INTERVIEW: Margot Duley
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey
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[TAPE 1]

Interviewer: **So I'm rolling again but if you need to stop at any time don't worry just let me know. The first set of questions have to do with just some basic biographical information. So if you could talk about where you were born and when and a little bit about your family circumstances.**

M. Duley: Well, I was born in 1944 and I was born in St. John's, Newfoundland when Newfoundland was still an independent country and I can remember the day, as I choose to put it, when Canada joined Newfoundland in 1949. My circumstances were, I was actually born in a fairly affluent family that had very much a history of public service. My father had been a World War I veteran and that very much colored his view of the world. He became a peace activist. He was a much-decorated war hero. He had been wounded five times during the horror of World War. He dedicated himself to public service of various kinds. My mother was also had a strong social outlook. She was the treasurer of what was then called the Retarded Children's Association, and the head of the advisory board of the Victorian Order of Nurses. I had an aunt who very much influenced me, who was the first internationally known novelist in Newfoundland. Her name was Margaret Duley. So, I was born into fairly comfortable circumstances, but one event marked me and my family and that was my father died when I was eight years old. So we went from a very comfortable existence to a mother struggling to support us financially. My father's illness had been long and expensive and so despite the fact that I had some considerable privilege as a young girl I also knew what it was like to live potentially on the margins and always felt a strong sympathy for those whom circumstances have brought low, so that affected me a great deal.

Interviewer: **And what type of education did you get?**

M. Duley: I was fortunate in my education. I went to an all-girls school. It was a school that was sponsored by the Church of England or the Episcopal Church or however you want to term it. It was a marvelous education. The teachers were extremely well educated. The first principal that I remember, Miss Cherrington, had been a suffragist and she had a very strong belief, as did the other teachers — that girls should achieve as much as they could, and this was an education in the 1950s. It was years before its time. It had a kind of perhaps schizophrenic message. It was a school that stressed good manners and deportment. One hand stressed very traditional values and female values and the other hand told us to go out and reform the world and do everything that we could, and if you looked

at my classmates, I'm not at all unusual in terms of social involvement or having gone on to a considerable degree of higher education.

Interviewer: **And you mentioned the school was affiliated with the Anglican Church…**

M. Duley: Yes, that's correct.

Interviewer: **Did your family have any religious affiliation?**

M. Duley: Yes, I went to an Anglican school. My family actually was Congregational or Presbyterian in their own beliefs and a kind of general, I guess, Protestant influence was part of my upbringing. The form of Christianity as I experienced was very social reform orientated, very much had a belief in the equality of all human beings, and quite progressive in its outlook. It had a very compassionate view towards the rest of the world rather than a highly judgmental or condemnatory view. So that helped to inform me, my belief system too.

Interviewer: **So it seems that all these influences steered you towards feminist activism?**

M. Duley: Yes, I think it was almost predestined. What I haven't mentioned is that my grandmother was involved in a form of feminism in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, Tryphena Duley. Though I didn't know her, she died before I was born. But she was still kind of a presence, a family presence in many ways. She had been very active in the Women's Christian Temperance Movement, a belief that has not lingered with me I might add. But she represented Newfoundland in an international convention in Edinburgh in 1902 and then my aunt, the same aunt that was a novelist, Margaret Duley, as a young girl was involved in the suffragist movement as well. So, as I say, it's almost predetermined that I turned out the way I did.

Interviewer: **And did you grow up with family stories being told about these strong, active women?**

M. Duley: To a limited extent, but in some ways I discovered their stories. I ended up, this is a long way from my involvements in Michigan, I'm a historian by training, professional historian, I wrote a book about the Newfoundland's suffrage movement and in the course of doing the research I found out a great deal about my own ancestors that I hadn't even realized as a child, and of other women that I remember as very elderly ladies when I was growing up. But in general a kind of social activism and giving back to society were part of the family message and the religious message and the school message that I grew up with in Newfoundland.

Interviewer: **Did you have brothers and sisters?**

M. Duley: No, I'm an only child.

Interviewer: **And in your later years what type of education did you get?**

M. Duley: Again I was very fortunate, I got a bachelors degree at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and then from there I went on to Duke University and got a degree in British Imperial and South Asian history, and from there I went on to the school of Oriental and African Studies in London and did a Ph.D. in South Asian studies and history. So, it was join education and see the world rather than join the navy.

Interviewer: **Was it expected that you would go on to get this higher degree?**

M. Duley: Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer: **Okay. And then maybe you could talk a little bit about, what happened? What happened after school, and did you get married or have a significant other? Did you have children?**

M. Duley: I got married part way through graduate school. I didn't have children. I went off on a career route initially and then my husband and I divorced, so that obviously ruled out a traditional conventional way. If the underlying purpose of your question is what drew me into the feminist movement and all of this — what happened there— it really began in terms of a personal involvement, commitment, rather than this theoretical thing that happened to my aunt and my grandmother.

When I was in England, and I can remember the moment to this day, I had come from the British Museum where I was doing research with another student from North America, her name was Diane Malpas. She was from the United States, I think from Texas, and it was quite late in the evening and we went to a restaurant, a Wimpy Burger place in Southhampton Row in London. It was about 9:30 at night and it was the only place open to eat and both of us had missed dinner so we were absolutely starving wanting to eat and so we went into the Wimpy Bar, ordered a hamburger and the young waiter informed us he couldn't serve us. And first of all we thought he was joking. So we carried on and ordered again. But he said, "No, I'm quite serious, I can't serve you." "Well, why on Earth can't you?" and he said, "Because you're unaccompanied women," and we said, "What do you mean? There are two of us for a start." and he said, "No you don't have a man with you. And by company rules I can't serve you." And trying to be helpful he pointed to his nephew who was sitting in the same restaurant who was about fifteen years old and said if you will move to this gentlemen's table I will be able to serve you. Well, even in this is pre-rise of modern feminism or second wave feminism we thought there was something deeply wrong with this scene. So, we weren't prepared to sit with a fifteen year old and he was quite embarrassed about the rule to his credit, so we reached a negotiated settlement where he served us the

hamburger but we'd have to eat it outside. So, Diane and I sat on the curb of Southhampton Row and both being historians we looked at each other and said, "Didn't Mrs. Pankhurst and the right to vote take care of this?" And clearly it hadn't. So we decided we simply were not going to let it rest, and to make a long story short — we researched why the company had the policy, and they were reflecting a British Law, the 1832 Wine Licensing and Victualers Act, which decreed amongst other things that — see if I can remember the exact phrase — "Gamblers and murderers and women of ill repute" could not be served in a restaurant, disturbing the respectable clearly, or the restaurant itself would be held liable." So, the assumption that the Wimpy Burger company—it was the Empire Holding Company, as we found out eventually, that owned it—was making is as unaccompanied woman we were suspect to falling into one of these categories. So, Diane and I wrote an outraged letter to the chairman of the Empire Holding Company and asked him what category he felt we fell into, and so then he replied back with some apology, and said he couldn't help it, it was a law.

And again to shorten the story, we then organized all the young women in our international residence hall, we had women from all over the world — Singapore, Malaysia, Sarawak, Nigeria, Canada, the United States, et cetera — go out across London to see how generalized this pattern was and the irony was the more respectable the neighborhood you were in the more unlikely you were to be served. You could go into the red light district in Soho and get served easily. So, at this point, I actually was going back to North America and Diane held on to the cause. A newly formed group had just come into existence, I think it was called the Waldour Street Collective, it was the first hint of the modern women's movement in Britain and she contacted the group and said, "This is the perfect symbolic issue to organize around because it is just so outrageous," and they agreed, and by this time, I was back in North America, but they sent me clippings., they dressed up some women as quote-unquote "nuns" and sent them back into the same Wimpy Bar and made sure they got press coverage. And the photo I got mailed back to me in North America was a quote-unquote "nun" being carried literally underneath a policeman's arm out of the restaurant because she stayed in there refusing to leave until she was served. So that was the click moment for me that all was not well in the world, and that perhaps I had some responsibility to try and change it. And then I arrived back in North America to a teaching position in Ohio where the women's movement was fairly well underway in this country, in fact I learned a great deal from my students in my first job at Hiram College and so that was how gradually I got involved in organizations more formally.

Interviewer: **And so you were able to hold your teaching position as well as become more and more active in the feminist movement?**

M. Duley: I was very fortunate at Hiram. I began to teach a course in women's history. I was part of the scholars that really helped to mold the field. There was virtually

nothing in it at the point that I began to teach and then I was lucky enough to get a job at the University of Michigan, an administrative job, initially with the Pilot Program which was a residential program for first and second year students, and then eventually as associate director of the honors program of LSA and in both instances I was able to put together something of a scholarly career and an activist career in Ann Arbor—of course by the time I moved here, which was oh probably 1975, it was a hotbed of activism and questioning. So, it was a very exciting time to arrive in Michigan.

Interviewer: **Before the Wimpy Burger event, would you have called yourself a feminist?**

M. Duley: Oh heavens no. I'm not sure I even knew the name. I knew the name suffragist or suffragette as they were called somewhat disparagingly.

Interviewer: **But your history was geared toward women's history?**

M. Duley: No, it wasn't no.

Interviewer: **Not till after?**

M. Duley: No, I went through graduate school initially in British History and then British Imperial and then South Asian without ever, I think, even reading, this may be a bit of an exaggeration, I was going to say a paragraph about women's history. I probably did read a paragraph and it would have been about the suffrage movement but nothing else. Nothing that analyzed the changes in women's status over time or any broader issues that faced women.

Interviewer: **So coming back to the North America you were a changed woman?**

M. Duley: To use the old phrase of the 60's, my consciousness had been raised by eating my hamburger on the curb, yes.

Interviewer: **Could you talk about the organizational roles that you played between 1965 and '85?**

M. Duley: Yeah, they really began in the '70s here in Michigan. In terms of a scholarly life, I chaired a task force of a NEH project that the Women's Studies Program at the University of Michigan had on global and international women's issues, and that eventually resulted in my first book, which was the *Cross Cultural Study of Women*. But in terms of political involvements, they began with the Ann Arbor NOW chapter, National Organization for Women Chapter, and initially I got involved in the Equal Rights Amendment campaign. I think because I was amazed at some of the arguments against it I heard from the extreme right. And I knew as a historian that this was a very inaccurate perception. They were predicting the decline and fall of the west if the Equal

Rights Amendment went through, which said simply that "equality of rights under the law should not be denied or abridged on account of sex." But this was misconstrued in all sorts of ways— leading to single sex bathrooms and, oh, just the most ridiculous charges. So initially I got involved giving history lectures on the evolution on the Equal Rights Amendment, which began in the 1920's under Alice Paul, and then eventually I realized simply talking about it and giving the historical context, if I was committed to the notion of equality for women that I needed to get involved politically.

So, I became involved in the ERA taskforce in Ann Arbor NOW, and then in 1978 I was asked to be the ERA taskforce chair of the state, then that lead in 1981 to my being asked to run for president of the organization. I was president from '81-'83, and after that I was administrator of the political action committee of Michigan NOW for a couple of years and a member. Then I left Michigan in 1986, I guess it was, and took a position as director of Women's Studies at Denison University, so my involvement in Michigan politics was really from '75-'85.

Interviewer: **What strategies did you use, say for example if we are talking about the ERA taskforce, tell me a little bit more about what you did and what strategies you used to get your message across and to achieve your goals?**

M. Duley: It may be easier to frame my answer in terms of both the ERA task force and being president of Michigan NOW because they were kind of part of a piece. What I and others tried to do was build up a broad based coalition of progressive forces in Michigan. Whether it was on the ERA or in terms of a myriad of other issues that we were working on, it was clear to me by the mid 70s that we were facing the rise of what is now known as the new right, and that it was impossible to argue for women's issues, and in fact inaccurate, as a separate issue. It was part of a large tidal wave of basic demands for human equality. And that involved issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, issues of poverty and wealth and there were global connections involved in this as well.

So what I tried to do, and others as well, is put together as broad- based a coalition as we could. Our organizing strategy, first of all, was to go out and talk to as many groups of like-minded as we could find across to the state. So it involved talking to progressive church groups, it involved talking to labor organizations, it involved talking to groups that were concerned at the deterioration of — I guess deterioration would be the notion — of the principle of separation of church and state—there was a group called Voice of Reason that was very concerned about that—the ACLU, United Auto Workers Women's Department, NAACP, traditional women's groups such as — or more traditional groups than the National Organization for Women— business and professional women's groups, League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, Welfare rights organizations. It just followed the spectrum of people who were concerned with the state of society and wanting

to change it for the better in some way, on the kind of middle to left part of the spectrum.

So we tried to put together a coalition. We pledged to try to lobby on each other's issues when there was a commonality and to educate each other about each other's issues. And the specifics of the ERA, some of the techniques that we developed there, we then carried off, transferred to other issues. This is kind of pre-computer technology, or it was pre-technology that we could afford, let's put it that way. We organized telephone alerts, where people spun out and phoned other people to generate letters or e-mails, that's a fairly obvious organizing technique. Perhaps more innovative for the time, we got people to sign permission cards, with the general contours of an argument, and sign them on a wide variety of issues, initially the ERA, but then subsequently, permission cards to have letters, phone calls, telegrams generated over issues of welfare reform, civil rights, abortion rights, educational rights. I think we had about twelve different cards, and then whenever we needed to lobby on a given issue, we would try to flood mail into legislatures. We organized delegations to lobby people, Michigan NOW, at the state level, had hired a wonderful lobbyist, Sue Wagner, who would alert us to legislation that was coming down the pike in Lansing. And, we would help in support of her lobbying activities at the state level, and she was lobbying on virtually anything that had to do with women's issues. At the national level, we also could flood mail upon request into any state of the union where there was lobbying for the ERA going on, or targeted mails to, let's say the Senate Judiciary Committee, or somebody in Washington who needed to be lobbied, or a state Governor, or the President. We also organized a large number of rallies; I can't begin to tell you the number of rallies we organized, even in those five years.

As you may know, one of the un-ratified states in the Equal Rights Amendment campaign, and we came so close to getting that through, we only needed three more to get it, the Amendment passed— but one of the key un-ratified states was Illinois, and, of course, we're next door. So, Michigan, as a ratified state, because we had passed in the initial stages of the campaign, actually years before I was involved, because we were ratified, we had a special responsibility to try to help out activists in Illinois. Some of the larger demonstrations that I can remember helping to organize was a march in Chicago, it was probably about 1980, in which we got, literally, thousands of women from Michigan to go to Chicago. And then, we organized, or helped to organize some of the lobbying of some of their own legislatures by sending in field organizers. I myself went there for a summer and helped to organize one of the suburbs of Chicago, Chicago Heights, and, so we did backup, in support of others on the ERA campaign.

Interviewer: **A lot of the women… excuse me, seem to have chosen. A lot of the women I've interviewed thus far seem to have chosen a specific issue to dedicate their energies to. And, maybe make more of a difference locally as opposed**

to align themselves nationally, to towards more broad-based agendas. Can you talk about why this was important to you, to be more active on a more national level and go beyond Michigan, and then, just in general, why these specific issues were important to you.

M. Duley: Yeah. Michigan NOW was active, not just myself, I don't want to personalize it too much, at both a statewide level and national level. It probably has to do both with my own personal view of feminism as part of a broader current, as I said earlier, but also it's a function of the fact that I was heading a statewide organization that was speaking for women's rights. And so, obviously, the ERA campaign was very important, both because of the legal ramifications it carried with it, but also at a symbolic level, it had become a kind of litmus test of the legitimacy of women's demands in general. I think its importance went beyond some of the particular legal reforms that it was speaking to. But, also, if one is a head of a statewide women's rights organization, there are so many issues that impact on women's lives, and one has to be attentive to the different interests based on class or race or sexual orientation, one was duty-bound to have a kind of comprehensive view of feminism, so that's why both I, personally, and the state worked on so many issues.

And, I think, one of the things, to me, that was fascinating about being president of Michigan NOW, especially as I read with some puzzlement, the descriptions of some of second-wave feminism, which was, you know, supposedly, was narrowly focused on a couple of issues, is that, in fact, we dealt with practically everything. It was exhausting, if I might say so. As I was looking at some of the state NOW newsletters, before coming to this interview, Sarah, I happened upon one, it was just one month, and it was an edition in which I had done some updates on what we were working on in that one month in Lansing, it was February 1981, I think it was. Here's what our lobbyist was working on: reform of insurance laws to make sure that mastectomies were paid for. You know, can you imagine having to argue for that, prostheses for mastectomies. Can you imagine having to argue that that was a legitimate, you know, right under medical insurance. That was one issue. Another issue that we were working on was reform of sexual assault laws, and the third issue was minority and women set-asides in state contracts. Now, that was just one month of one year. And, at the same time, we were working on the ERA campaign at a national level, and preservation of abortion rights, which were the two things that NOW was usually identified with. In another month, I think it was the next month; we were working on an outrageous reform of general assistance, in which a state legislator, Thaddeus Stopchynski, I can remember his name, even twenty years later, was basically trying to drive people off general assistance, I mean, people who even were mentally handicapped and physically handicapped, and one of the rules was that, if you had more than $5,000 worth of property, you were no longer going to be eligible for general assistance. So we got a NOW member, who was on general assistance, who was now about to become ineligible under the new legislation, whose property was a family

burial plot, and did a little lobbying campaign over that. So, that gives you an example of kind of the range of things that one was duty-bound to do.

Interviewer: **You mentioned the feminist movement being concurrent with the gay rights movement, the civil rights movement. Could you talk about that a little bit, did you think that any movement could have existed without the other?**

M. Duley: No. I don't. I think the woman's movement is hugely indebted to the black civil rights movement; in fact, many NOW activists were involved in the campaigns in the sixties. Edie Van Horn would be a wonderful example of that, and there were others. And, the gay rights movement, of course, came later, but at the Michigan level, again I'm astounded at some accounts that I read of supposed homophobia in NOW. It was not my experience as, say, president. The thing I should tell you personally, is that after my divorce, I fell in love with a woman. So, I can speak from personal experience that I experienced nothing but a supportive atmosphere within NOW and within this state. But, to get back to the central point of your question, the interrelationships between NOW and the lesbian and gay rights movement, it started a little later than the campaigns that I'm describing in this state, and we lent some organizational assistance and some speakers, and also, this was during my presidency, Michigan NOW was, I think, the first organization in the state to hold a conference on women's sexuality, which dealt with issues of sexual preference, but it dealt with many other issues as well. And it was an effort, in a way, to kind of mainstream an issue that was sensitive out in the community, and to make NOW activists comfortable, who were straight, in, in kind of discussing the issue and dealing with it, even advocating. And, I think we made quite a bit of headway in that respect. We had a lesbian rights task force very early on. Some of the, as I would see it, bad press that NOW got, it's possible that there were deep splits in other states, I didn't experience it from '75 on in this state, and I'm afraid that perhaps some of the statements that Betty Friedan, one of the founding mothers at the national level made about lesbian rights, which were quite hostile, were assumed to be the, the kind of, philosophical position of others, when they weren't necessarily.

Interviewer: **So, you, find much of it is to the contrary of these…**

M. Duley: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, that was my experience. I don't want to deny other people's realities, but that was, I simply didn't experience the National Organization for Women that way.

Interviewer: **And, what about the assessment that the majority of the NOW members were bored housewives, middle class. Does that accurately portray the women that you worked…**

M. Duley: Bored? No. Housewives? Yes, there were a fair assortment of housewives in

NOW. It reflected the national demographic, I think, and middle class, probably disproportionately. I don't know frankly, as an historian, of any social movement in which leadership positions don't tend to get assumed by those with the time and money to do it. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are narrowly focused, or, you know, totally insensitive to other peoples' life circumstances. So, yes, it was probably more middle class, it was more white than it was women of color, but at the same time, I can cite many instances of leaders in NOW that don't fit that profile. There, again, were recalling the time at which I was president, the president of the Lansing chapter of NOW was somebody whose burning issue was welfare rights reform. She was a welfare mother, who was facing another absurd change in welfare rights rules in which you couldn't pursue an education beyond K through 12 if you received welfare. I mean, what a, you know, a set of barbed wire to put somebody through, or surround somebody with when they're trying to get a decent paying job. And so, that chapter had an intense interest, as did its leader, in that issue. A chapter under my presidency that began in Saginaw was begun by women who were members of the Boilermakers Union; they were the first women working in blue-collar jobs on the shop floor in a factory in Saginaw. So, it's such a distortion to see it simply as a kind of white, middle-class movement. Now, heaven knows, we may have made our errors, but it's just an oversimplification to see it that way.

Interviewer: **What sorts of efforts did NOW make to recruit women of color, women, lesbian women, and so on and so forth. Were there active efforts made?**

M. Duley: Yes, there were. It wasn't always possible to bridge the gaps of perception, but certainly many of us sought out speaking engagements with other organizations, tried to meet with other leaders of other organizations, and that was part and parcel of our coalition-building. Sometimes we were successful, sometimes we weren't. I think we were particularly unsuccessful, though from my perspective it was not from lack of trying, in trying to get relationships with trust, a kind of honest dialogue, between African-American women and white women. It — in some ways maybe this sounds like letting white women off the hook — but I think it was part of the temperament of the times as well, that African-Americans were so rightly frustrated and, you know, suspicious of white liberals for all of their failures, failures of commitment, you know, historical failures. We were facing the entire history of race relations in the United States, in some ways, and trying to build up these dialogues, so they didn't always succeed. There were, however, wonderful African American feminists who worked within NOW, and whom we worked in coalition with, especially in the Detroit area.

Interviewer: **Did you want to, talk any more about your organizational roles?**

M. Duley: Yeah, I guess, one thing, aside from the kind of issue-driven lobbying that we did…NOW at this same period formed a political action committee, Carol

King, Barbara Miyata, Sue Wagner, I'm sure I'm forgetting some others who were key, as well as myself, were involved in setting up the first state NOW political action committee. And we were quite successful in raising funds for it, and intervening in political campaigns to get more friendly forces in Lansing. And, we also did a fair amount of organizing in some key races; Mary Brown was a state legislator and we put a lot of effort into one of her state races, in fact, as I recall we gave to one of her re-election campaigns against great odds. She had been targeted by the Chamber of Commerce for her stance on Affirmative Action, and, I think insurance reform. And it was seen as a hopeless race, and we went back to the absolute, grassroots, old-fashioned way of organizing, of having NOW women and others go door-to-door, saying "This is a woman, worthy, whose seat is worth saving" and, she won. And it was just force of numbers and organizing that outstripped some very slick, negative campaigning, advertising in her district. We also, I'm happy to say, unseated Thaddeus Stopchynski and got a much more, shall we say, humane legislator in power. And the NOW PAC continues to this day.

The other thing, I guess I would say about my time as president, and as ERA chair, as a whole, was the amazing proliferation, I think kind of grassroots feminism, that occurred in Michigan at the time. The state organization, over about a decade, went from a handful of chapters to 28 chapters that reached all over this state. I mentioned Saginaw. There was a chapter in the UP, there was a chapter that began in Caro, in the thumb. I mean you don't exactly think of this as a hotbed of feminist activism, but there were chapters popping up all around the state, and what was fascinating to me, and it actually gives me some pause, if I was going to reflect on what we should have learnt from this era, and what we might have done better, what was fascinating was to see the number and diversity of issues that drew women into the women's movement. Saginaw: discrimination on the shop floor; Three Rivers, I think was a group of teachers and librarians who had gotten targeted by the new right to remove books from the local libraries, like *Our Bodies, Our Selves*. And so they formed the nucleus, organizing there; and Kalamazoo, I think it was women who were more professionally oriented, who were a little frustrated with some of the existing women's groups in town and they didn't think they were activist enough. And, if I have one regret as state president, and one reflection about what we might have done better, I think we needed to have put a lot more money in grassroots organizing and, less perhaps, into national organizing. Although that's a very hard call, I'd be the first to admit, but I think it's at least worth debating.

But at the national level you had these huge abortion rights, and ERA issues, that were being regarded symbolically — we were being targeted with millions of dollars by our opponents. But at the same time, you had heartfelt, grassroots issues at the state that needed more funds. And the lobbying that I've been describing to you, including paying our professional lobbyist, our state organization's total funds at their height, were something like, oh $40-$50,000,

and here we're running a statewide organization. Now, you ask me, you know, were there middle class leaders? Yes, who else could afford to do it? I don't think there was a NOW activist in this state who didn't pour her own money into this, and that was just kind of the reality. But, I do wonder about the kind of relative balance of how we organized things.

Interviewer: **What do you think were your personal achievements in being a member of the feminist movement?**

M. Duley: Oh, goodness. I think they're so, I think it was a collective achievement; I don't think it was personal, per se. I think I was very lucky to be elected president of a wonderful organization at, kind of, the height of its activism, and so it's very hard for me to disengage personal achievements from the organizational ones. I guess, if I were to claim anything as an achievement, it would be trying to carry through the notion of a coalition, and, perhaps, as well, I'm not sure this was an achievement, so much as I think I was a little prescient — I really think I saw quite clearly the rise of the new right before many others, and began to speak about what we were facing collectively as a progressive movement. And that we had to become better organized, cannier, that we had to address some of the underlying fears and even hysterical arguments that the new right was whipping up against a fairly fundamental notion of human equality. And, as I go back and look at some of my speeches, I'm a little despondent, because so much came to pass, a kind of tidal wave in the opposite direction that we're living through, of a backlash to the notion of human equality and equal opportunity. And I do wonder if we'd all been a little savvier in seeing this tidal wave developing, whether we could have counteracted it, or whether it's just inevitable that history goes through these cycles. The time for a greater advance in human equality is yet to come, again.

Interviewer: **We can only hope. Margot, were there other causes that you worked on that were not women's issues?**

M. Duley: Well, yes, 'cause I see women's issues as a part of this broader issue, but in terms of, you know, time and space and letter writing and organizing, et cetera, I have been involved, for a long time, with peace issues, doubtless partly an outcome of my own father's searing experiences about the uselessness of war in World War I. You know, where six million people were killed in the trenches, and he went through some of the worst battles. He fought in a regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, in which, on July 1, 1916, 728 went over the top, as it was called, on the western front, and about 28 were standing, including my father, at the end of it. So, it's no, you know, surprise that I'm a peace activist. At the end of it I just think that wars are insane and solve nothing. So I've been very involved in peace issues, very concerned about global issues, because of my interest in the third world. Between our over-consuming society and our — the richness of what we live in — and the utter destitution of so many in the rest of the world, and I've traveled in South Asia

and seen it for myself. So, I've been always interested in globalization issues and the downside of globalization. Because of where I'm coming from personally, I've worked on lesbian and gay rights issues. I also have a personal commitment to anti-racism, and have worked on those issues, so I've kind of done a fair amount on a fair number of causes.

Interviewer: **Did you have fun?**

M. Duley: Absolutely. Yeah, it might be easy to think that one gets gloomy working on so many heartbreaking issues, but really, the reason I had fun was not because the issues aren't serious and heartbreaking, but the caliber of women and men that I worked with and met were just so extraordinary and so inspirational. And so many of them had wacky senses of humor. It was just fabulous, and sometimes, one landed in ridiculous situations too that you can only kind laugh at.

Well, here's one instance of fun in difficult circumstances: we were, my friend Carol King, who was the previous president of the National Organization for Women in Michigan, who was also very involved in pro-choice activities in the state, was asked to be a guest on a radio call-in show, and the particular radio station which has a Detroit-wide audience was known to be hostile to feminist issues, so, they were always setting us up in some way, and this was the latest set-up. I was to phone Carol to ask her to be a speaker at the last minute, whereas the opponents had, you know, weeks to prepare. And, in these call-in shows, it's no accident. Both sides try to organize speakers to phone in with, you know, supportive questions. Well, Carol didn't want to pass up the opportunity to speak because, if she did, we knew what was going to be said: The National Organization of Women refused to come. We knew we were set-up. So poor Carol phones me practically on the way to the radio station, saying, "Margot, I've got to go to this thing, but you're going to have to organize people to phone in." And I had like a half hour's notice to do it, so I frantically phone every friend I could, and no one was home. So, there's me and Carol, so, what I had to do, fortunately I think I did find one friend at home who was able to network up, so I only had to keep this up for about fifteen or twenty minutes, but I had to phone in to the radio show under a variety of names, and assumed voices to ask her these powder-puff questions, but unfortunately she recognized my voice, even in disguise, so she was beginning to laugh at the most inappropriate time, as was I phoning in. So, it was one of the more hilarious moments in my organizing.

Interviewer: **A lot of women that I've interviewed for this project, have mentioned that they think that Michigan women have more humor, or approached the feminist movement with more humor…**

M. Duley: Well, I'd love to believe that they are. There really were any number of hysterical moments. Carol King, being in the center of them. And my recollection another time was of a pro-choice rally, in which we were trying to

dramatize the fact that if we went back to the old, you know, illegal abortion days that real women were going to die because they would go to unlicensed providers, so we had arranged for Carol to be the corpse in a coffin, which was then carried into a, I think it was, it was one of the, was it Kennedy Square? It was somewhere in Detroit. But, unfortunately, one of the neo-Nazi groups got wind of the rally and made a rush in a phalanx towards the coffin. And so, poor Carol realized this, so suddenly you saw the corpse sitting up in the coffin, which rather ruined the effect that we were trying to achieve for the TV cameras.

Interviewer: **That's funny. I haven't interviewed Carol King yet, I wish I could.**

M. Duley: She's out in California now, and we've got to get her on tape. You should, she's just the most fantastic activist who could have also been a stand-up comedian if she had wanted to be.

Interviewer: **The next set of questions has to do with reflections upon second-wave feminism. And, the first question is: what is your definition of feminism and has it changed throughout the years?**

M. Duley: I think I'm beginning to sound a bit like a broken record. I really do see feminism as part of a much broader movement towards human rights that began two-and-a-half centuries ago. Trust an historian to come up with such an ancient definition.

Interviewer: **Continuity…**

M. Duley: Right, continuity. And I don't think my view of feminism has really changed that much over time. I see it as a movement towards human equality that is not just formal, legal rights, but also has to do with equality of opportunity, has to do with lessening disparities between rich and poor, that stops stereotyping people by reason of any circumstance by which they're born, over which they have no control: gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, you know, kind of, you name it. And, I see the prejudices against women as ancient prejudices. Perhaps one of the first forms of discrimination in human history, arguably, is gender stratification. So, I don't delude myself as to the forces of culture that we're up against in trying to redefine women's roles. But I do ultimately see it as part of a broader demand that all people be treated fairly, and it sounds so simple, but it's so complex. It's so difficult to get people to break beyond the barriers of their own pain to see that other people are similarly situated. But we have to just keep working upon it as a human race; and I think, if anything, the issues have grown more serious, partly because of growing disparities of poverty, both within our own country and globally.

Interviewer: **Let's talk a little bit about activism. Why do you think that activism, and the type of activism that you did was the way to go.? Were there other**

options to create change and reform, and this is also thinking about today and sort of the apathy, or lack of activism that seems to exist?

M. Duley: Well, I think any social reform movement has to carry forward at two levels. One is at the level of the public arena, but ultimately, the issues have to be addressed in people's day-to-day lives and interactions with each other. And it's a kind of dialogic process that, there are times huge bursts of human progress and activity and creativity, and I think that's because issues assume a public stage, but ultimately the momentum for the movement and its sustenance draw from individual lives, and individual choices. So, yes, there were other forms of activism, there were women with much less public roles than myself who simply, you know, walked the walk. They went out and did things, they were the first on the shop floor, they were the first this's and they were the first that's, they brought up their sons and daughters differently, they went home and had discussions with their husbands, and there were many supportive men as well in the movement, including in Lansing and including in the state legislature. Doug Ross, I remember, is somebody who helped train us in how to lobby, and it came out of a personal commitment, and I'm not sure there was even, you know, many political brownie points for him to win when he began doing this. So, yeah, individual commitments.

Interviewer: Do you think that the press accurately portrayed the feminist movement?

M. Duley: Oh, heavens no. It was just astonishing to see how the mainstream press portrayed the women's movement. Whether it was kind of subliminal, I hope I'm not fingering the wrong network, maybe I shouldn't mention it because I could be inaccurate, but I remember there was one network who, every time they talked about the equal rights amendment campaign, it was a national network, and as their logo they would put up a clenched red fist. Now think about the subliminals in that. Again, it was extremely common, and it is just not the experience of the women's movement, it's the experience of the Black civil rights movement, the LGBT movement. I mean anyone who's asking for reform. Those who are, you know, campaigning against the World Trade Organization today, are receiving the same treatment. That is, when they show a rally, to look at the most disheveled person or the person who's acting out most. Now the excuse, and I really do see it as an excuse, that the media give you is that they need some interesting visuals, but there are other interesting visuals that one can get rather than simply reinforcing perceptions of marginality and people generally out of control. So, no, I don't think the media were fair, the other…

Interviewer: Can I stop you right there to change batteries?

M. Duley: Sure.

[TAPE 2]

Interviewer: **Okay, so you were talking about the press betrayal of the feminist movement…**

M. Duley: Right.

Interviewer: **And do you have anything more to say about that?**

M. Duley: Yeah, I guess one concrete instance of this, was after the ERA rally in Chicago that I mentioned some minutes ago, where Michigan NOW had played a central role in getting some people there. It was a huge rally, it had over 100,000 people at it, and I can say that with perfect assurance because I was one of the people who were assigned to count the numbers. And it was very easy to count them because everyone was lined up, as I recall, in rows of 25. And we stood at a certain point in Michigan Avenue and watched the rows go by. It was so huge a rally that those in the rear actually got frustrated and began to take short cuts, broke rank and went to where the speakers were because they wanted to get a decent seat. Well, we counted ourselves 100,000, and then we put in a modest number for those who broke, in fact, we probably under-counted.

Subsequently a student of mine wrote a paper on that rally and followed the press coverage of it, and what was absolutely fascinating was to see the ideological bent of the paper and the numbers that they put at the rally, and it ranged all the way from the numbers that we had announced, which I am convinced were accurate, to having them in a case of a paper in Alabama saying there were 7,000 people at it. And it can't be explained by press times because we even checked that out to see when stories were filed and printed, so it had nothing to do but the kind of ideological proclivity of the newspaper and, I think, the newspaper coverage of progressive movements in general has only gotten worse, that the degree of media concentration has gotten worse over time.

In the 80's, at least, you could rely on some local newspapers giving you a break, and I think there was perhaps even more independence of individual reporters on national networks. But, I kind of despair at how many news organizations are now operating, making purely commercial decisions, at times shaping the news to peoples' existing prejudices because they don't want to, in sense, break set and upset people; and there are less well-educated reporters or anchor people who don't have a background in the issues that they're reporting on. And, I think, the only counteraction is that those who believe in social change go back to the notion of establishing our own media, use the internet more creatively to link with each other, because, frankly, we're not going to be accurately portrayed, as a generality, in the press. So we have to build up alternate structures of getting the word out.

Interviewer: **Margot, thinking broadly about the feminist movement, what do you see**

were the main achievements and is there anything that you would consider a failure of the feminist movement?

M. Duley: I think the achievement was that, for a period in time, we got women's issues fore grounded politically, and a whole bunch of things followed: formal legislative change, Title IX, which affected education, funding for domestic violence shelters, changes in laws. Some of the laws changed were minor, others much more profound A minor one in Michigan would be that before the feminist movement broke on the state, you couldn't get a family fishing license if you, unless you were a husband or a man. I mean, it's just absurd. And then there were many more you know more serious issues, shall we say, than being able to fish, equal rights to fish, like basic education and health and jobs and such things. But, we did manage to galvanize public attention towards the status of women; for a time and a whole bunch of things flowed, both in the public sphere and in the private sphere of how people live their own lives. Our failure was a failure to keep the momentum going. I often wonder if we could have kept it up longer for a greater period of time had we reflected more on what we were doing wrong when the ERA went down to defeat. If we'd had a serious soul searching about how to retool, how to reframe our message, could we have continued the momentum? It's a great unknowable, one can only speculate, or maybe it was just one of these great yin and yang's of history, where you just let the counter forces, the backlash, backwash for a time and then you carry forward. But I do often think about that.

Interviewer: **There's a question in here about if you wanted to talk about the outstanding figures that you met during your activism, and who you learned from the most.**

M. Duley: Gosh, I met so many interesting people, it's just the great gift of my life working with the women's movement. Let me begin historically. I met, through my organizing, a woman who had been treasurer of Alice Paul's National Women's Party, Olive Hurlbert was her name. So, I kind of connected with some of the historical movements of the past, on whose shoulders we stand. In another instance, I met a woman who had been active in the suffrage campaign who had met Susan B. Anthony — if you can imagine that. In fact, if you want another funny moment, I was giving a speech at Midland and a very elderly woman was wheeled into the audience and then afterwards, they brought me up to meet her, and identified her as somebody who met Susan B. Anthony.. She said to me, the most astounding thing, she said, "My dear, I liked your speech, and I don't wish to insult you, but I have to say you're not as interesting a speaker as Susan B. Anthony." I was flabbergasting, even to be mentioned in the same sentence. And so, I asked her how on earth she had met Susan B. Anthony, and if you're talking about, you know, our mistakes, here's perhaps one of them. She said that she had met Susan B. Anthony when she was about eight years old in what must have been one of her last organizing tours, even though Susan B. Anthony lived until 1902, '3, '4, I've forgotten. And she had

met her because whenever Susan B. Anthony went into a town, she insisted on meeting young women and girls, and having a separate meeting with them. And this had made an indelible impression on this young girl's, now elderly lady's life, and she had gone on in her own way with having a marginal affiliation with the suffrage movement, and later taking a stand in Georgia against the notion of married women no longer being able to teach. That had become her issue because she'd married and they wanted to remove her from the classroom, so she went on and tried to reform the law in Georgia on that — she was now living in Michigan.

But our failure to pay more attention to the transition of generations, I think, was another failure. But that's a sidebar to what I am recalling under the guise of the question of outstanding women. She was one of them. I guess another event that kind of stands out in my mind, 'cause I met literally dozens of nationally prominent women, and it was a gift to know them, but one event that stands out in my mind, and it was very early on in my years of activism, I don't think I was even ERA task force chair.

I was in Washington on a lobbying day, at a rally, and they asked people to stay behind to lobby legislatures, legislators, on Monday. I was one of the Michigan people who stayed behind. I was asked to join a delegation of Helen Milliken, the wife of the Governor, and also head of E.R America, and Betty Friedan and Bella Abzug, to lobby some Michigan legislators. I was an absolute nobody, and here I was with these three women, and I was kind of their Michigan constituent. And, my chief role was to shut up and to say only that I'm from Michigan, and I care about this issue. And I got to watch them lobby and it was a blinding revelation to me, especially coming out of an academic background, because one's natural inclination is to argue the logical case, and if you hear some absolute nonsense being talked, about you know, in this case, the legal ramifications for the ERA, to engage in debate and dialogue about why you believe the other person is mistaken. The person we were lobbying was a key vote on the Senate Judiciary Committee; it was a discharge motion to extend the ERA campaign. His vote was crucial to get the legislation out on to the Senate floor, where NOW knew it actually had the votes to win, but it didn't at this point, have the votes in the judiciary committee to discharge the legislation. What was fascinating is that the legislator was clearly a terrifically old fashioned man, not to say totally bigoted, in terms of women's roles and also completely misinformed about the ERA. They did not engage him on those issues and I was, you know, practically like this wanting to, you know, debate and they basically told me: don't get into this, let the pros do it. What they engaged him on, instead, was his sense of equity and his, his sense of obligation to his fellow Senators to have a vote on an issue that they cared about. So, they appealed, in a way, to their audience, in a way that he could hear. And that was just such a revelation to me, as to how you operate in a political process, you have to craft your message and kind of deal with people where they are and the task at hand, which is to get the bill out of the committee, not try to change his

entire mind on the legal ramifications of the ERA because you could have spent the rest of your life arguing and, you know, never convincing him. And that was such a revelation to me, and I thank them to this day for my insight into lobbying and for seeing that moment.

Interviewer: **Sounds like it would be good advice for the academic world as well.**

M. Duley: In general and it's true.

Interviewer: **The next set of questions asks you to think of, well, what do you think are the outstanding issues that next generation of feminists are going to have to confront in the future.**

M. Duley: You know, it's kind of glass half full. I think all the issues are still there and that is a mixture of disquieting and sometimes quite amusing to me. I now teach women's studies courses at Eastern Michigan University, off and on, and to see this generation assume, on an issue, lets say, like body image, which is of huge concern at eighteen to twenty-two— this kind of impossible standard of beauty, leading to, you know, anorexia and self doubt that so many women go through. To see them assume that this issue wasn't tackled before and that they are now just discovering it. So… I think I am losing the thread of your question, I'm sorry…

Interviewer: **That's okay. The issues that you think the next generation of feminists…**

M. Duley: They have to continue with the same issues, and they also, I think, there needs to be much more dialogue across the generations, about how we framed our arguments for many of these same issues, why they worked, or didn't work, and a heck of a lot more dialogue. Because I see the issues as, in many ways, the same; there's maybe a bit more freedom of kind of sexual expression in this generation, or even that is debatable, because so many times the expression is not defined by the young woman herself, but by a set of societal expectations. It has totally changed from, kind of, Victorian norms to anything goes. But, so many of the issues are just enduring.

Interviewer: **What advice would you give to them, then?**

M. Duley: Don't give up. Don't give up, expect not to be understood, be brave, and have fun. What was it, Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, I don't want this revolution."

Interviewer: **That's beautiful. That's the end of the interview, as far as the questions go.**

M. Duley: I enjoyed it.

[END]