

INTERVIEW: Harriet Alpern  
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey  
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**Interviewer:** All right, Harriet, that sounds good. We could probably start...The first set of questions Harriet has to do with your biographical information,

H. Alpern: Right.

**Interviewer:** So we can get an idea of what actually made you - led you to become active in the feminist movement. So could we start from the beginning and you can tell me about your...

H. Alpern: Yeah.

**Interviewer:** You can tell me about where you were born and when.

H. Alpern: Right, yup.

**Interviewer:** So where were you born?

H. Alpern: I was born in Detroit. Actually, Harper Hospital.

**Interviewer:** Does that still exist?

H. Alpern: Yes, I didn't hear your question.

**Interviewer:** Is the Harper Hospital still in business?

H. Alpern: Oh yes. Harper Hospital is now connected to Wayne University

**Interviewer:** And what year?

H. Alpern: 1922.

**Interviewer:** And could you describe your family circumstances? What did your parents do? Did you have brothers and sisters?

H. Alpern: Yes, I do. I have a twin brother [and a sister].

**Interviewer:** And your parents?

H. Alpern: My father was in business, and my mother she was atypical, really, although

she was a housewife — she was at home a lot, and she was a traditional-type person in many sense but she was an artist, a wonderful vocalist and she had a musical background; she studied piano and had a glorious voice. She had wonderful training. She had four sisters and there were other talents in the family too, so they were independent women — strong women. So, I think that's one of the beginnings, you really have to have. I don't know really why I became a feminist except that it was very natural — it's a natural thing. And the rest of my family wasn't particularly political and they weren't particularly interested in what I was doing but they respected it. She respected it a lot. She felt it's true that women do get some bum deals. But, she didn't participate with me.

**Interviewer:** **How many brothers and sisters did you have?**

H. Alpern: A brother and a sister.

**Interviewer:** **Okay. A twin brother and a sister as well?**

H. Alpern: Yeah.

**Interviewer:** **Did you all practice any religion? Did you have a religious affiliation?**

H. Alpern: Yes, Jewish.

**Interviewer:** **Okay, And, other than your mother, can you think of anything else that might have influenced you towards feminism?**

H. Alpern: Oh, a couple of things. I think religion for one thing.

**Interviewer:** **Why is that?**

H. Alpern: Because in Judaism, there's one principle tenant — you're supposed to do good deeds all of your life. They call it a...mitzvah is the word, the Hebrew word, and you're never supposed to stop doing them. I heard a lecture recently from — it was Hebrew — this Rabbi that had a lot of humor and was down to earth and very charming and he said that — he compared it to your kids; you telling them what you did for them. "When you were a kid, I made you breakfast, when your mother was home," and this and that, so the kid turned to him and he says "Yeah, Dad, but what have you done for me lately?" And he says, "That's what God says to people: 'what have you done for me lately?'" [In Judaism you are commanded to do your part in making the world a better place while you live] Until you die, you should be doing things for other people. And, so I think that that's the very core of it too, and I didn't realize it, I won't say realized it. But I think that's true. And the other thing, influence, I think, was really the League of Women Voters. I was a member interested in women's issues and so when this came

up, I knew very little about it, and I know that many of the women came in for personal reasons, and they weren't happy, and they have had a lot of problems in their lives with men, and that wasn't my incentive because I was really interested in the issues. And then as I went along, I was extremely interested in the women that were working, because that, I always liked to work — that's just natural, too. I always found myself working with really, really bright women that I learned something from.

**Interviewer:** **What type of education did you get? Did you go to College?**

H. Alpern: Yeah. Uh-huh.

**Interviewer:** **Was it expected that you were going to go to college when you were growing up?**

H. Alpern: Sure, oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** **And when did you, did you get married?**

H. Alpern: Uh, no, after World War II, I got married.

**Interviewer:** **And do you have children with this...?**

H. Alpern: Yeah, uh-huh, I have two children.

**Interviewer:** **Okay. And so when you joined the League of Women Voters, were you married at that time?**

H. Alpern: Sure. I guess so. I think. I imagine.

**Interviewer:** **Okay. And, did you have a career outside of the home?**

H. Alpern: Well, before I got married, we had, the three of us had an ad agency. So, we had taken care of some small accounts and things.

**Interviewer:** **Three women?**

H. Alpern: Uh-huh.

**Interviewer:** **Was that uncommon?**

H. Alpern: No, I don't know, I don't think so.

**Interviewer:** **Okay, okay.**

H. Alpern: It was small, you know. No, it wasn't uncommon handling [advertising]

accounts. Maybe it was, and I really don't know, but I wasn't aware of that.

**Interviewer:** **Okay. And then, what do you think led you, then, into the feminist movements?**

H. Alpern: Well, as I said, gradually, a couple of people that were forming it were friends, so, I went to the first meeting to find out what it was all about.

**Interviewer:** **Are you talking about NOW?**

H. Alpern: Yes, NOW.

**Interviewer:** **Okay.**

H. Alpern: NOW. National Organization for Women. Yes, and they formed a chapter here, we formed a Michigan chapter but it was really Detroit, and I do think there are some [in] other cities. I'm not familiar with it anymore because I haven't really done that much, but I think we have some other cities in Michigan also that has chapters.

**Interviewer:** **Okay, so friends of yours convinced you to join NOW?**

H. Alpern: Well, it was friends of mine and then I admired the people that were in it [NOW]. I liked them. They were the type of people I was used to working with. They were smart, and self-starters, and people that came from all over the city and they met up where I lived. I was just lucky.

**Interviewer:** **What were the issues that they were working on?**

H. Alpern: Well, we worked on most of the early, very important issues. I learned a lot about the EEOC, the women (we had working women), and I learned about [writing and promoting] the legislation. That was historical that they had passed in Washington. Actually that was the beginning of the feminist movement. That's not true. But, it was one of the very early organized things that we can look at and see concrete things — it was that women went to Washington, and among them was Gloria Steinem, and the other one around them, was Betty Friedan (the one I met), and I'm not sure if Gloria Steinem was there at the time. And, they found out that they weren't getting anywhere with the men, that they were trying to get women into the legislation, that they could not be discriminated against. And so, well, they finally, the women fought for it and the men said "Put 'em in." They didn't think it would mean anything because they were working on the racist issue, actually. But they did include women, and that's how it started and the women helped each other very much, getting the information, I understand. Some of the women working inside the EEOC, they really were very courageous, and they actually could have, their jobs were really, could've

been threatened. They got information and gave it to these women — of the statistics of how many women — I suppose the wages and all these things. So, they all worked together and they got the materials and it was just a very exciting thing.

**Interviewer:** **Did you work on this as well?**

H. Alpern: I did not work on that issue. No, that was earlier, but that was what I had learned about early — that we had union women in the group and you're going to see one. And anyways, she was a prominent woman, Millie Jeffrey, and then there was Alga Madar, she was the head of the women's UAW. She since has died, and there were others: Dorothy Haener, and they have died, but I learned an awful lot from them.

**Interviewer:** **And so what were the compelling issues to you? Was there something in your personal life and experiences that made you think that you needed to work with these women?**

H. Alpern: No, not really. That wasn't my pathway, but the abortion issue was an early issue, and that was interesting. I hadn't really thought that much about abortion, I had never had to experience it. But, my husband who is a pediatrician, he really introduced me to it. Well, one thing, he felt no child should be born who isn't wanted. And, he was very upset with the state of Connecticut, I think that's the right state, was Catholic and they wouldn't let the women have birth control. That really infuriated him. I realized women could achieve rights without control of their bodies.

**Interviewer:** **Did your husband and children support you in your activism?**

H. Alpern: Yes. Oh yes, well my husband, he's a feminist. The women said, "You know, he's the nicest man in the feminist movement." They said "Where did you find him?" There were women in the group that had had really sad life experiences, so, I can understand that. And, they did have consciousness-raising groups, which you'll probably find out about those from other people, because I was not part of that.

**Interviewer:** **You weren't?**

H. Alpern: No.

**Interviewer:** **So what were you involved in?**

H. Alpern: After we had media experience, I became the PR Chair, so I was involved very much with that aspect. The wonderful thing about it was it was fun — it was exciting. I never had to call them [the media]. They always, the media, called me as soon as any issues came up. We were the only

[feminist] resource group and they always called NOW for what we thought about different issues. Well that was great. And, I learned how to conduct this sort of thing, and to be sure that when somebody called, there always should be one person in the group that answers — not everybody should be answering. We appointed one spokeswoman, and only one, to assure an authoritative NOW point of view. So, that's the way we did it. I learned about how to do press conferences, news conferences, we called them, because it was television as well as press. And they didn't really like being called a press conference. And, we had some of those, so I was involved in that, and we had a media project for quite a number of years where we monitored advertising.

**Interviewer:** What were you looking for?

H. Alpern: The image of women. [We found young women were depicted as sex objects and older women ignored completely].

**Interviewer:** Okay. As portrayed by...

H. Alpern: The media. And, we did a collection of ads. We monitored all the papers. There were other groups doing it too. We looked in the magazines, we looked in *Esquire*, and *Vogue*, and we looked in various places; in the papers, you look at the advertising — all reflected the inequality of women and it was really appalling to see that, in a magazine like *Vogue*, to give you one example, they had pictures of women roped and tied. And, with the ads, women were in very vulnerable positions. The male ads of course had that, every liquor [ad], and on all the billboards too, had women lying down; it's very vulnerable.

**Interviewer:** So what strategies did you use to try and make the media change the way...

H. Alpern: Well, we showed our program at various places [stations and programs]. We went to the television. Well, first the media, I'll finish that first, and then I'll — because at the television station we did really do quite a bit. Well, I had actually called the editors of papers and they all came and I presented an ad program — no it was a news program. That was a little different. It was a news program that they claimed that... I claimed that they never had important news about women. If anything took place, they ignored that. And we did a monitoring to show the paper for specific days and then we would tell them what happened that day that was important to women and it wasn't there and very often they would say, "Well, there was more important news." So part of the monitoring was to show them what was on their front page and some of it was triviality. I didn't get one challenge. It's very interesting, no, but, nobody challenged anything I said. I was surprised, but we did what you should do, we brought them the

evidence, and we showed it to them, and they couldn't dispute it.

**Interviewer:** **Did they change?**

H. Alpern: I think it has changed somewhat, and women are doing things that they have to show in the news because, government appointments, all of this works together and there are more government appointments. I'm not claiming it's wonderful, but we've made strides anyway, and so, yes, in some senses they have definitely changed.

**Interviewer:** **And at that point in time, they made changes?**

H. Alpern: Oh, yes...

**Interviewer:** **You were directly... At that point in time when you were monitoring and showing them, what they didn't have in the newspaper, so on and so forth, did they...**

H. Alpern: Oh? At that particular time? No, I don't think so. But they absorbed it. And people [feminists] all over the country were doing things like that. And our media, our first media project was, really, it was amusing to me. They called us in, and...

**Interviewer:** **Who's they?**

H. Alpern: The station, WXYZ, called us because nationally, NOW had a project of going to the media and telling them they were not following the regulations. They were right there in black and white. Of course, now, over the years I've noticed how, the currently, the Republican Party — I don't know if Clinton did this, too, but they've [the government] deregulated [the media], they do not have regulations. And so, which is really sad.

**Interviewer:** **And what did WXYZ call you in for?**

H. Alpern: They called us in to negotiate and they did make the changes. It was against the law, that's why, and we had a lawyer come with us, who was a woman, and at that time, can you imagine? I mean, we have so many women lawyers now. I think one of them [the men] said "How cute." I think one did. And they also had lawyers and we had ours, of course. But it was negotiations, and one of the things was the hiring policies. There were no women on camera in — they called them the talent. And there were no women at the news [desks]. Their argument was that even women would not accept women's voices as authoritative, and they also had no camera people, no women, and they have that now. They did not have promotional — opportunities for women — the glass ceiling. But, when we were there they had a woman [station manager], I think, I don't know if that was the

first. And she's so smart. We just loved her and she was wonderful to us. And, she moved to Florida. I wish I can think of her name. I should've gotten it — I can get that for you if you'd like me to. Yes, she was wonderful, and she was a feminist. Anyway, and very, very, smart. So, they did make the changes and you know now they all have women. Of course, they're always, generally always, accompanied by men. As you know, they have to have their escort. But, that has changed, and they have camera people, too. The women have more, I guess, more promotion, I don't know. They're probably still dragging their feet a little bit, I don't know.

**Interviewer:** **So, you were chair of PR for NOW, and you also were highly active in the media project. You weren't the chair?**

H. Alpern: Of the PR?

**Interviewer:** **Of the PR.**

H. Alpern: Yeah, that's right.

**Interviewer:** **And highly active in the media project. What else?**

H. Alpern: And we also have, yes, our committed had our own project, and we worked for many years. The last project was depicting older women and how they were absent from the media except in rolls, of you know, being ridiculous looking, which they would show some hair-brain sitting in a restaurant or they were also shown to sell medication for all kinds of illnesses. But, outside of that, older women were really really not visible. Certainly the fashion industry never used them, and they claimed that older women did not like to see the clothes on older women. That was what they said. They have a few more now, I think they do.

**Interviewer:** **Uh-huh, uh-huh, and did you use, was the project for targeting older women in the media at a later time than this other project?**

H. Alpern: That was the last one. Yeah, yeah, because we met for several years, we had different projects and that was the last one

**Interviewer:** **Okay.**

H. Alpern: And I did the slide production and, you know, the dialogue and stuff for that. I still have that here.

**Interviewer:** **Did you find yourself getting more successful in your activism to change the image of women as the years went on?**

H. Alpern: Yes, I think nationally people really don't know today all the various

projects, and we were successful. Another project that just comes to mind, which was, we fit relatively early, was women and credit [achieving credit for women in their own names].

**Interviewer:** **Did you work on this?**

H. Alpern: I did not work on that one. But, there were people that did. They went to, I believe they selected Sears, and they challenged the fact that women could not take out credit. And they didn't have things in their own name, and I think the Visa cards. It's hard to remember it was a long time ago. And, the arguments, there were some very good ones. One of them was that women are the ones that generally pay the bills, they're very responsible, and it's an ironical thing — they can't get credit. That was one of the arguments, and there were others. Women when they get divorced or their husband died, the telephone company would discontinue their line because they no longer had credit. It was a really bad situation for people whose husband died or got divorced. Terrible. So, those were the basic things.

**Interviewer:** **Marcia Cron and Diana Leventer talked about that...**

H. Alpern: She's the one. She did head that group, so she could tell you a lot about it.

**Interviewer:** **Do you have any funny stories that you remember...**

H. Alpern: Oh yeah.

**Interviewer:** **...that you would like to tell.**

H. Alpern: It was a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun. Well, we integrated the [local] bars for one thing. If women wanted to have a drink in many of the places, they could not sit at the bar. And, some other places, they wouldn't take women's coats, women had to take their coats to the tables and some people say it was because they were fur coats, and that might be, but they weren't all fur coats. And so, we changed that. But I did go on that, the first time, when the women went to a bar, and we sat at the bar.

**Interviewer:** **And what happened?**

H. Alpern: And, well, they told us to leave. And we told them we were challenging the Public Accommodation Law, because there is one that says that you have to accommodate everybody the same way. And, I was taught through the women's movement that there's no good having laws on the books if we don't implement them. So, I learned some really basic things like that. And we should go out and implement them. So we did. And there were other public accommodations, you know stipulations too, but that's the one I was involved in and that was really fun. And, then, another one was really

hilarious, was a religious one. That was a very big part, too. Religions are really one of women's worst enemies today, too. You know that, all over the world. And, of course, well, this friend of mine in the group, she was a Catholic, and she was having the bishop's — they [the Catholics] were having a bishop's conference in Michigan, and a news conference, down at one of the hotels, and she said "Come on, let's go. We're going to go down there and sit in, and we're going to ask them if we can be part of their news conference." So, we had signs, and I said, "Well, you don't want me to come" I said, "I'm not Catholic, I'm Jewish." She says, "Never mind, everybody's supposed to come." They had signs that said "Jesus was a feminist," which the women wore. They related it to the story about, his attitude towards the woman was supposedly the big wicked woman. And, he, she, I don't know what he...

**Interviewer:** **Mary Magdalene?**

H. Alpern: And what?

**Interviewer:** **Mary Magdalene?**

H. Alpern: Yeah and he was, whatever his attitude was, it was what you would call liberal today. And, of course, they [the priests] refused to have us part of their conference, and, oh, they huffed and they puffed. And, the TV and the news gave us a separate conference. And so the women answered their questions about the church [from women's point of view]. It was fun; it was really hilarious for us, seeing all of these pompous bishops sitting there. And, another one was when we integrated the Detroit Club, which women aren't, no, not wasn't integrated, I misstated it. No, well the Detroit Club downtown and women weren't allowed in the front door, you know? That was the issue there. And so, we all walked in the front door, and one of the women said her husband was a member and he's going to be furious with her. But anyway, and we all walked in the front door, and the men sat there in their big old leather seats reading a paper and they never looked up. So, we got in there and we sang the song "I am woman, hear me roar." And so, that was hilarious, and of course we always got publicity from the things like that. So that was fun. And, we had a couple of protest marches and one of them was the issue of — and this was relatively early, the issue of Bell telephone totally segregated their employment according to sex and women weren't allowed to be outdoors — the ones that fix the wiring outdoors and climb up. What do you? A linesperson. Anyway, they weren't allowed to be, and so that was challenged. That was a national challenge too.

**Interviewer:** **How did you challenge that? Legally or did...**

H. Alpern: Yeah, sure, legally. Legally, because it was illegal to [discriminate according to sex]. Oh, and another challenge, before I forget, was in the

airlines. We had very funny cartoons. The air stewardesses, they all were called, and they had a separate line of duty, too. You couldn't be a pilot and when one of the major — at least it was a visible thing, what we attacked was when the kids got on the plane, they'd give the boys pilot wings and the girls, they'd give a little, something like for the hostess, I forgot. And the women said that is not right. And you know what they do now? Every little child gets a pilot's wings. Did you know that? Things changed drastically, and it was out of the women's movement that did it. And, the reason is that anybody will tell you that, and I think, the anthropologist, the one who went to New Guinea I guess.

**Interviewer:** **Margaret Mead?**

H. Alpern: Margaret Mead. She's the one that said that, "It isn't unusual for a small group of active and educated people to change things. In fact, that's the way it's always been." That was her quote. So, I do realize that if you don't have the group — you have to have two things. You have to have the right time, and after World War II there were educated people — women who had been in the service, nurses, and they have these wonderful pilots that were never, ever even recognized. What were their names? They flew in sick people. They flew in all sorts of important things and they weren't — it starts with a "W". Not the Waves, the Wasps? I don't know what they called them. It's similar. Anyway, they were not recognized, and that was true with the racial movement was the same thing. They had these men that went overseas, Black, and they fought in the service, they saw the world, and they came back and they weren't going to settle for that role anymore. So it's education, a lot of it.

**Interviewer:** **You've said earlier that the EEOC was one of the reasons that the feminist movement was also...**

H. Alpern: Well, it was early. When they met in Washington, I believe that was the issue, and they realized that women were not going to get anywhere, unless they started a political movement of their own.

**Interviewer:** **Do you make connections between the civil rights movement, anti-racism movement...?**

H. Alpern: Yes, very much.

**Interviewer:** **...and the feminist movement?**

H. Alpern: Very much so [the women learned many tactics from both these movements].

**Interviewer:** **Would you talk about that a little bit?**

H. Alpern: Yes, of course — is not original with me. None of this is, but it's part of what I believe that I've read. The civil rights, this was very much like the civil rights movement, and I'm sure it was generated from having the civil rights movement, too. Well, the Black men didn't support it, but that's where it started. I think, yes, there's a definite correlation. I think it's a period of time, that's the way everything is in history. I think, you have to have two elements, though, at least, and one of them is the time and the period, when people are ready for this, and because things do change and women's role changes a lot all the time. And women have gone to college, and they came out and it was just timely, and for the Blacks it was timely too. And you have to have leadership. Without that, you can't have a movement. You have to have an intellectual part, portion of it, and a leadership, political portion of it. Don't you think? Yeah.

**Interviewer: What do you think — what do you consider were your main achievements, in your activism?**

H. Alpern: Well, I worked on the media, so I could say that was really the one I was most involved in. You see, so that's what I would say.

**Interviewer: Okay. And, as far as the — I'm sorry. Were there other issues that you worked on, besides the women's issues?**

H. Alpern: Uh, no. No, I mean it was women. You can't work on everything at the same time. But it wasn't that we excluded the presence of men. The way I looked at it, too, was that we needed more, much much more participation of women. I still feel very strongly that way, and I remember Eleanor Roosevelt's quote, and it was about peace at the time, and she says: "If we're going to have peace, it's women who have to do it." And she was a very wise woman, and I do believe that.

First of all, I think women are wonderful ambassadors, but if we had a few more women ambassadors, I mean, a mixture — I believe in a mixture of the contribution of both sexes, you need diversity. It's the same idea of diversity of the races here. I think we need diversity of everything, because you get a much more richness of talents, you have to utilize the talents you have. Look what women have been doing, they're so talented, and now that they're in politics. They're way behind. That's one place where we need. It's really bad, but they're wonderful speakers. I read someplace they claim women would not be good public speakers. Well, there's some very good men too, but I think the women I hear are. Well, they're certainly equal if not. A lot of them are a lot better than the men; they're wonderful speakers. That's one good example, and you know, women learn to do things, and there's so much talent that we don't — we never utilize. And the talent in peacemaking, which is I think, I'm going to call it a talent because right

now it's one of the foremost things we need. And, women I think, should be highly represented, at least 50% should be women. And women, when they go to meet other women from other countries, and I know I've done it, and you do have an immediate warmth right away because women inhabit a little different world than men. And it's all the countries, not entirely different, but over here we do too. And women get along beautifully, not all the time, God knows, but they get along very beautifully in helping each other, they form committees, they form groups, they're more team oriented. And team orientation, I'm told by the experts while reading business books or whatever, that's the key to the future because everything's going to have to be done by teams. In the auto factories they work in teams, I mean I don't know auto in all of the factories, and they have a different orientation, so women are very adept at that sort of thing.

**Interviewer:** **The next part of the set of questions, Harriet, asks for some reflections upon the feminist movement from the sixties through the eighties. And the first question is: What is your definition of feminism?**

H. Alpern: Oh, my definition?

**Interviewer:** **Uh-huh.**

H. Alpern: Well, the definition, the foremost definition and it is not mine. It was the women's movement that said that they want women to be [considered] equal as human beings. They were not saying that men are stupid and men can't do anything. They just really said that women should have choices; if they want to be home, fine, and if they want to go out, fine. It's a matter of choices and of being recognized as human beings on every level.

**Interviewer:** **Do you think that the press accurately reflected your activism and the feminist movement in general?**

H. Alpern: No.

**Interviewer:** **And why?**

H. Alpern: Well, the press usually has biases, they do today, and they always do. And they didn't understand. They, men, called us a specialized group. So I said "Well, you know, you're really a specialized group. You're males, and you're males in managerial positions, over forty. And that's a specialized group." They couldn't say anything, because it's true. I didn't say it in a nasty way. I just said...So, they didn't reflect us, no. They didn't understand, either. You can't expect that they — I don't understand probably a lot of issues of people I don't know. Black. I understand plenty of them because I know what prejudice is all about. But I don't understand everything, and they definitely didn't understand women's issues. They

never been in a house working as caretakers, and all day long, or else having two jobs, which women do nowadays, they have to work in and out of the home.

**Interviewer:** **What do you think, looking back in the feminist movement in general, what do you think were the main achievements, and if you think there were any failures, what were the failures?**

H. Alpern: Oh, what was the second part of the question?

**Interviewer:** **The first was the main achievements of the feminist...**

H. Alpern: Yes. And the second?

**Interviewer:** **And the second is the failures.**

H. Alpern: Oh, the failures.

**Interviewer:** **If there's anything you would consider a failure.**

H. Alpern: I think that women, all of these issues that I mentioned, that have been addressed, I think have made remarkable progress. They've gotten legislation that's helped. They now have bank accounts in their own name and access to credit. They worked on so many things; public accommodations. And women are in law school and medical school.

[Pause]

**Interviewer:** **Okay, so we're rolling the tape. So you think the press has learned...**

H. Alpern: The press and the television too, well they've learned that they can't do that anymore; either probably legally or they would get fired from their companies because women have been so strong in their insistence on being treated as a member of a staff representing a business or a politician, and they have talked so much about the resentment of being termed as what they wear and what they look like. And, so, they've learned, and not only that, they know that's against them; they can't do it because it would be detrimental to them. So, I say they've learned a lot, yeah.

**Interviewer:** **So that's an achievement of the feminist movement?**

H. Alpern: Oh, definitely

**Interviewer:** **Do you think there were any failures? Was there anything you would consider a failure of the...?**

H. Alpern: Oh, failures, is because we haven't done enough. And women, there aren't enough women in politics, and the women that are in are extremely, many of them, not all, are extremely experienced — nowadays you've got women that have been in their states. They have a warmth and understanding of citizen's issues. They care about that more than they do about weapons, and they have a different approach, but we — you can't do it that easily because we're products of a, well the western tradition is the only one I can address, and the others are equally bad, but I don't know enough about them. But western tradition comes from the Bible, and the women are, now especially that we have religious people who are Bible-based. They don't want to be called fundamentalists, but that would be the term I would probably use, but they feel that women have a certain place, and that women are still battling tradition. Tradition is an enemy of any people because you can't — you can hardly overcome it. I mean, Eve as the temptress, and you see that everywhere. Women are portrayed, and young women are learning to be temptresses again, so that's a failure there. I don't know how you're going to, I mean there are cultures around us, you can't buck everything. So that's not helpful, and as I've said, some of it's gotten worse.

**Interviewer: When you think about second-wave feminism, some critics, or analysts of second-wave feminism, in the sixties through the eighties, have called, have said that it's overwhelmingly concerned with a bunch of housewives who didn't work, and had nothing better to do. Do you think this characterization accurately portrays...**

H. Alpern: No, that's just a mechanism to discredit [to prevent women from raising their issues]. And they probably don't know anyway, but certainly you're not going to say that a wage issue is a middle-class issue; most of the poor women, most people working not working because they're happy about working. They have poor jobs and those issues are addressed and the union women (we were working with union women) and one of the very big issues which I didn't mention was childcare. And we had activists and that — you probably spoke to Joan Israel, she was active in that. So, the childcare issue, that's certainly not a middle-class issue. It's everybody's issue, actually. All people really in this country, we don't have that adequate. Other issues? Well abortion is not a middle-class issue, and neither was the Equal Rights Amendment. Equal Rights Amendment affects everybody, and that's something that we worked very hard on, so that was a failure because there were two states left and that's generally the way ratifications go, I understand. It's always one or two states at the end, and that's what happened here, but that's not a middle-class issue because women can go to different states, still, in 2003, you can still go to a separate state and you may not own your property, that if you were a widow you might have a totally different set of problems that — we have pretty good laws in Michigan, not all states don't have.

**Interviewer:** **And, the women that you worked with, did they fit this profile of middle-class, bored women? Or were they...**

H. Alpern: Oh no, bored? No, God no. That would be the opposite. The women, well many of them, most of them were working. We were union women, and we had women who were activists. And they loved challenges. They certainly weren't. What they talk about the women, they think — well, women who don't do any work at all are not going to be activists.

**Interviewer:** **Who were some of the outstanding figures? Feminist figures that you worked with**

H. Alpern: Oh, in Michigan, we really had wonderful women. And we had Helen Milliken, and she's still active, and she's just wonderful. Olga Madar, who died since. Millie Jeffrey and, the other one I mentioned, Madar, Olga Madar, the unions. We worked with some wonderful Black women, and I would have gotten you the names, now I don't have them with me. I can call you with that. And, well, and all of these women, the ones you are interviewing, are extremely active.

**Interviewer:** **What do you think are the outstanding issues that the next generation of feminists will have to confront? The next generation of feminists...**

H. Alpern: Yes?

**Interviewer:** **What issues are they going to have to confront? Are they different or the same?**

H. Alpern: Unfortunately, some of them will be the same. One of them of course is going to be abortion. Unless they work very hard right now, they're going to find themselves without that. And the other one, I'm pretty sure they'll have to work on an Equal Rights Amendment — you really need a federal law to bind it, just like for voting. And voting only took place in 1921, which some people from other countries can't believe. In the United States that it was that late. And, they're going to be many many of the same issues, I think. They're certainly going to have to work and become more aware of the image of women and what it does to women, and that's really hard. And, as I say it hasn't gotten a lot better, in some senses it has, I think the radio, no, and the newspapers dialogues, the things they talk about, they are quite aware now about women wanting equality and not to be trivialized. But, as far as the images, the media is our most important culture, unfortunately. I think it is, maybe I'm making a too generalized statement, but I think that the media, it has to be because it's — we live in a consumer society, and so does, the world is going to be I think is going to be that. I think that's the stage of history we're in. And, when you have consumer society, the media is a tremendous influence, and I think frivolous.

**Interviewer:** What advice would you give to the next generation?

H. Alpern: Advice? Oh boy, well it's the same advice I think that people always have to continually give and that is to participate. If you live in a democracy, you have to participate in it or you can't have it. You've got to be active. You've got to be interested in politics up to the point that you know who you want to vote for and what major issues are going to be affecting you. I know people are busy, they live busy lives, and that's what they claim, but what's happening is we're — the political activism is disappearing, and you can't have a democracy, they taught me that in school. They said, "You can't have a democracy without informed and active citizens." And so, I guess, I believe that.

**Interviewer:** Harriet, those are all the questions that I have. Is there anything else you would like to add?

H. Alpern: I don't know. Well, I tried to give you what I thought was happening. I think I really covered it all; I don't want to go on too long about it, because you heard — there are lots of details, but that's not necessary. Well, another thing about for women today though, of course, it's a transitional period, and women now. It's true now we give them two roles. A lot of people resent that, they say that, and of course you blame whatever you can on women. That's another thing that women should be aware of, I think. Because, they say kids are evil and getting into drugs, because women aren't at home mothering them. And, you have to be careful to realize that whatever happens, you're available to be criticized. That's another thing. Otherwise, well, I certainly believe that women should be active because they are more understanding and more willing to promote citizen needs and address poverty, and disease, because, I think that, and I see it everywhere I read, that it's a major issue in the world. The rich apparently are getting richer and the poor poorer. This poverty, its just horrible, all over the world. So, I do think that women should address that. If you're going to do a mitzvah, or a blessing, I think that's a major thing is to care about people because we — and women are good at that. So, that's why my advice for the future is you really got to be aware of what's happening and the poverty and disease and that can consume all of us.

**Interviewer:** That's good.

H. Alpern: And the nuclear [threat]. I didn't put that in, that's one of the more important... Women should address the nuclear, the bomb and get rid of this country. They want to do more trials. They said they want the other nations to stop producing bombs, but my understanding is: how can you tell other nations to do something you're not doing? I'd like an answer to that one, somehow. I think women should be addressing those things.

**Interviewer:** I'm going to take a few still shots of you.

**H. Alpern:** You know what? Take a few still shots and just put those on and don't put, please don't use any of the rest of it.

[END]