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## **U.16 Long Civil Rights Movement: The Women's Movement in the South**

Interview U-0489  
Dianne Levy  
17 August 2010

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## ABSTRACT – DIANNE LEVY

Dianne Levy was born in London, England, and as a child in the 1940s, she moved with her parents to the United States, first to New York and then to Kentucky. She moved back to England in the 1960s, where she was involved in the anti-war movement. In the 1970s she moved to Cosby, TN, and soon became aware of domestic violence in her community. She began housing women who had been abused and eventually founded Safe Space, a domestic violence shelter. Dianne Levy discusses how her parents met; moving to Brooklyn from London in 1949; being diagnosed with tuberculosis of the spine when was a child; being quarantined because of her illness; how the medical experience influenced her notions of justice; attending school in Brooklyn; moving to Frankfort, KY and attending school there; integration in Frankfort, KY; Jewish community in Kentucky; death of her mother; moving to Cambridge in the 1960s; involvement in the anti-war movement; battered women's movement in England; moving to Cosby, TN; receiving training in midwifery; stories of domestic violence; establishing Safe Space domestic violence shelter; laws to protect women in abusive relationships; National Coalition Against Domestic violence; experiences at Highlander Research and Education Center; influence of Suzanne Pharr; influence of Marie Cirillo; how she met Eileen Kogen and Corinne Rovetti; views of feminism and the women's movement; current state of battered women's movement.

FIELD NOTES – DIANNE LEVY  
(compiled August 17, 2010)

Interviewee: Dianne Levy

Interviewer: Jessie Wilkerson

Interview Date: August 17, 2010

Location: Cosby, TN

THE INTERVIEWEE. Dianne Levy was born in London, England, and as a child in the 1940s, she moved with her parents to the United States, first to New York and then to Kentucky. She moved back to England in the 1960s, where she was involved in the anti-war movement. In the 1970s she moved to Cosby, TN, and soon became aware of domestic violence in her community. She began housing women who had been abused and eventually founded Safe Space, a domestic violence shelter. She also became an advocate for women in violent relationships and helped to write legislation that would provide protections for women.

THE INTERVIEWER. Jessie Wilkerson is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently conducting research for her dissertation which will explore social justice activism in southern Appalachia, with special attention to women's activism, from the late 1960s through the 1990s.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. I met Ms. Levy at her home in Cosby, TN. Levy has a big garden, and she had harvested that day. As we talked she worked on shucking corn and preparing supper. She moved around the kitchen freely as she cooked and talked. While I tried to move the recorder around to catch her voice, sometimes the sound quality suffered.

CONTENT OF THE INTERVIEW. Dianne Levy discusses how her parents met; moving to Brooklyn from London in 1949; being diagnosed with tuberculosis of the spine when was a child; being quarantined because of her illness; how the medical experience influenced her notions of justice; attending school in Brooklyn; moving to Frankfort, KY and attending school there; integration in Frankfort, KY; Jewish community in Kentucky; death of her mother; moving to Cambridge in the 1960s; involvement in the anti-war movement; battered women's movement in England; moving to Cosby, TN; receiving training in midwifery; stories of domestic violence; establishing Safe Space domestic violence shelter; laws to protect women in abusive relationships; National Coalition Against Domestic violence; experiences at Highlander Research and Education Center; influence of Suzanne Pharr; influence of Marie Cirillo; how she met Eileen Kogen and Corinne Rovetti; views of feminism and the women's movement; current state of battered women's movement.

## **TRANSCRIPT: DIANNE LEVY**

Interviewee: Dianne Levy

Interviewer: Jessie Wilkerson

Date: August 17, 2010

Location: Cocke County, TN

Length: One audio file, approximately 146 minutes

### **START OF INTERVIEW**

Jessie Wilkerson: This is Jessie Wilkerson and I'm at Dianne Levy's home, and the date is August 17, 2010. Okay, so we're recording now. So, Dianne, I was thinking we could start by thinking about your early life, where you come from.

Dianne Levy: I was born in London, England and my father had been in the British army. My mother had served as a stenographer for the American army officer's squadron in Northern Africa, which is where they met and married, in Ethiopia, and I was born soon after they arrived in England. My mother was of course immigrating to England. For various reasons, family struggles and whatnot, things didn't work out for them in England, so they decided to immigrate to the States and we came here in 1949 to Brooklyn, one of the last of the big immigrant waves before they kind of shut the gates.

When I arrived in the States, soon after, I was found to have tuberculosis of the spine, and so I was hospitalized. There was no cure for it at that point, but I was hospitalized at a teaching hospital in Brooklyn and they were doing experimental sorts of things on me, and that was really--. I don't know how much to talk about really. My hospitalization, although I was only four, was a revelatory period for me because of

how I was treated. At that time, kids – especially in that kind of institution – were objects. We were pieces of furniture. So I was isolated. I was four years old, I was not told what was happening at all, and I was taken to a hospital and separated from my mother and was given a sedative. And when I woke up I was in a metal crib in a tiled room and there was a net over the crib, so when I stood up in the crib I was pushing against the net. My head had been shaved. I had these Shirley Temple ringlets which my mother had always made a big fuss over, so I realized my hair was missing and that was a terrible thing and my mother was very upset. [Laughs] I screamed for hours because of course I was terrified and I'd been drugged and I didn't know where I was and no one came for a long time. And when someone came they basically came and told me to be quiet.

That's basically how I was treated. [Laughs] I was isolated, I was quarantined, and my family was allowed to come and spend thirty minutes a day with me and it was a two-hour subway ride and we were immigrants; we had no money. It was a huge expense, and it was very frightening because they never told my parents--. There was never any chance of my living. It was not even an option. They were just going to do what they wanted to do until I died, really, [Laughs] was the plan.

But it was there that I--. I mean I had no language for it but I'm uniquely empathetic, almost too much. There's a reason why I live here. [Laughs] I'm very sensitive--very sensitive--to what's going on with other people, other people's pain of any kind, and in the hospital, although I was quarantined I was really aware--. So, part of the treatment that I received, they did experimental surgeries but antibiotics were new and they were very--. When penicillin was first developed of course it was very, very

rough, and you're too young to remember, but back in the [19]50s they still used hypodermic needles that were reusable and they were huge glass hypodermic needles with very large hollow cored needles, and they were sterilized and used over and over again. I was a little runty kid, I'd been ill, so I probably didn't weigh much more than thirty-five pounds and I was just tiny, a little runty kid. So they would wake me up in the morning with four of these hypodermics with penicillin in them and then as soon as I fell asleep at night--. It's amazing I didn't have more sleep disorders, really. When I fell asleep at night they'd come in and hit me with another four of these hypodermics, so I had eight of these huge hypodermics every day and it would take five staff to hold me for this. I had to have a nurse or an aid on every limb and then the person with the needle. I mean it took five people to hold me down, that's how [06:29] it was. They strapped me down a couple times but my mother came in and found that they'd done that and she raised such Cain that they actually--. I couldn't believe she--. She was pretty intimidated by the authority of these doctors. It didn't matter how much I screamed or what--I mean it didn't matter. They would do this to me. That went on for eleven months, night and day, eleven months.

So I didn't have any language for it but I became aware of injustice. I understood power and control issues. I understood discrimination. I just understood a lot of stuff that at four years old you don't usually--. You don't have the language for it, but I understood a lot of stuff that year, and that set me up really for justice work the rest of my life, that incident that year.

Where I was in school in Brooklyn, which was one of the last of the big immigrant neighborhoods: Africans, South Americans, Europeans; it was the last of the

really--. The doors really slammed shut right after we came in, and of course we were English speakers so we were privileged, being white and English speakers, but we were poor. We had nothing. So in my classroom there were like nine languages spoken and I could speak five. I mean I could speak of course Yiddish, because my mother and grandmother would speak Yiddish to each other so I learned Yiddish. And I had a friend who was German so I could speak German. I didn't speak Yiddish because that was like the secret language, and I didn't want my mother to know I could understand Yiddish because I could hear everything that was going on and secrets. But German, I had a friend who was Puerto Rican so I could speak Spanish, I had a Danish friend and we spoke Danish at his house; I didn't have any real knowledge about these languages because when you're young you just have them. And English, so I had five languages. And everybody was very distinctive, everybody's homes were distinctive, everybody's food was distinctive; there was huge diversity.

[Laughs] And my father had found work in the garment district. Well, he found a job, I don't really know the whole story but anyway--. He found a job in Frankfort, Kentucky. It must have been a hell of a deal to get him to move. It was 1954 and Frankfurt, Kentucky was a segregated, Southern--. It was very small--nothing like it is today--very small and entirely segregated Southern town. I was seven and we arrived there. We took the train from Brooklyn to Frankfurt, Kentucky, if you can believe we could do that then, but we could. I got off the train and it seemed strange to me just because accents were different, but it was almost an out-of-body experience. It was so surreal to me when I went into school. I was in the third grade, and I got into my classroom and it was kind of like everyone in the classroom looked exactly the same to

me. Everybody had the same hair, everybody had the same clothing on, everybody talked exactly the same; it was like I was in a room full of clones. I couldn't understand what anybody said because they had very strong Southern accents. I had a very strong Brooklyn accent and they couldn't understand me, between Brooklyn and British because I probably still had some British accent then. So that was horrific. I couldn't tell anybody apart and everybody looked so white bread to me. It was really frightening, and I just continued to struggle. Eventually I could start to understand what people were saying, and I could start to tell people apart, you know, this one had blond hair and this one's hair was brown, but it was very bizarre.

So, integration, [Laughs] or lack of. I didn't really talk to my mother about how strange I found--. I mean I didn't know anything about segregation. School was just really different, and I talked to her about I couldn't understand anybody and everybody looked the same, but she'd say, oh, you'll get used to it, because she was pretty freaked out herself. We were allowed--because in Brooklyn we could take the subway or we took the bus. There were not safety issues like now. So we lived like a mile up the hill from downtown Frankfort and the bus came right in front of our house, and we were allowed, after we'd probably been there a month or maybe two months, we were allowed to take our fifty cents and take the bus a mile into town and go to the Saturday movie and go to Walgreen's for a grilled cheese and come home. And that was pretty normal. I had an older sister, three years older than me, and she was supposed to keep an eye on me. But she always dumped me as soon as she got out of sight of the house.

So this particular Saturday morning we both left the house at the same time and there was a bus coming and she saw it and she ran ahead and got on that bus and left me,



which was typical of her. [Laughs] So I got on the next bus which happened to be empty except for one person sitting in the bus. I paid my dime, and I was so relieved to see this person in the back of the bus because I could recognize her, and I went back and sat next to this woman. The bus was empty, but I went back and sat next to this woman just because I guess it was the first brown person I'd seen. Just a mile into town, right, so I sat down. The woman said to me, "Honey, why don't you go and sit up in front where you can see out that front window? You can see where you're going," and I went, "No, I'm fine right here," or something. She tried again to encourage me to go get a better seat so I could see, you know, "There's plenty of room up there; you can sit right by the driver." No, I was fine. I was so happy to find somebody I could recognize, and –. ([talking to her dog] "What are you saying, buddy? What are you doing?")

JW: [Laughs]

DL: So then the bus driver looks up and he says, "Little girl, come here to the front of the bus." Well that terrified me. I was frozen because I didn't know what I'd done and I don't think I'd ever had a bus driver talk to me before, so I just froze. He stopped the bus and walked to the back of the bus and took me by the hand and walked me to the front of the bus and sat me down in the front seat and told me to stay there. [Sighs] And you know five seconds later we were downtown and it was my stop, and I was afraid to get off the bus because he told me to stay there and he said, "Where are you going, little girl?" [In shaky voice] "The movie." So he told me to get off the bus. Well I never could find my sister, I was totally traumatized and I had no idea what any of that meant or what it was about, so I was afraid to get on the bus going home and it was just a huge trauma. Then of course my mother had been worried because I was late. I was

afraid to get on the bus and I was afraid not to get on the bus, it was getting dark. I think actually my father drove into town and found me at the bus stop, too afraid to get on the bus. Of course I couldn't talk to my father about this because he was my father, but my mother, who finally pulled out the story from me and then had to try and explain segregation to me. So that was another milestone as far as consciousness raising, [Laughs] hospitalization and then that was like a whole--.

JW: Do you remember how she explained segregation?

DL: With great embarrassment and--. I wish I could remember her words but the message I got was it was really wrong, it was unjust, this is not how we believed in our family and everyone was the same. She told me everything I needed to know, but she certainly couldn't explain to me how that could be, how that could be happening, how people could be treated like this.

In the seventh grade I had another huge revelation because we moved to Louisville, it was [integrated], and I remember my mother, and my father particularly, was really happy because my classroom teacher was a Jewish woman, and I hadn't had any--. We had been the only Jewish people, whatever, so it was like, oh, this is so nice, so I thought there was something special about that. I didn't like her, and I felt terribly guilty because I didn't like her, but I didn't know why I didn't like her until one day--. We had a fellow in the class who was so smart and he was a jokester. He was incredibly smart but he was a jokester, and so he was the one who was the class clown. But not like evil or not malicious but just cracking jokes because he just had that kind of personality. And, guess what, he was an African American boy. She was afraid--I didn't know this then, this is from my perspective now--she was afraid of him. She was afraid of him

because he was a black boy, period. That was all, he was black, and she was just a little Jewish woman and God knows maybe she'd been through--. I'm sure she had Holocaust stuff. Who knows what she had. She had problems, no doubt, in her life. Perhaps she'd been abused, I don't know. But she had a paddle, and even in Frankfort I hadn't really noticed paddling, but she had this huge paddle and she went after him. I mean she would just--. He would say something and she would jump up from her seat and go and beat him with this stick. The first time it happened I was so traumatized. I'd never seen anything like it. We weren't even spanked, and I'd never seen anything like it. I was just--horrificed is not even the word. But I didn't know what parameters there were, like is this normal? So I think I said something at the dinner table at some point and my father was going, "Oh, well I'm sure he must have deserved it," or something, which was so clearly not true, and I may have said something to my mother about it and whatever was said there was not adequate for me. A couple of times in that room when she was beating him I remember I jumped up out of my seat but I was just--. There was nothing I could do. I wasn't going to attack her or grab the stick. That was my first time when I felt really helpless when somebody was being hurt. It was like, what do I do? My reaction finally to that was I just stopped turning in any work. I wouldn't give her any work. I wouldn't turn in my homework, I wouldn't respond in class. She tried to fail me, of course.

But, anyway, that was another huge noticing, [Laughs] or consciousness-raising. So those are the things that really--. And of course I knew all about the Holocaust and many other things and I certainly followed Martin Luther King and all these things fitted

together. Those are just my personal experiences that fit into the whole context of what was happening.

JW: Were there other Jewish families or were you the Jewish family in these communities?

DL: We were--. You know even in Frankfurt we had merchants who were Jewish and they built this little Temple in Lexington, serving all the Jewish merchants, I guess, for miles around and I went to see it, and I went to Hebrew school. We [had a] carpool and went to Hebrew school and I went and saw it, I don't know, maybe twenty years ago and it was just the tiniest little building. I couldn't believe how [20:28]--. I don't know. I guess the main sanctuary is probably not a lot bigger than this house but it was a teeny, tiny thing. We had like Sunday school rooms and those were like, I don't know, twenty by twenty. [Laughs] It was just the most teeny, tiny little building. I was amazed to see it because it was huge in my mind as a child.

So, no, I wasn't the only Jewish family in Frankfurt because the shoe store and the furniture store and the clothing store were all owned by Jews, and in Louisville there was a much larger Jewish community, so that's why--. Oh, I had a Jewish teacher, that's astounding, and I know her daughter goes to the Jewish community center where I now go. We had a Jewish community center, and that was our little social life. So, no, I didn't have the sense of being the only Jewish person. Rebecca certainly had that, growing up here, but I didn't have that. So, I don't know where I am now, but that's background.

JW: So was integration taking place? Do you remember that process of integration?

DL: I don't because it was segregated in Frankfort, and then I moved to Louisville in 1959 and it was integrated. I mean at least in the suburb where I lived the school was integrated. Now I'm sure that in, I can't remember now, the west end of town that was mostly African American, I'm sure those schools were primarily African American. I'm sure there were still primarily African American and white schools depending on where you lived in the county. In 1959 it's inevitable. I don't think there would be any busing or anything. But in my school there were African American kids and Jewish kids. That Louisville school was more of a mix for me since Frankfurt, but in Louisville I became aware of class differences, [Laughs] which I hadn't been aware of in Frankfurt because everybody was pretty much poor and everybody was poor in Brooklyn. We were all poor together. But in Louisville we had a few wealthy people, and we had an aspiring middle class and you had working people, and people were different. People dressed differently according to class and there were different expectations academically depending on class and other, at that point to me, intangibles. Some of it could have been religion, some of it was where you lived, some of it was association, but you were streamed. There was the honors things and then there was the vocational thing, then there was the general studies thing and some people were going to go to university and be professionals and some people were going to be the working masses and some people were going to be other, and it became very clear to me in Louisville that that's the way it was.

JW: What stream were you being pushed toward?

DL: Well I was being pushed over into the academic stream because I guess I was smart, but I took such a dislike to the competition that was going on. To me it was ridiculous, like who cared whether you got a ninety-six or a ninety-seven on a test? I

mean I could care less. That was not a motivation for me, and I hated the malicious competition amongst the students and the favoritism so my rejection was to not take biology but to take general science and to reject--. I remember I had to take Algebra, Algebra II, Geometry, but then I said no Calculus, no Trig. I rejected all the upper academic stuff even though I did intend to go to college. My mother certainly intended me to go to college. So that was my reaction. I just rejected that whole--. I was going to be everybody in that middle stream.

JW: Did you end up going to college?

DL: I did, only for a year. My mother had died and things fell apart for me, so I dropped out of college. My father had no value on education and once my mother died: Get married. Get married so I don't have to think about you. [Laughs] I was kind of orphaned when my mother died.

JW: How did she die?

DL: Cancer, breast cancer.

JW: So did you get married at that point?

DL: I did. I really--. Now this is not stuff that I necessarily--. I may not need this in here, but I'll tell you. [Laughs] So, let's see. I can't remember now; what was I going to say? Oh, so when my mother died her--. I mean they did terrible stuff back then. We had a call from the hospital saying come right away, and of course we got there and she was dead, and at that hospital when her physician came in he gave my father--. Now I had just heard my mother had died, right, ten minutes, [Laughs] and he gave my father--my father was a real doctor freak, he just loved doctors--and he gave my father a prescription for Valium for me, which my father actually stopped on the way home, I

remember, and filled it and started feeding me Valium so that I was addicted to Valium by my mother's physician, which really caused me to have a mental breakdown. I never was able to process the grief properly because I was drugged out and so it caused a whole bunch of stuff to happen. And I had a really rough time for a couple years.

I did have a boyfriend who was my best friend, and I was seriously suicidal and he was busy getting drafted. That was draft time. So we married, he married me really, and he sort of drug me to the courthouse to be married because he knew there was nobody that was going to look after me. And he really thought I was going to do damage to myself. He knew my father was not connected and my sister wasn't connected and I was pretty much out there. So, yes, I married and we were just, with sheer luck--. I don't know how much detail, I mean I could just, you know, detail, detail, detail. By sheer luck many people that were in his unit were being transferred to Vietnam, and I had a stepbrother who was working in the personnel office in Washington and he had just called and how are you doing, kind of thing, and I said, well, I'm kind of worried that Pat's going to get shipped to Vietnam. He said, "Where do you want to go?" and I said, "Well I'd like to go and live so I can live right outside Cambridge." [Laughs] And I'll be damned if like two months later we didn't have a transfer to a base about thirty minutes from Cambridge in England, so that was just serendipitous.

So we went to England where I had family in London, my father's family was still there, and I found a cottage, just a little thatched roof cottage, in a little village outside of Cambridge and that's where I recovered, really, from that Valium stuff that was just--. I mean so many women were addicted to Valium back in the '60s and '70s. It's just

amazing to me. It's like, you're pissed off? Here, take this. [Laughs] You're frightened? Here, take this. Are you getting raped? Here, take this.

So, and in England that's where I hit the streets and I began--. I don't know, I guess Pat came back from work one night and he says, "There's going to be a meeting at the pub over there by the base and I want to go to it tonight," and I said, "Well what is it?" and he said, "I don't know, just some guys who want to get together and talk about what's going on." Oh, okay, I'll come too, and how old was I then, twenty maybe? Maybe I was twenty. So I went to the meeting and the guys were eighteen, nineteen; they're all like younger. Because I was married I was like the older woman and it was very interesting. I was like a mom and I was maybe two years older than the rest of them. These were guys who were eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds and they were air traffic controllers--this was the Air Force--and they were air traffic controllers and they were the mechanics for the airplanes, that's the service men, and there were a couple of officers and of course they were the pilots, and there was an attorney there, one of the Air Force attorneys that was trying to keep people from getting written up for having their hair too long and stuff like that. Out of that meeting there were some guys and somebody had written a poem and some of the guys had done cartoons and they wanted to print up a little newsletter with their writings on it. And they couldn't do it. They couldn't have it printed up, and they couldn't distribute it. Well, I could, so that's where I started. I mean we had a mimeograph machine [Laughs] so I'd lay out whatever it was they had done. I didn't write anything for it. I just took whatever they gave me, and somewhere up in the attic I'm sure I have some copies of that stuff. Right before you came I thought I wonder if I should pull out any of that old stuff. [Laughs]



JW: [Laughs]

DL: Then I had maybe a hundred copies printed up. No, I ran them off, I printed them myself. I ran them off on the mimeo machine. Then I'd go out in front of the base at the gate and I'd hand them out. Big deal. Oh, it was a big deal. At this base and at other United States Air Force bases in England they had--I didn't know this right then but I soon found out--they had nuclear warheads, atomic warheads stacked up in the field. I mean they were like half a mile from the school, and the village was here, and they had all this just stacked up in a field. They were live. That was something. [Laughs] I don't know; that seems kind of wrong to me. [Laughs]

So anyway, and we hooked up with--. There were a lot of people doing anti-war work all over Europe, so as we became organized we started networking with those other groups. There was FTA, which was Fuck the Army, which was doing a lot of work in Germany then because Germany was a real base, people were getting shipped to Vietnam from Germany. And by the early '70s there was a lot of talk about the war was going to, you know, they were going to shut it down but they were still sending kids over there and they were getting killed. It's like, if they're going to shut this war down it's not worth dying for. Let's not send anymore boys over. So I spent a lot of time trying to keep guys from going to Vietnam, and we were able to keep a lot of people from going. That was something gratifying. But after three years, I guess, my mail was being opened and our phones were tapped and we were being followed by the British military police as well as the American military police and I got to a point where I was like, you know, if this is how it's going to be here I might as well go back into the midst of the beast. [Telephone rings; break in recording from 33:48 to 34:50]

--my job, but. [Laughs] Anyway, I had [34:57] find work here because everything I did was so controversial and because I'm not degreed so I don't qualify for any jobs that I created, [Laughs] which has happened to a lot of people.

JW: Yeah.

DL: You've heard of founder's disease with nonprofits, I'm sure. Founder's disease?

JW: I haven't heard it put that way.

DL: Well there's different phenomena and sometimes it's that you have an activist who is working on an issue and their skills are with people and community skills but they don't have any what I call bureaucratic skills. So once you start having to write grants and raise money and you're dealing with policy and you've got to write reports everything shifts and many activists really can't make that shift, and I shocked myself and many people because I did. I was able to make the shift and I was an extraordinarily good fundraiser. I mean I was great at it. In Appalachia it was amazing how well I was able to bring in money for my program, but I've also brought in on my own--. People knew that if I said I was going to do something I would do it. I didn't see any barriers. If there was a wall in front of me I'd go over it, around it, under it. If I was committed to something, to get something done, I would get it done, and I did. I was able to do really amazing things over the years, many things I can be proud of, if I can remember them. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

DL: So what happens is a person will get an organization up and running and the community will adopt the cause or whatever and then they'll get a board of directors and

they'll throw the person out: We need somebody who dresses better or we need somebody who can talk to the politicos. But I saw it as theater myself, so I took off the overalls and put on the bra and I realized that somebody would actually talk to me if I had lipstick on so I put on the lipstick. I knew what my goals were and I was willing to do theater in order to get things done. If the judge wanted me to be a lawyer in the courtroom I was a lawyer in the courtroom, and for years I was able to do a lot of stuff that people cannot do now because I was the only one--. I had written the law so they'd go, "Dianne, can we do this under this statute?" or, "Dianne, would you go out and talk to them and see if you can work something out?" or, "Dianne, could you explain what's going on here?" and every now and then a lawyer would stand up and say, "Judge, you're letting her practice law without a license," and they'd make me sit down but the next time they'd have me up again because I'd help things move along. So I had my little lawyer suit and I would do whatever I needed to do. If somebody wouldn't talk to me in my overalls I'd put on something that they'd talk to me in.

But what happened to me, I think I was a victim of founder's disease as well because for me--. I mean I was never done, and a lot of things, you know, various varieties of board members--. I mean I would approve my own board. It's a constant--. You have to bring everybody along at the same time so you have to explain, you have to be sure everybody understands the connections, why did I want to do this, why was it important, how would it help this community of people, what was I going to have to do to make this happen, and you have to bring your staff along, you bring your volunteers along, you bring your board along, and you have to get the community in. I mean you're running your mouth all the time and educating and training all the time, and I reached a

point after twenty years in a paid position, and I had been doing it for ten years before that, so I had thirty years now--.

I started working with battered women in 1969. I'll tell that story in a second. But after about twenty years a lot of things changed for me. I hit menopause and so my body changed and so the things that had worked for me--. I was able to maintain myself amazingly because I could come home at night and I could throw off the stress of the day, I would sleep, and I would get up fresh every morning. I mean I was amazingly strong. But when I entered menopause it affected my sleep patterns, my hormones all went crazy, but particularly the lack of sleep--I didn't sleep more than two hours for over a year, in twenty-four, and it affected my blood pressure and my heart. I was really desperately ill. I was at stroke level with blood pressure and they thought I was going to have a heart attack. I had been ill a few times previously but nothing ever like this. And I was so exhausted that I couldn't really advocate for myself and I scared my daughter so much that she was going, that's it, that's it, you're out of there, and really I just removed myself finally because I couldn't--. Whenever there was a crisis I was always able to go out and fix it, but I just was so exhausted and my daughter was my main advocate at that point and she just wanted me gone from there.

So I didn't--because my activism pushed the board beyond the point where they could go. They just couldn't--. It's like enough already. This is enough. We got a shelter and we're getting into court and we're doing this and that's enough, and I'm going, no, it's not enough, because for me my ultimate goal--. I thought the shelter was a waste of time and money because our goal should be--. When a woman or a family's been assaulted and been driven out of their home, why are the victims of a crime put in a

shelter? The community has a responsibility to make the community safe for families so that women and children should be able to go back home and be safe at home. I didn't want to put money and resources into shelter buildings. We need more supportive services and we need to be sure that supports are in place in the community so that she's protected. Well, so I'm going, no, I'm not building a shelter, no, we're not wasting money on a building. We don't need more buildings. We need to shut down the damn shelter so these women can be safe at home. The final draw for them was that whole economic development piece I put in place because I became a board member for the Tennessee Network for Community Economic Development, which was like the alternate to the whole multi-national, let's-bring-in-more-industry, kind of thing. We were working on entrepreneurship and for families to be able to support themselves sustainably, either adding to their income from a job they had or doing something to add cash flow, or whatever they wanted to do. Also we had a model called Individual Development Accounts, IDAs, which we would match dollar for dollar. If someone saved a dollar we matched a dollar, and that was to help the women get a down payment together to get into their housing. These things were fairly radical, in this country, economic stuff. I did training on small business development and budgeting, stuff that didn't make sense to my board but made absolute sense to me. So, they tossed me out, basically. They were happy to get rid of me. It made things a lot simpler for me because then--

JW: What year was this?

DL: --as soon as I was gone--. That was 2003. Once I was gone all the positions were tied to education, not experience, and basically what they felt were extraneous

[Laughs] programs were basically shut down. I don't even think they do support groups anymore. I really don't know what services they give. I saw a report from the shelter and they were reporting sheltering as many people in a year as I used to shelter in less than a month. They built a half a million dollar building with money I'm sure that I brought in because I was working on endowments and people leaving us money in their wills. So somebody left us money that I'm sure I had cultivated but they never let me know about it. They built a new shelter with it which sits empty most of the time. There was something though. I was telling you that and I thought, oh, I have to tell that piece, and I can't remember now what it was. Oh, 1969.

JW: Yeah, how you started--.

DL: Yeah, so in 1969 when I had become active, and some of the people that I was working with getting the newsletter distributed and my home had become a--I don't want to go off on a tangent--my home had become like the G.I. Joe, you know when they left the base they came to hang out at my house. There were some students that also began working with me--kids--that I guess had studied in Germany. Anyway, they had hooked up with some of these other people doing anti-war work so I hooked up with them too and they were doing some other things. They were working with homeless people and what they would do--. I don't know what the laws are now but then if you broke into a building basically and moved a family in they couldn't really move them out before thirty days and usually you could actually stay there for almost twelve months. So I joined a group of people that were liberating empty buildings and moving families in, and we had people who were good with getting electric turned on and could get the water turned on. I happened to be the lock picker, [Laughs]--

JW: [Laughs]

DL: --so I broke into the building and opened it up. We had opened up a university building, and it was just like a tall narrow building and there were five apartments, really nice buildings, and they were going to tear this apartment complex down for a parking lot. It was a good building and they were going to tear this building down, but they weren't going to tear it down for two years. But they evicted everybody. So I had opened the building up and then I came back, probably I guess it must have been sixteen hours later, and my next job was the supply person so I was going through--. Because somebody else had moved all these families in and so my job was to--. And they couldn't leave. You had to occupy it totally for thirty days and then all this legal stuff came in and you could pretty much be there for the year. So I began going up and down and visiting all the people in these apartments to see what they needed, diapers, food, whatever it was they needed. It turned out that all the people that had moved in were women, some had kids, no men were in the building, and they were all, God, they were Cambridge fellows and they were all academics. So I was visiting these women and I was making a delivery and there was this one woman in there and--I was so young and so naïve--I asked her--. She was covered in something and I thought it was a rash, she had stuff all over her body. I'd just gotten into herbs a little bit so I asked her if she wanted me to bring her something for her rash, did she want some comfrey, I had comfrey, or I had, you know. She looked at me like the idiot I was and she said, "I don't have a rash," and I said, "Well, gosh, what--?" Bruises. Every one of those women was a battered woman, every one of them, every one.

So that was my first like, whoa. If I'd had any preconceptions about women that were hurt, raped, that really knocked--. Because I'm sure I was like everybody else and I just sort of assumed everybody was poor or uneducated or something, somebody other than me. Every one of us wants to believe that a woman who's being victimized in some way is someone other than us. It's a terrible thing to realize that that's not true, that all of us are potential victims and you can't tell somebody by looking at them and you can't tell a man who would hurt you by looking at him and we're all vulnerable, every one of us. Education, money, nothing makes any difference. Gender is all. But that was my first lesson, and it was an important lesson early on in my career to note that because it was very helpful. I didn't find out until much later in my life that both of my grandfathers were batterers, very different kinds of batterers but nevertheless there was violence in both of those families. I didn't find that out for years and years and years, and my family was not at all violent. They were the, "I'll never have this going on in my home."

So, about I guess it was '72 I came back to the States. I had nothing. My husband and I weren't together actually, came back to the States and separated, just because that's what was going on in those days. We were both traveling and we didn't know what we wanted to do and he'd just come out of the service and I was pretty lost, really, not having a clue what I was going to do. So, what happened then? What was the critical piece that happened then? Oh, when I came back to the States I was listed in the-- . They had literally a black book. It really was a black book, very thick hardback book, and when I came through customs they had me in the book--check. I thought, oh, Christ, they're going to follow me here, too. So I didn't have a place to go to. My mother was dead and my father had remarried, and I didn't really have any family thing. So I was



traveling up and down the East Coast primarily and I was seeing--. We had become a real center and so anybody doing any anti-war work, we were one of the places that people would come to if they were in Europe, so I had met a lot of people and most everybody I had met were all living in D.C. or Boston or Atlanta, in urban areas, and so that's what I did when I first came here. I just had a pack on my back and was hitchhiking because you could hitchhike in Europe. I didn't realize you couldn't hitchhike here so I found out pretty quickly that was not going to work, but when I first came here I didn't know that, so thank God I lived. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

DL: I wound up I guess after a month or two I was living in a communal household in Boston, in Jamaica Plain, actually. I was working in the food co-op there. I found a little job, which I had like a contract work. I was doing drill press work and I could not stand being in the city. I had been in a village for all that time and I just hated it. It was getting to be spring and I was pretty desperate to put a garden in. I just had to get out of there, and Pat, actually, my husband, had traveled down to Tennessee and we were still living communally and he said, "I'm trying to get a house down here and I need someone to do the garden," and I said, "I'm there." I'm shortening this, it's just too much, but anyway I came to Tennessee with a pack on my back and fifty bucks in my pocket [54:13].

JW: And where was the house?

DL: The house that I came to in Cosby was just not far from here on Greasy Cove Road, just a farmhouse. What I was interested in at that point was I was looking--. My hormones were raging, and I was wanting to have a baby and of course in Europe you

had midwives and it was a whole different--. Women in Europe had babies and it wasn't an illness. [Laughs] You had babies because that's what your body's made to do. I had to find myself a situation where I could have a baby because I wasn't going to do the hospital thing and Ina May Gaskin, of The Farm, Stephen Gaskin, at that time she was really one of the only active younger women midwives in the country, working out of Summertown. So I was going to hook up there, I was going to go to The Farm, but when I got here I found Etta Nichols was here, who was one of the last of the old granny midwives, and she was an extraordinary woman. Too bad she's not alive because she would have been somebody for you to interview. She was a lay midwife; her dad had been what they called a country doctor, which means he wasn't trained but he was a healer, and he had caught babies and she began catching babies when he was too old to do it anymore. She was so skilled. So I hung out with her for three years and helped her catch babies and learned a whole lot about that. But she was extraordinary.

So that's what I was doing, and right in that time that I was spending so much time with her they passed a law where there were no more lay midwives and you had to go through an RN and nurse practitioner whole thing and I went, do I want to go to school? About that time also I was sharecropping tobacco, I was doing farm work for money, and I mean I've never had any money. I've never really ever had any money. I was living up in Grassy Fork, Raven's Branch area, and what we did back then is we traded labor with our neighbors and so everybody would work somebody's tobacco one day and everybody would go to somebody's else's field the next day. I had a woman friend, her name was Johnnie Ray, so we would help each other, and she was a country

woman, the real thing. I'm the real thing now, but I wasn't then. She was very helpful to me and taught me a lot of good stuff and we worked in each other's fields.

Let me tell you this; this is an important story. So, I don't know if you know Grassy Fork or that area. Back thirty or forty years ago—all the roads back in there are paved now, which amuses me since my road isn't paved and that's much more of a road—but it was really a remote section of the county and it was very rough roads. Nothing was paved back in there, which made me happy. I was happy to disappear into the woods. At the fork of the road I lived on there was a cement block building which was probably maybe the size of like the front of the house to the end of the house, maybe thirty feet long and maybe sixteen feet wide. It had a back door and it had a front door and it had two front windows and that was it. There was nothing to it. I was coming out one day and I saw Johnnie's truck parked there so I stopped and looked in and there she was, and I said, "What are you doing?" because she had a farm and four kids and she had a son-of-a-bitch for a husband, too. Oh, [Laughs] and I had done the same thing with Johnnie Ray one day. I was out at her place or she'd come down to me and Johnnie had all this stuff all over her arms, and I said, "Johnnie, have you got ringworm or did you run into some poison, or what's going on with you?" She looked at me like I was really an idiot and she said, "Those are bruises." It turns out that her husband, Paul was just--. He was a drunk and he was the kind that used drink as an excuse and I mean he raped and pillaged and beat. I'm sure he raped all of his kids, not to mention Johnnie, and beat her and the kids to a bloody pulp time and time again. Also, lucky for me, he was also a cop fighter so that was greatly in our favor because he fought cops and cops don't like cop fighters.

Anyway, I'd already found out about the bruising and when I stopped at that building that day and said, "What are you doing here?" she said, "That's a steel door, steel door, got bars over both those windows, and he can't burn this building." And so she rented that little building probably for about thirty bucks a month, I don't know, not much. I don't know if there was an outhouse there. It was electric, there was an electric line and she had a refrigerator. She had a little counter not as big as this table and on the counter she had like two loaves of light bread and three onions and some bananas and some Beanie Weenies or something. That was her stock from the store. [Sighs] Many a night Johnnie would run out of the house, grab the kids, and she'd lock herself in that building, many, many a night.

So, it was Christmas day 1975, probably 2:00 in the afternoon maybe, and I had a call. It was Gracie, one of her daughters, and I guess Gracie was nine. She said, "Mama says come quick." So I jumped in my little VW bug, and she lived probably, I don't know, maybe five miles up the mountain from me. I got up there in time and there was a deputy up there. So Christmas Eve they'd finished the tree and got all the presents out and they were waiting for Paul to come home, and he never came home that night. The next morning they waited for him to come home all morning to open presents and he didn't come home. They went ahead and opened presents, and they waited and waited on Christmas dinner for him to come home and he didn't come home, and they'd been up all night, so they eat Christmas dinner early and they ate dinner, and she had fallen asleep. Johnnie had fallen asleep on the couch and she woke up and he was standing over her with a knife at her throat saying, "You're going to die, bitch." Johnnie was a strong woman, she'd been fighting him for years, and he was drunk, and so they struggled and

struggled and struggled. And Gracie went into the bedroom and got the pistol that Johnnie kept loaded under her pillow, because it wasn't the first time this had happened, and Gracie threw the pistol across the room, tossed it across the room to Johnnie--I mean you can just imagine it, screaming [1:02:24]--and Johnnie caught the pistol and it went off. Now he's got the--I mean he's after her with the knife. The bullet slices right through here and gets his--aorta? Is that what it is? And so he was bleeding to death. She called the law and called the ambulance and blah, blah, blah, but he died.

I got up there in time. The ambulance had just left and the deputy was just waiting for me to get up there so I could keep the kids so they could haul her off, and they hauled her off to jail, Christmas day, hauled her off to jail, charged her with first degree murder, manslaughter. I think they released her late that night because I think we had the kids back to her the next day. So she was charged with murder, and she was convicted of murder, even though it was clearly self defense. They didn't think anything about convicting her for murder, and then they let her go. And they laughed about it because Paul was a cop fighter and he'd had big fights with the cops for years and they hated him and he was always dangerous to them, too. They would make jokes about it: "Good going, Johnnie!" and stuff like that. Well she was devastated. I mean the more you suffer the more emotional attachment you have. They'd been abused for years horribly, but that doesn't mean the emotional attachment isn't there. It was horrible for her, convicted of murdering her husband who she hated and loved, and being joked about at the courthouse about, "Good going," you know, "That's great!" They'd pat her on the back; horrible.

I discovered in that time that there were no laws [Laughs] to protect family members. Basically a man could assault his family at will, rape, beat, terrorize, whatever he wanted to do, and the law and the preachers and everybody went, oh, well that's his business. [Laughs] So I was astounded and very soon I started getting calls--. I was pregnant, and I was in the laundry mat because I was living up in [1:06:05] so once every two weeks I'd come down and do laundry, and I was on a schedule. It was this day of the week and I did my grocery shopping, I did my laundry, and I only came into town once every two weeks. There was only one laundry mat in town then and at the laundry mat, you know I was getting a belly and when you're pregnant you tend to notice other pregnant women, and there was another woman in there whose belly was about the same size mine was and so we began--. We didn't know each other but we were both pregnant so we started to chat a little bit, and we found out she was going to deliver up at Etta's and I told her maybe I'd see her up there because I was helping her catch babies. I mean it was nothing. I didn't even know she knew my name. I didn't know her name, actually. I know it now, but I didn't know it then. She was maybe, I don't know. I can't remember whether she was six weeks behind me or six weeks--. I think she was six weeks behind me. One day when Rebecca was--. And I had moved from where I'd been living in Raven's Branch, and I'd moved down to Cosby, very remote. There's no way you'd know there was a house where I was living. I had a phone back there and I had a call one day and this woman said, "I'm that woman in the laundry mat that was pregnant with you. Can I come over to your house?" and I said, "You know where I live?" She said, "Yeah, I know where you live," and I said, "Sure, come on." So she came over, and that time I knew what I was looking at. She'd been beaten. Oh, that's right, she was

behind me, because Zach was the baby and Zach was like six weeks old and she'd been holding Zach when she was attacked. Somehow word had gotten out. I said, "Why'd you call me?" She said, "Somebody told me there was a woman helping battered women in Cosby." I went, "Who is it? [Laughs] Who is that woman?"

So that began a real stream, and I had a call from DHS, I had a call from Mental Health: "Are you that woman helping battered women?" "I guess." [Laughs] So, very quickly I--. I had a good friend--. At that time I really hated the phone and didn't like using the phone. I was almost phobic. I had a stutter as a child and for some reason my stutter had come back when I was on the phone so I hated using the phone. Well I had a good friend and she was agoraphobic so she hated leaving the house. I didn't mind leaving the house, so I would make a list of calls and contacts for her to make and she'd make all these phone calls for me and I'd be out doing whatever needed to be done, picking up women or going and talking to somebody. And she got--. Because I wasn't--I hadn't taken this on. I mean I was doing this but I didn't realize this was going to be my life's work [Laughs] at that point at all.

Chloe--that was my friend's name--had found out--. And I had been sheltering people I guess from '75 to--this was 1980. She found out that there was going to be a battered women's national conference, and she decided she needed to send me to it, and she did. Lots of things happened. We would find fifty dollars here, and I got a scholarship for that, and I got a ride from somebody else, but I had nothing, I mean I had absolutely nothing. I went to Washington, D.C. and I was able to meet everybody I needed to know. I was able to set up a network. We set up an underground railroad at that conference. It was really the base of everything. We knew that we needed to pass

orders of protection in the state and get them implemented, we needed funding on the federal and state levels, we needed policy written, training judges, training cops, training DAs, training public defenders, we had our work set out for us, and everything I was able to do came from them, because I was able to access resources. One of my best friends was like the legal mind of the movement, Barbara Hart. My best friends were the meat of the movement. I became the representative from Tennessee to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. For me the organizing was every bit as important as providing safety. It was important to provide safety, don't get me wrong, there was no way I was not hooked into safety for women and children, but it was clear to me that we had to change society. [Laughs]

JW: So was that the first conference that really started a movement?

DL: That was the first conference in this country, 1980, was the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence first national conference, and we had a conference, I'm thinking it was every two years for many, many years, until probably very recently. I think they're probably still having conferences. But that was really a huge work and development time for us because we had people coming from all over the country and we had people coming in--. By 1990 we had people who were looking for work so we had social workers that were coming in and mental health therapist kind of people coming in, so things started to change pretty drastically. Some people were respectful and were feminists and understood where we were coming from and then you had people that were your conventional therapy things and victim-blaming crap and had a social work model, which was not--. There are social workers that are activists and have a good grasp of things and then you have folks that are not trained in social change at all, don't have any



background or haven't done any reading, just don't have any clue about what social change is, so they're very service oriented and policy stuff, so that was really different.

I began, like what I did at Carson Newman and what I did at UT and--where else was I? [1:13:34] too, I did. People brought me in to talk about social change work and to talk about social work and social change and talk about how my work manifested itself, so I did a lot of that throughout my whole career, talk about social change, because there was no--. I mean now at UT, my friend who teaches a graduate class at UT in the school of social work said there's a whole class on social change now. Well, there wasn't then. I mean there was nothing. So, anyway, I have no idea where I was [1:14:18].

JW: So before that conference you were doing what women in your community were asking of you, I mean they were coming to you.

DL: I was just responding to a need, which is what I did, and that meant that not only was I sheltering people but I had already set up an underground railroad of sorts. I had contacts in North Carolina and--because there was no way to protect children and women who were getting sexually assaulted. There was no safety. You couldn't depend on the court at all. Very, very often men would get custody of kids that they'd been raping for years. It was such a terrible story nobody would believe it was really happening: "Oh, you're telling a terrible story on your husband," or, "You've taught these kids to tell this story." Well, does that explain the vaginal tears? Does that explain these anal tears on this three-year-old boy? I mean how do you--? So, we acted as we had to.

JW: So what were the first--?

DL: And I didn't care--. Some of us didn't care very much about the laws that were not just, [Laughs] so we sort of ignored stuff that put people at risk, but we also began acting to change those laws. We were going at it from every direction because we knew we had to change policy laws; that this had to happen. I mean we were going to be out here in the woods unless this happened, so we were busting our ovaries. We were in people's faces; we set up committees; we'd disseminate information. One of my first paying jobs was--. At that first national conference we organized what we called the Southeast Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which was all the southeast states, and we were able too--. We had some funding, who could have believed it, and I was hired as the coordinator for the Southeast Coalition, so I spent two years--. I worked out of UT, UT was my fiscal sponsor--[1:16:31]--and I spent two years traveling the southeast, sharing policy, sharing legislation, training boards of directors, training advocates, keynote speaking at conferences, or whatever. For two years that's what I did, and we got all the states up and running. We did some good work.

JW: What were the first major battles that the movement had to fight?

DL: It was different; I mean just getting past barriers of getting people to believe the stories and finding allies. Finding allies was really not as hard as you might have expected because of course fifty percent of us come from families that were violent, so I found allies among police and judges because those were the folks that grew up where their mothers were being assaulted and they were assaulted themselves. I found cops that were allies and I found a couple of judges that were allies and I was really good at--I could find common ground, and those people didn't think I was crazy because they knew what I was saying was true because they'd lived it. Different states had different

problems but first that just believing that it was real, and it was to this extent, and it wasn't poor women, and it wasn't black women, and it wasn't someone different from us but it was you and it was me; that was huge.

One of the biggest things I know I did all through my career was--. My daughter's father was a violent man and although he never physically assaulted me I lived with that threat of violence for years, and I always identified myself as a formerly battered woman because people have preconceptions about who a woman is who gets hurt. And I was not at all anyone's preconceived idea of a woman who could possibly be hurt. It was like those Cambridge fellows. Who would have ever thought that someone with that education level would be victimized? Well, hell yes. So I always came into it like I'm talking about my own experience, which is powerful. It's a powerful thing.

So just getting laws passed were sometimes difficult, and getting the order of protection, which was a really critical piece, getting it implemented. We passed that law in Tennessee in 1979. Well in 1983 I finally got it implemented, and I say I did because there was one judge in metro Nashville, that's downtown Nashville, who would sign an order of protection. That was the only judge in the state who would sign it. I had an ally, Bill Holt, Judge Bill Holt here, who's a circuit court judge, and I had been talking to him for a couple of years about getting these orders of protection signed. I finally went in with him--. I had a woman who was beaten to a bloody pulp and her kids had been hurt too, and I went in and I brought this woman with me--I mean show and tell--and I also brought, because of who I knew--. My friend, Barbara, sent me a copy of a PhD dissertation where a woman had researched--it was like this thick--had researched every state that had the order of protection in place where it had been challenged. It had been

challenged in every state as being unconstitutional, every state, and the appeal had been thrown out of court. It was a good law and here was the proof. So I brought him a copy of that dissertation and I said this has been challenged in every state and it's been overturned--not overturned--it had been upheld in every state--and we've got people in Nashville ready. If someone's going to challenge us we've got people ready to go to court on this. He said, "Well, Ms. Levy, I'm going to sign this, but if I go down I'm going to take you with me." I said, "Judge, if you go down I'm coming with you."

I told you I was founder of the Tennessee Coalition--I was on the board for twenty years--so I copied that order of protection, made copies for every shelter director in the state. I took it to the next board meeting or shelter meeting. And I was the trainer. I was the chair of the training committee. I chaired many committees for the Coalition for years, but for fifteen years I was the head of the training committee and I brought every bit of training into the state. I brought everybody, the best people in the country, because I knew them all. They were all friends of mine. So at that meeting I gave everybody a copy of the order and I explained to them, you take this copy of this signed order to your judge, whoever your friendliest judge is. This is who you want to take this copy to, and you tell them that Judge Bill Holt in Cocke County has signed this and that means that he will take the heat, and from that moment on that order was being able to be signed all over the state. So, that's a nice piece of organizing.

JW: Mm hmm.

DL: Money was a huge issue. There was no money, and there's still very little money for this work, but we passed federal legislation, got [1:22:47] money and--oh, what is it?--the Violence Against Women Act, if you remember that. That was a huge

piece of work for us. That took us a few years to get that through. Then also at the same time we had to come down to the state level and find some chunks of money too because there wasn't enough. But we ran shelters on shoestrings, on nothing, for years, with volunteers, donations.

JW: Who were your most surprising allies?

DL: Well, it wasn't really all that surprising because once I realized--. I mean there's no way to know. You don't know. I can't look at you and know if you came from a family where there was violence, and neither can you look at me and know, so I didn't know. But I wasn't surprised because I knew so many people had this secret. It wasn't surprising but it was gratifying when people would come forward, particularly cops, particularly elected officials. Judges, I mean give me those judges who were allies. Those are powerful people. There was a particular law enforcement officer, his name's Mark [1:24:00], and he was just one of the most effective--. He probably was the most effective law enforcement trainer that I have ever known. He came from a violent family. He told a great story of how he grew up, and his story was: I could have gone either way. I could have become the worst criminal or I could become a cop. It was a flip of the coin. It's true; it's the way you go. He said, "I could have killed my father or I could have jailed him." [Laughs] So he was the most--. You want judges to train judges. You want cops to train cops. You want mental health people to train mental health people. You want people to be talking to their own people rather than me coming in and telling anybody from my perspective, so my job was to find those people that I could train to be my trainers, and I was able to find perfect people for those situations. I was able to find common ground. It was something I was--. I mean I could see all the

barriers and all the things we had different but I could also see what we had in common, so I could make other things go away: I know you may not like this about me and I know you may not like that about me but this is what we can do together, and we would.

JW: In those early years were you connecting domestic violence to other community issues? Were those things coming up?

DL: Yes, but it took awhile to--. I mean things became obvious. It was obvious that justice system was not equitable. It was obvious that there really wasn't a system of justice available for women and children. There wasn't a safety network. There was no community response. The churches were--. For the most part, except for those allies I could find amongst church people, the churches here were incredibly victim-blaming, and so many of the fundamentalist churches, smaller churches, were submit, submit, submit. So there were cultural things in place that kept women in an unsafe situation or didn't enable them to get safe. Every single person I worked with there something came up that was like, oh, put that on my list to deal with. The last thing that I was really head down working on was financial stability for women, which I can't even do that for myself, [Laughs] so. That was the obvious--. That was the reason that women went back to batterers because they would be homeless with their children and they would take an enormous amount of violence to themselves in order to keep their children under a roof. Who could blame them, if that's the only choice you have?

JW: So you saw those other issues. Did you feel like other organizations--?

DL: It's always clear to me that if you see a problem as your problem, if you see it then you do it, because there weren't people out there doing this kind of work. Now there's lots of different--. Well, no, there isn't, because a lot of people have stopped

doing a lot of that kind of work really, but back then there wasn't anybody else. [Laughs] It was like, who am I going to call? I was the one getting calls. If there's a problem, let's call Dianne. Dianne will figure out something. Let's call Dianne; she'll do something, which was true. I would do something.

JW: Once you got started and were organized was there the ability to build coalitions with other--

DL: Oh, sure.

JW: --social movement people or organizations?

DL: Social movement people. [Pause] I think we were the social movement people at that point really. I mean we were probably some of the most radical folks around. It's not true now. It's totally different now, I think. We were a radical bunch of women and we were demanding justice, and we learned how to work the system because that's how we were going to get things done. Did I find allies? Actually I found it very difficult to find allies. I remember going up to Highlander way back, gosh, '81, '82, way back, '83, because I was clear that I was doing justice work. It was clear to me. [Laughs] I remember going up to Highlander and I remember getting so pissed off. For many years Highlander was so misogynist, it was just typical of the whole Left male thing that was going on for years, and they didn't have any women in leadership positions, and: This is just a stupid women's thing. They did not get it. They would not get it. They had no interest in talking to me. I couldn't even--.

So, no, I could not find allies back then. My allies were other people working with women's issues, so the rape crisis folks were allies, because we were doing the same work, but other than that. I mean we'd find folks in other--. There were legislators that

we worked with and we brought people in, but, no, I can't say that there were lots of groups that were--. We found contacts and we brought those people in, like we had our folks with legal aid and we were able to be sure that there was somebody doing domestic violence with legal aid offices, you know, one attorney for God knows how many counties. So we had allies there and we would find legislators and we would find a judge and we had law enforcement, so we had our allies. We knew who to call. I never would tell anybody, call the cops. I would say call so-and-so and talk to so-and-so and don't talk to anybody else, or call so-and-so, mention my name, and tell them I told you to talk to them. It was very specific. You couldn't ever just make a phone call and get anything you needed. You had to work your allies and work the system, and it was who you know and who you blow, who owes you something, who did you do a favor for, who will push a little bit over the edge for you, so that's how it was. No, there weren't, because it was women's stuff and it was not like male people--. [Laughs] The men didn't recognize it as like the work, because it was misogynist. It was a real problem.

In the late '60s and early '70s in a lot of progressive organizations--things have changed. The women's movement came up and women demanded changes and a lot of the leadership changed to women, at least fifty percent women. Not Highlander. It was a long--. It was Suzanne Pharr, finally. They hired Suzanne Pharr and it totally changed their entire culture, but that was not until, God, that was late--. Was it 2000, maybe? It was late in the game. [Oh, gosh, I'll] never forget. I mean they called me up there to do training every now and then, they had a staff person that was being battered they wanted me to intervene with. But actually getting the scope of this work and what it mattered to



fifty percent of the population, no. No, they did not get it. So, no, I did not have lots of allies here.

JW: What was your first introduction to the women's movement? When did you become gender conscious?

DL: Probably when I was living in England and everyone started living communally and had all these weird--. People were so strange about how they lived. Some of our closest friends, who were students or fellows or whatever they were, had a large communal house in Cambridge, and it was a bunch of people, some of them were married couples and some of them weren't. It was a whole mish-mash of folks and they were always wanting me to come and join that communal household, and I was pretty young and I was not quite sure what was going on. [Laughs] So I was visiting one day and I just happened to walk in on a conversation, and they were doing things like all the women had their own room and the men would move from room to room at night, so they got to sleep with all the women [Laughs] or attempt to, or whatever. I thought, what the hell is that about? "Oh, we're just--." I don't even remember their rationale, really. It sounded to me like it was a good way for the men to get to be with all the women, [Laughs] is what it sounded like to me. They had this whole intellectual explanation about equality or noncompetitive relationships or some kind of crap, just bullshit stuff, [1:34:10] talking about, [Laughs] so they could get more sex. Almost every time we got together or they came out to the house: "You all just need to close this place down and come live with us. [Dog barks] You can have a great room, and--." I was just really kind of clear that seemed like bullshit to me and I didn't want any part of it.

Down the road I remember there was a huge blowup at that house because one of the women put her foot down. She said the hell with this. We're not doing this anymore. [Laughs] And I couldn't have articulated any of that, but it all--. And then the women started sitting down together and they wouldn't let the men in the room, and I was there for those meetings and those were the beginning of the women's group and women's consciousness raising and all that stuff, so that was probably it. By the time I came back to the States I had a pretty good handle on looking at stuff in a really different way and being able to analyze what I was seeing in a different way. I mean meetings became really different for me because it was like, who's talking, who's listening, who's setting policy, how is this going down, is there any consensus in this room; what is really happening? So, yeah, that was when it opened up for me.

When I came here, very soon after I came here--. I came here and I really wanted to disappear. I mean I wanted to be off the radar. I was happy to go way, way back in the sticks; my name wasn't on anything; that was fine. That was good. And I was really determined not to do any organizing, but I couldn't help myself. So pretty soon I had started organizing the food co-op and I set up a barter market. I was going to do an alternate money thing but never got the cash actually printed up, but I had great barter markets going on here for a couple of years, fabulous. God, I wish we still had them. What else did I do? Oh, and I started having women's groups. I can't tell you how that happened; it just happened. So that got pretty powerful pretty quick because we had the same sort of dynamics going on here between men and women, like anywhere, and then the men started demanding--.

So I had the food co-op and the barter market and of course I was busy with Etta Nichols catching babies and [Break in recording from 1:36:58 to 1:37:59] --being strong--. Not every woman who came here but many women who came into this area had pretty strong visions and goals about what they wanted to do and how they wanted to live, the men often not so much, and men were attracted to the women who were strong and had ideas and had visions about stuff. But pretty universally the men were then threatened by the same things that they were attracted to, and so a response--and I'm really generalizing here--but a fairly general response was to be verbally abusive and to beat down the woman so that she would lose some of that confidence and her sense of self worth, and that wasn't even talked about. That was so absolutely common, standard behavior in relationships that if it wasn't going that way it was unusual. And there may have been some physical stuff, there could have been sexual stuff as well, but the verbal abuse was absolutely across the board, and women didn't actually know it was happening unless someone was talking about it and they go, oh, well that's how he talks to me. So you had that--. I think that's probably after when the men [1:39:22] because I think everybody went back with that revelation.

JW: So they started to come to the actual women's meeting?

DL: It didn't last after that because the whole object was of course to bust up that. It was very threatening for women to be meeting together without men. That was incredibly threatening, and I became an incredible threat, and that was when I was the dyke and the lesbian and the this and the that, whatever, because those are the standard names that you get called. [Laughs] Even if you have a man it doesn't make any difference. Those are the names that you get called in our culture.

So I really thought I'd have allies out of that women's group, but I really didn't. In fact most of those women, who were my friends at that time and most of them are not now, thought I was really sticking my nose in and who was I to, whatever. And my conversation with them was, well, if you saw someone beating up a child, what would you do? What would you do? If you walked in on someone getting beaten up, what would you do? What is your responsibility there? [Laughs] And our views of things were very different. Almost all those women, my original set of friends here, who I had in common gardening and flowers and hiking or whatever, or learning a little bit about how people lived here, those women were not my allies. Those women, I threatened their relationships or I made them look at things they didn't want to really see, and at least fifty percent of those relationships broke up eventually because of the violence, and they didn't want to talk to me about that either when it happened. So, no, those were not my allies. I had to go further afield to find, you know, I had a different set of friends than I did originally here.

JW: Let's see what else I have. [Pause] Well did you feel like there was a network of women's movement people in this region? You said those women weren't it, but.

DL: Well I found my allies. I knew Marie [Cirillo] was up there so that was helpful to me at the beginning. She put out a little newsletter. I didn't know Marie; just somehow somebody sent me her newsletter because they thought, you all need to know each other. [Laughs] That's a lot of what happened, is that people would know someone and meet both of us and say, oh, you need to call so-and-so. That's how I met Eileen [Kogen], that's how I met Corinne [Rovetti], is people who met me go, "Oh, my God, do you know Corinne? Oh, you have to--." So other people would recommend--. I mean I

was living back in here. I didn't see anybody, I didn't go to town. It was who you hear about. And how did I find--? Oh, I remember.

When I went to that national conference in 1980 there was a woman named Callie Hutchinson who was there and she was the reluctant [Laughs] representative--. She was from Nashville and worked for the Y[WCA]. Many Y's got involved in sheltering back in the day when they were a little bit more progressive than they are now. But Callie had worked for the Y and I can't remember what her position was but she got involved and began working with battered women and she--. I don't [1:43:19] She was, like I say, the reluctant representative from Tennessee for the National Coalition, so they had like state caucuses. And she and I were the only two people from Tennessee and she went, "Great! You're the new representative." [Laughs] [1:43:34] To what? So she quickly dumped everything onto me, which was fine, and she and I then pulled together a coalition meeting. There was a woman in Bristol that was doing some sheltering and Angie in Memphis, Angie and--what's her name?--Brenda, Callie. Kathy Skaggs was an attorney with Legal Aid and she had just like noticed there was, you know, [1:44:07] and me, there were five of us, and we were the charter members of--we put the coalition together and did everything, wrote the legislation, everything, policy, so that was the beginning really of the state, of us really starting to take hold of the state. We pulled in more people over time. I can't remember really who the next wave was, but. And of course once we got some funding in place things just really [Sound effect of explosion], as soon as there's money.

JW: Has living in the South shaped your idea of women's issues, or were there different challenges, starting a network to challenge these laws or to put things in place?

DL: You know, I've lived in the South almost all my adult life, with a few years in England, and, I'm sorry, but I think--I'm not sorry--I really am quite sure that these--. It's all the same. I mean there may be subtle differences but there's as much racism, classicism, misogyny, there's all that stuff in urban, suburban, northern, western. I think it's all the same. It may make people comfortable to stereotype different particular issues but if we started to say, okay, well there's this, well you can match up issues everywhere. I mean I could talk about religious prejudice here, but there's just as much crazy fundamental crap going on in the East and the North and everywhere. You've got this insanity everywhere. You've got that conservative [Laughs] face on everything no matter where you are in this country. So, no, I don't think there was any particular--. I mean maybe the fact that it was segregated but even that was just clear. You had the same prejudice everywhere, just like in Frankfort there was white and colored. Well that was certainly not confusing, it was clear what was going on. Was it worse in the South? Well I mean we had the lynchings, yes, that happened here, but did we not have other people killed in other parts of the country that wasn't famous for it? We did. Is the death of African Americans any more important than the genocide of our native people? I don't think so. I think it's all the same. So I would say no, that I can't say I saw any barrier. I mean I certainly--. Part of the theater of it is learning how to talk to people so they'll listen to me. I had to learn what not to say or how to approach people, but I don't know that that was definitely a Southern thing necessarily or just learning how to communicate in my community, how to talk to people. I mean my conversation might have been different if I had been in a city up North but I don't think it would have been a whole lot different.

JW: What have been your proudest moments in your career?

DL: I was proud when I got that order of protection in use. That was big and unnoticed really by everybody, but to me that was like a huge--. I knew what a huge deal that was and how that affected--. It was an instant change in the state, so I'm pretty proud about that. [Pause] You know, I look at just the changes in people's attitudes around this. In fact I mean I pick up the paper and here's a domestic violence arrest. That never would have happened. It simply never would have happened. There were no domestic violence arrests; there was no domestic violence crime. The fact that a woman, really almost across the country, not universally, but a woman can call 911 or call the cops and she's more likely to get a response than not, and particularly in the state of Tennessee that building consistent response was my passion, the fact that no matter where one of the--that she didn't have to know Dianne to get safe. She didn't have to call Dianne and Dianne have to call a friend in order to--. She could call 911: My house is burning down; my husband is beating me--same response. That's big. A woman can go into court now and she's going to be treated respectfully. That wasn't true. It just wasn't true. The fact that people are extremely cautious about doing victim blaming, which was never true; it was always some stupid woman's fault for doing something stupid. If she would change her behavior, keep her mouth shut, give him sex when he wanted, have dinner ready, whatever, jump through the hoops. That's big. So, it's hard--. I mean I really probably saved lives and I'm happy about that. I'm proud when an adult comes up to me [1:50:07] and says, "Do you remember me? I want you to know Mom's this and I went to school and I'm doing this." Women I sheltered, they went to school and they've gotten a professional something and they're doing better than I am. I'm extremely proud.

That stuff is great. I mean I didn't write down, oh, this was a big day. If you have a success or something really wonderful happens well you move on to the next problem. You don't go, oh, great! You're just like, oh, that's good; now let's take care of this, so.

I do feel like I helped change the world and make it a safer place for women and children, and I think that I was a fabulous advocate for many years. I was the advocate for the battered women's movement in the state of Tennessee. I was the front person. If there was anything controversial, dangerous, risky, I was the front person. I took all the heat. Before anybody else had to deal with it I was there. I went to every meeting. I was at every meeting, policy legislation, anything, I was always there to the point that when I wasn't at a meeting, I couldn't make a meeting, somebody in that meeting would go, "Dianne will never let this go through." So it got to the point where I didn't actually have to be there. People knew where I stood. Now that's a powerful thing, when you don't have to be there and people can still be sure that you'll--. Even if they don't agree with me they knew that this would never go by me and so they would state, "Boy, Dianne won't go for that." That's powerful, and it was never for me. It was always I was the voice for the battered woman. I was always speaking on her behalf and the kids' behalf on anything, so that was the perspective I brought to the table, and I never backed down. I never backed down. So, I'm proud of that.

JW: Let me check something on this. [Pause]

DL: I can turn on this big light.

JW: Oh, yeah, that helps.

[Break in recording]



DL: Early on when I was first trying to get things done in the courthouse, trying to get a case prosecuted or something, there was an attorney here in town, many attorneys, and I didn't really know anybody at that point, didn't really know who anybody was, but I knew the attorneys because they were dressed in particular clothes, usually, [Laughs] so you could tell. I was coming down--. And a lot of the attorneys were really pissed at me because the judges would want me to stand up and represent things and that just pissed them off. So this one guy, I was going up the steps of the courthouse and he was coming down--. Because people were getting divorced and I was always there for the divorces, custody, anything, I was there. I never sent a woman to court by herself. It was Bill Leibrock and he was coming down the steps and I remember I was looking down, because I was going down steps, and I remember looking down at his feet because he had on these big black kind of clodhopper shoes and his pants were really short, like mine are, and he had on white socks. I remember looking down at his feet thinking, God, his pants are so short, and at that moment he spit on my feet.

JW: [Gasps]

DL: And I looked at him. He was really a hateful son of a bitch and he just [Sound effect of retching] and I just kind of looked at him surprised and went on. Well he's married to a very nice woman and we never could figure that out, but he ran for office just a couple years ago. [Laughs] He put out a really fancy color slick brochure and on the front of that brochure was, "Bill Leibrock supports domestic violence law." [Laughs] And his whole campaign was based on his respect and whatever for women. It was just hysterical. I thought, you live long enough and you see some funny things.

JW: So do you think he really has changed?

DL: No.

JW: [Laughs]

DL: Although his daughter is an attorney and is in practice with him and she's declared herself a lesbian, so I don't know how in the world he's dealt with all that, but, no, I don't think he's changed. [Laughs] I don't know how his wife lives with him, quite honestly, but that's her problem; that's not mine. But, yeah, that's typical of how it was back then. I mean I had judges threaten me from the bench. I mean things were so--. It was so dangerous because it was dangerous for women that were helping women. I mean rape crisis workers got killed, battered women's advocates got killed; it was not unusual. We were shot every year. People died every year. So when people say to me, "You bitch, I'm going to kill you," I didn't go, "Oh, honey, you don't mean that." [Laughs] But when Rebecca was in school, was little and in school, I would pick her up at the school house because I knew that there were men who would victimize her, wouldn't hesitate, so I never left her alone for a second. If she insists on riding the school bus well I followed that school bus, I was right behind the school bus, so she could ride home but I was right there. Why did I start on that? Oh, and so when we came home at night we'd come around the bend or we'd come down the hill and we'd go, "Oh, look, the house is still standing! Hurray! No one burned us out today," and that was reality. "Oh, good, look! No one burned us out today, hurray!"

And I was really pretty convinced that somebody would kill me. I couldn't see how I was going to live with so many people threatening me, so I very carefully--. And besides my mother died at fifty so I was quite certain I wasn't going to live very long, so I was really careful when Rebecca was growing up--she's thirty-three now--but all the

time she was growing up I had arranged my--. Now I never had any money and I don't come from money and I knew I couldn't depend on her father. So I arranged my life that I had really good life insurance so that if I was killed this house would be paid off and she would have a chunk of money for college, and that was my entire focus. When I reached fifty-five and I thought, oh, Christ, I'm alive and I'm not at all prepared for retirement, because that was my focus, was being sure that she was stable when I was killed. That was my reality. It was like, oh, shit, I've lived too long. Now what? And it's true, [Laughs] that's really true.

JW: So what are you doing now?

DL: I am, let's see. I'm struggling, is what I'm doing. I'm trying not to have to be forced to leave here. I'm a bail bond agent, which brings me almost nothing in because I'm not a corrupt one. [Laughs] What else am I doing? I worked the census, which was great, for about a year. I'm too experienced and too old and I don't have an educational qualification so I'm really pretty screwed. So what else am I doing? I have a little granola business, which I have not--. I've got to get it going again because I stopped pretty much when I was doing the census. Everything I was doing pretty much stopped when I was doing the census because I didn't have time for anything else. So I've just signed up to be a substitute school teacher, you know, I'm doing whatever I possibly could do. I'm going to try to get back--. I'm trying to get a different census job since they seem to be one of the few employers that actually hire people my age, and you might not need an educational, you know, you don't need a degree.

But I'm struggling, is what I'm doing. I'm trying to live on nine hundred dollars a month, which is my social security, because I have very little social security because in

my twenties I did farm work, because my real work was community work and I wasn't paying in social security, and you don't think about that stuff when you're young. So I basically lost ten years of earnings that a lot of people have, and then when I was fifty-five, the last ten years of your career, fifty-five to sixty-five, are the years where you're going to be making the most money, which bumps up your social security, and when you pay off your mortgage and maybe even get some money into a retirement account, and I lost that ten years basically as a professional. So I'm having a hard time of it, and I do not have any answer for it and I may well not be here in a couple years. In order to survive after I lost my job at Safe Space I lived off the equity in this property and spent out what retirement money I had put away because I had no way to live, and as soon as I turned sixty-two I started pulling out my social security because I had no income, and of course that's not the thing to do, but I was grateful that I had it because I certainly had nothing else. It's hard to--I'm in Appalachia. It's hard to make a living in Appalachia. If I had taken the tiniest bit of care of myself as I took care of so many people--. I sent so many people to school. Somebody should have been giving me the same kind of advice I was giving everybody else. I should have taken time to get that degree because I could teach and do stuff that I would enjoy doing now. But, I just can't quite get myself excited about even trying to get to school now. I can't stand [2:04:05] I can't stand [there's like nobody to talk to], I can't stand having to take all this crap that I don't really have any interest in. I've lost what credits I had. I mean it's not like I can go enjoy going to school. I may enjoy it eventually, but I haven't been really taken by Rebecca's experience. It's been all [2:04:29] work and she's been so unable to take anything that

would be of like fun or interest, art or something, dance, or something else besides slogging with science. So, anyway, there are people who--.

JW: But I think it's an important--.

DL: There are people who tell me there's money and that some school would love to have me, I'd be a great addition to the classroom, which I think is probably true, but it's a lot of work.

JW: I think this is an issue that a lot of people like you run into who were community organizers.

DL: We're struggling.

JW: Yeah.

DL: We're really struggling. It's really quite--. It's been a challenge. [Pause]

JW: Do you want to say anything more about the state of the battered women's movement today?

DL: Well, there isn't a battered women's movement today. It's now domestic violence work and it is comfortably now social work. I mean you can take a class on, I don't know, domestic violence. You can take a class, so it's changed dramatically. Every now and then I will see a younger woman who gets it and is working at a shelter, but as us older ones retire and fade away it's [2:06:41].

JW: Can you explain that difference being the battered women's movement and what's now called domestic violence?

DL: The battered women's movement was political and we knew that we were political. It was clear. We did analysis and we spent time figuring it out. We understood power and control in the largest sense, and that's not true now. We were able to identify

ourselves as women, whether we were battered or not, we knew that if we weren't battered it was the luck of the draw, and that's not true now. That's just not true, I don't think. The materials that we developed, the training materials and the manuals and the policy stuff, pretty much that's still there. That's pretty much our work. And I'm not in a shelter now, so, you know. But the only shelter that I know in the state of Tennessee that still has an analysis, that still gets the big picture, is a shelter program working in Gallatin and Lebanon, close to Nashville, and the director is Sherry Tolli who is somebody that I [helped to] train and has been there now longer than even I was there. And so she has a clear--she's got it and so her program gets it. But I don't know one other program in this state that I could refer someone to and think that they will get anything besides your basic shelter for two weeks or three weeks or whatever. They have rules and this is what they will do, and I really think it's important not to have a lot of rules. I mean these families are coming out of a totally controlled situation and they need to be able to operate and make decisions and make mistakes as well as--. You know, how do you learn? It's like you really mess up, so let them mess up. It's really appropriate. But that's not what's going on now. Now it is everyone does this, this, this, and this, it's what everybody does, and I'm sorry, we aren't cookie cutter people, and I don't want to take responsibility for someone else's life. I want her to take responsibility for her life. She's got kids she has to take care of.

So that whole attitude of like, you know, not being judgmental, pfft, that's not true. [Laughs] Not having rules that everybody has to fit into, being culturally sensitive, being respectful of where people are, I mean everyone travels their own journey. Everybody makes changes when they're ready to. They don't make changes when I'm

ready for them to. How arrogant is that? Should I replace the batterer? Should I become the batterer in this woman's life? Is that my role? I have the shelter so I've got resources so let me control her. It's like those are all the wrong messages. My object was to have a woman take control of her life in a way that made her feel okay, not what my choices are. I mean probably the biggest problem I had with control was wanting to control what people ate in the shelter, because I'm a clean eater and I hate to see kids eating crap. I know it affects their health and their wellbeing, so that was probably my--. I had to stay away from the groceries because my method of eating [2:10:43 wasn't everybody's,] so that was probably my biggest issue, which of course was huge. And the fact that I expected the staff, my coworkers, to be sensitive to people's food issues. If somebody is used to eating something that's what they should have and no, we're not just buying what is at the food pantry. No. We're going into the grocery store and buying fruit and vegetables, [Laughs] just like real people eat. So those are things that I drove people crazy about, but it's not really--that's of so little importance.

JW: Do you consider yourself a feminist?

DL: Of course.

JW: Can you define what that means for you?

DL: Oh, it's so complex. I believe that women are equal parties in the world. [Laughs] That's very simplistic. I think women have the same rights as men. That's it. That's all, which means, of course, rates of pay, equality across the board, whatever that means. There shouldn't be--I mean there's really no discussion. What does it mean; it means there's no difference, except in the genitals, perhaps, but. Is that too simplistic?

JW: No.

DL: I think it--.

JW: No, we're just--.

DL: I think it is simplistic. I mean I don't think it's controversial or I don't think it's--. I'm going to have a glass of wine. Do you want one?

JW: I would love one.

DL: [2:12:25] [Laughs] I'll open a new one for you. Hang on. [Break in recording from 2:12:41 to 2:13:39]

--thing I think is important is that I never was alone. I didn't do this work alone, and although my friends, allies, supporters have changed over the years--I was in thirty years and people have gone out of course--but there was never--. Even at the very, very beginning, like even in England, I had a group of people that I was working with, and even with Johnnie Ray when I had a call from Johnnie Ray, well my friend, Karen, was also friends with Johnnie Ray so I was able to call Karen and say, "You need to come over and watch the kids; I've got to go to town with Johnnie," so even then. I had Chloe who was okay using the phone back when I wasn't for a year. So I've always had at least one ally, somebody I could talk to. Once I went to the National Coalition conference I had people I could always call on anything, and that was critical, that I had someone always that was safe for me to talk to, because I was doing things that were way outside the realm of anything normal. I mean I was doing things that people thought were outrageous and people had threatened to kill me for some of the things I had said and was doing, so I had to have that backup, because I needed to bounce against somebody. Am I crazy? Am I just insane to think I--? Is this real? So I always had somebody to say, no, no, you're okay. You're on track; you're right; hold your ground; you're okay. Very



important. So in a lot of ways I've been alone because I've been the point person, but I also had people that would--until the end I had people that would back me up, would hold my back, that I could call and say I'm going in to do this and if you don't hear from me in four hours then come looking for me, or whatever. Or, if I don't get this person back to the sheriff's department by now then you'd better send somebody out here because something's wrong. Or, I'm going to go challenge this in court and they're going to hold me for contempt, will you come and defend me, stuff like that.

So I don't remember the years that these things happened but some time maybe around, it was probably around 2000, one of the women I had sheltered, her husband was murdered. She wasn't staying in the shelter, I hadn't seen her for awhile, but the cops were looking for her. One of the things I did was I was beyond passionate--. There were a lot of things that I upheld and one of the things that I was passionate about and would not bend on was confidentiality. I would not allow any information to go out of the program, I just wouldn't. I would not. So I got a call from--. The sheriff was looking for her and the DA was looking for her and they just knew I knew where she was. They just knew I had her sheltered. I didn't really know where she was but they were sure that I did. But anyway the DA, who was himself a batterer and was never an ally, showed up on a Monday at 5:00. I had two locations. I had an office in Sevierville and I had the shelter and an office in Newport. I had a third office too but I didn't have anybody there all the time, so that's where my staff was. At 5:00, closing time, deputies show up at both locations to issue me a citation, and the staff, a contempt order, for everybody, to show up at court the next day at 9:00. This was at 5:00 in the afternoon. They wanted

me in court to prosecute me and my entire staff for contempt. Well I ran a crisis line and besides 911 it was the most active crisis line in three counties.

So 5:00 in the afternoon, I'm on the phone and by the next morning I have one of the best attorneys in the three-county area, wearing the most expensive suit, representing us in court. The judge that was doing this had been an ally and he'd done very well by being my ally. It had worked for him. He said to Al, who was the DA, he said--because he had all my staff there in the courtroom, and I said to the judge, "You know, Judge, there's no one answering my crisis line; there's no one at the shelter. Is this what you want?" He looked at the DA, not the assistant DA but the DA, and he said, "Mr. Schmutzer--." No, he said, "Attorney general--"or something, attorney general, I guess-- he said, "I don't think it's going to look good in the paper or on the news if you jail Ms. Levy." He says, "Do you want that? Is that what you want?" And Al's--because he really wants to throw my ass in jail, he really does, and he's like wiggling, and then Doug, the attorney that I asked to come--. And see I could call people and they'd come. If I had an emergency they'd come, and Doug came. He wasn't even a close friend of mine. I just knew that he had some heart and he understood the issues. I don't even remember what Doug said but the judge--. And after they had dismissed us, because the judge was not going to jail me, and after he dismissed us I went back and I said, "You know, Judge, I'm not going to reveal any information about anybody who's been involved in the program, but you know, if Al would have called me, just called me and said, we're thinking maybe, is there anything going on here that you can let me know, I could have said something to him like, you don't have to worry about this, or something. I would have said something to him." If someone didn't have to prosecute stuff I'd let

them know that there was nothing going on there, but of course that's not what--. They came at me heavy handed; they arrested all of my staff. He got my back up. I was never going to do any work with him again. When he ran for office he was trying to do a little bit, like "I'm the domestic violence prosecutor," and I was like, no, I don't think we're going there. [Laughs] Don't think so, Al. I don't think you're going to [2:21:42] prosecutor.

[Break in recording from 2:21:59 to 2:22:43]

--and I did it because I was asked to but it wasn't anything I really wanted to do, but it was in my role as the advocate, someone who did not back down. Batterer's Intervention programs, which began as another alternative to jail thing, you know, how can we keep these men out of jail? "Well these men are only a threat to their families"--I love it--"these are not guys--." This is the analysis. These aren't men who are a threat to their community, oh, no, [Laughs] just to their most--only to their families. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

DL: Only to the most intimate. I mean every one of these steps was a huge battle for me but I had to. That was a losing one so I backed down but I chaired that damn batterers intervention committee because we were writing policies because I was trying to control them so at least they would be accountable, because what happens with batterers intervention programs is you have--. Of course it's another job for a therapist, so, yay. [Laughs] It created a lot of work for people. But therapists are trained, you know, therapists are trained to be empathetic and sympathetic with the person that they're working with. That's the training. And batterers are your absolute experts at blaming [Laughs] someone else. It's never their fault and it's never--. So I knew what was going

to happen which was you get in a batterer's intervention group and you have a therapist going, oh, poor baby, what a bitch she was. Gee, that's terrible. I'm so sorry this has happened to you. [Laughs] [Sighs] So I did that. That was my last big piece of state work, which I knew was going to be a waste of my time, and of course it doesn't really matter how I write up policies or curriculum or whatever, it doesn't really make any difference, because you're down to the individual therapist who is trained the way they're trained and unless they've had a lot of counter training, which they don't, they're just [naïve]. But I spent three years trying to make it accountable, trying to make it work. So, that was my last. That's like, okay, I'm over this, [Laughs] really over it. I hate this work and I hate these programs and I can't believe that I've spent three years trying to control you people [Laughs] into making good sense. [Pause]

END OF INTERVIEW

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