

Environmental Justice Oral History Project
Detroit, MI

Carol Izant

Interviewed by

Tammy M. VanderMolen

December 1, 2014

Detroit, MI

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography

Carol Izant was born in Cleveland, OH, and grew up “in the hill country north of Baltimore, MD” (Izant, 2014), where she spent many hours hiking, camping, sailing on the Chesapeake Bay and enjoying the outdoors. She was a Girl Scout, a member of the Hiking and Ecology club, as well as several other clubs and organizations in High School, and participated in the first Earth Day in 1970.

Mrs. Izant has lived in Detroit since 1974, is married and has one son. She has a degree in painting and printmaking from Wayne State University, and is a self-described nature lover, artist, activist and organizer.

Carol has worked with the Evergreen Alliance, Greenpeace, and the Sierra Club, in their respective fights for Environmental Justice. She is currently co-chair of the Alliance to Halt Fermi 3, promoting carbon-free nuclear-free safe energy. She continues to work on her art, and still owns property in mid-town Detroit.

Interviewer: Tammy M. VanderMolen

Abstract

Carol Izant helped form the grassroots organization Evergreen Alliance in the 1980s, which headed the opposition to the Detroit Incinerator (Bryant, 2011). She eventually took on a leadership role in the Alliance, getting to know the ‘heavy hitters’ in other similar organizations and helped bring them to the Detroit fight. She was also involved with community leaders and the push to educate the community about the dangers of the incinerator.

Carol has also worked with Greenpeace and the Sierra Club (particularly the Southeast Michigan Group) on other environmental justice issues, and is currently involved with the non-profit organization Alliance to Halt Fermi 3 (ATHF3), acting as co-chair of the ATHF3.

Carol Izant has been recognized for her activism and work as a grassroots leader by the City of Detroit and the Sierra Club, among others. She considers it a 'calling' to be an activist and an organizer in particular, and notes that she has been asked to, and has served, in many positions because of her skills in organizing groups with an activist role. She counts her mother and an aunt among the many women who inspired her love of nature and her volunteerism / activism.

Restrictions - None

Original Format: Digital, .wav format

Transcription

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VanderMolen -My name is Tammy VanderMolen and I'm here with Carol Izant to record her oral history. This is Monday, Dec 1, 2014 and we are at the Shangri-La Café in Detroit. I want to thank you for taking the time and allowing me to do this interview. This is part of my Oral History class, LIS 7770, for Wayne State University. To begin with would you mind telling us a little about yourself, where you were born, lived, your education, such?

Izant – I was born Jan 24, 1954, in Cleveland, OH. My parents had met at college; they both went to Miami University of Ohio and were college sweethearts. My dad was from Cleveland, my mom was from Pittsburg, so after they married they settled in Cleveland. My dad went to work for the Cleveland Twist Drill Company. I was almost 3 he was relocated to the Baltimore area with his job, and so we moved. I was the oldest child as well, and we moved outside of Baltimore, and lived there for the next 17 years, I graduated from high school there. I have one younger brother, he was born in Baltimore, so this is where I grew up. My parents were very active, outdoors people. My dad was quite an avid sailor, so I grew up sailing on the Chesapeake Bay. We also have a family vacation home in western New York State; my grandparents owned this, so every summer period, several times over the course of the summer we would drive from Baltimore to Bemus Point on Lake Chautauqua. And where we also did a lot of sailing, a lot of outdoor activities. I was active in scouts; I was active in the church growing up. My mother was quite the activist herself really. She was involved in the civil rights movement and she certainly set the example for me of what it means to be an engaged citizen, and she took a lot of flak I think from my dad's family but my father was always very supportive of my mother. Everything that she was involved with, the church, her social activism, but at the same time she was a very dedicated wife and mother. I had, I saw that model of volunteer work set forth by my mother, which really impressed me. I do think that my involvement in the Girl Scouts also really helps to develop leadership in young women. I was active in Scouts from 3d grade to the 9th grade. I had an aunt who was a Girl Scout leader, she was also very encouraging. My grandmother was very encouraging in terms of getting an education, etc. I had a lot of strong women around that set a really positive example for me.

VanderMolen – Sounds like it.

Izant – When I graduated from High School I went off to college in Pennsylvania for a couple of years. I was on a pre-med program, but after a couple of years it was clear to everyone that I was not mentally or emotionally, psychologically prepared to be a good student at that time of my life. So I exited there, meanwhile my parents had moved to Michigan so this is how I got to Detroit.

VanderMolen – Ah, ok.

Izant – I got a job worked for a couple years; I did some traveling with a friend of mine that came to Detroit. I started to go, decided I was gonna go back to school. I decided I was going to really try my hand at going to art school, because this was certainly always, I had always as a child been very active in the arts. So, that's what I turned my attentions to. That has continued to provide tremendous outlet for growth and development for me. In High School I got it, like I said my Mom was active in the civil rights movement. Well, of course in the late 60s there was the anti-war movement with the Vietnam War, then you have the beginnings of the environmental movement, the first earth day in 1970. My High School formed a college and hiking club, I was part of all of that. I was elected to a seat in my senior class, elected to a position, I was class officer, involved in more clubs and sports and activities. I have been an activist

VanderMolen – Since the beginning.

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Izant - All my life. I've been active in lots and lots, all kinds of ways. Really when I moved to downtown, moved to Detroit and started going to school at Wayne and got involved in the art scene that too was a really, you know creative exploration something that I really hadn't given myself much of an opportunity to be involved with since I was a child. I was talented, but I lacked focus, so in many ways it was kind of an unsatisfying/unsatisfactory kind of a period in my life. I had a lot of talent, but I didn't have much direction. So what did I end up doing? I ended up getting married and having a baby. (Laughter) So that kind of galvanized my focus.

VanderMolen – Which it does, yes.

Izant – Thank God for that. So after, really when my son was 2 years old is when a few of us in this neighborhood learned about the proposed incinerator only just a mile from here. And really it was at the suggestion of a friend of mine that she said ‘you might want to get involved in this’. So I went to a hearing at the city council chambers in April of 1986. I was just, it just boggled my brain there were over 500 people crowding into the city council chambers. And at this time there was a miscalculation in the health risk that had become known, so there was a question about how could the state even consider issuing a permit to build this thing knowing that the health risk was just off the chart. But the response was well we’ve already issued our license to build and so now if we pull it back we’re gonna get sued.

VanderMolen – Right.

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Izant – So it from the beginning there was a legal challenge. As Lois Gibbs, Director of Citizens Health for Environmental Justice, this is Lois Gibbs of the Love Canal.....

VanderMolen – Ok.

Izant – She got involved with us you know early on. And as Lois will tell you legal battles empower lawyers. And if you don’t have the money to fight a good legal battle then you have to empower people.

VanderMolen – Right.

Izant – And the group that became the Evergreen Alliance had a total commitment to, trying to engage in direct action strategies that would bring notice to the issue. We were not polite,

VanderMolen - (Laughter).

Izant - We were not going through business as usual channels. We were not hiring lawyers because we didn't have any money to hire lawyers. But we had several people in the leadership of our organization that knew a lot about the media and how to attract attention in the media. So what did I know? All I know is that I went, I decided that I was in on this, I mean right from the very beginning. I was just totally engaged. It was obviously the artist in me that was really engaged in what I saw as a very dynamic creative process that was unfolding, a collaborative kind of people power that brought me into an awareness of politics and big money. It forced me to reexamine just about everything that I thought I knew. I mean I was quite naïve, I mean I was raised to believe that the people in a leadership role in our government knew what they're doing.

VanderMolen – Right. You come to Detroit and find out otherwise.

Izant – Well, I didn't have to come to Detroit to find that out but that's where I ended up. So one thing lead to another and we were a merry band of pied pipers. We just, through our arts and our activism and our theater and our music and our words and our puppet making...we formed this great big kind of collaborative, creative collective that took to the streets with our actions. And at the same time we were going to all the meetings and the hearings, trying to educate ourselves to identify people outside of Detroit that had expertise about all of this stuff, all of this business. People seemed to really want to come to Detroit and talk to us about what we were doing and so little by little Greenpeace became very interested in the kind of work we did because it was so much like the work they did.

VanderMolen – Right.

0:12:43.7 *Izant* – And Lois Gibbs with the Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, and talked to Paul Connick who has been active in New York State, and Dr. Barry Commoner came, a lot of, like, really heavy hitters came to Detroit to talk with us about how this fight in Detroit over this proposed world's largest trash incinerator why this was such a big deal.

VanderMolen – So you brought it their attention and they helped take it and run with it.

Izant – Um hum, so we developed a more sophisticated kind of a critique. There were a couple of us in the group who were concerned about the fact that so much of the kind of work that we did and the kind of a critique that we developed was a very, a more I don't want to use the word 'elitist' but a very much more politically sophisticated kind of an argument. But what I really started to connect the dots on was the fact that not only was what I was working for was environmental protection but really it was a question of social justice. And how I got turned onto that idea there was a woman Dr. Rosalie Bertell who came to Detroit in May of '87 with a conference called Women, Peace and the Environment, and she was really very nationally and internationally known for her work on nuclear power. And the problems of, the moral question that is raised due to the fact that most of uranium mining in this country takes place on Indian reservations. And that there was this tremendous sacrifice of indigenous peoples and lands for the sake of this nuclear power industry which of course is so married to the military industrial complex because it is so linked in with our weapons program and all of that. And that's a separate topic. But she came to Detroit to talk and she talked about the notion of communities being sacrificed, toxic sacrificed communities and all of a sudden bam the light bulb went on for me and I thought this is what's happening to Detroit.

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VanderMolen – Right.

Izant – That we are being abused in a very systematic injustice, racial injustice that's going on, not only about race but about poverty because the combination of poverty and race - those are the twin issues that allow these kinds of terrible toxic polluters to be able to do what they do. I met a woman that worked in southwest Detroit and she had been engaged in a lot of toxic issues in the southwest Detroit area. I don't know if your, if any of your folks are looking at southwest Detroit in your environmental justice project.

VanderMolen – I think one or two of them are, yes.

Izant - But I can't imagine you wouldn't be. Her name is Brenda Liveoak and she was very interested in the work that we were doing on the Detroit incinerator. So I remember calling her up and introducing myself, before you know it she really, 'woooo', she just sucked me in. So I

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got myself a serious education, and talking to her is - I kept saying Brenda we can't just look at it as a problem of environmental pollution, we have to really see it as a question of social justice and she immediately she just glomed right on to that and she connected the dots. There was another one of my comrades names was Tom Stephens he also really connected the dots on the environmental justice issue. I know he is being interviewed for this project as well. He's an attorney that went on and wrote the Michigan environmental justice(*Unintelligible*)

VanderMolen – I think I have seen his name.

Izant - Yeah. So it was Tim and myself with the Evergreen Alliance that got really interested in the environmental justice component and with that of course we needed to start to really reach out to the African American community here in Detroit. Which at the time was pretty challenging.....Coleman Young was our Mayor at that time, he had made it quite clear to community groups and neighborhood block groups that if they came out publicly against the Detroit incinerator project that he would take away their funding. Cause this was Coleman's baby, now I can tell you right now that I believe that Coleman Young thought he was doing a good thing for the city of Detroit. That he got sold a bill of goods, he got sold on the idea of we're gonna burn garbage, we're gonna boil water, we're gonna generate steam, we're gonna make electricity, we gonna be able to sell electricity and make money for the city of Detroit. And at the same time we're gonna eliminate all these landfills, we're gonna... I genuinely believe that he got sold a bill of goods by the waste incinerator industry and it was going to be a win-win.

VanderMolen – He was told only half the story.

Izant – Certainly he was only told half of the story but never the less there was this huge financial commitment to take this on and so he was very invested in making sure nobody said bad things about the Detroit incinerator. Again, to the extent that community groups and block club groups, neighborhood groups were made to feel that if they came out in any public way to support us that they would they could risk their funding. So we had to go about our education and our outreach into the African American community. We had to find our friends as best we

could. So the good news about the Detroit incinerator today is that we don't have to find our friends in the African American community anymore because they have organized themselves. It's become quite clear that what the problem is, so I don't have to champion the Detroit incinerator issue anymore because now a lot of other people have taken it on.

VanderMolen – Those that are directly affected and those in the area.

Izant – I lived in the area, but no matter how much time I spend in the sun I'm still going to be viewed as a white person.

VanderMolen – Right.

Izant – And that makes a difference a lot of times in the ability to attract people to the concerns that you have.

VanderMolen – And trying to get them to understand that it's also their concern.

Izant – Well sure, absolutely. The good news is there is a lot of people involved in this issue now and I've been able to go on and do other things.

VanderMolen – Great.

(Laughter)

VanderMolen – I think you just answered about 6 or 8 of my questions all at one time.

(Laughter)

Izant - So you know I mean there were certainly, it was for seven years, seven solid years from '86-'93 this was pretty much all I did. Now one thing led to another and before you knew it I was like saying 'yes' to coming to everybody's meetings in town. I realized that I was so

interested in knowing who the people were that were interested in what we were doing. So that's how I started getting myself invited to everybody else's group in town. It kept branching out further and further out, into covering the whole southeast Michigan. We were able to pull more and more people into our demonstrations and our meetings and what have you. It was very exciting. Again, so Greenpeace had the campaign 1990-91, Great Lakes Basin-wide campaign. They saw that I had the ability to organize so they asked me if I would take on the job as the grassroots organizer for this campaign. Not really knowing what I was getting myself into I said yes. Then my whole little world

VanderMolen - Expanded greatly.

Izant – Expanded a whole 'nother quantum shift. Now I'm not just going to meetings in southeast Michigan, now I'm going to meetings all over the Great Lakes Basin.

VanderMolen – Wow.

Izant – Yeah, *WOW!* (Laughter) Meanwhile my son is still growing up, my husband is still going to work and I'm still managing my apartment buildings. I had worked at Harper Hospital over here in the Medical Center for a long time, just part time. Then I got laid off, so I was able to devote most of my efforts to this movement. Until my contract expired with Greenpeace at the end of 1991. So all systems kinda started to collapse in on me, and I realized that I needed to get a job.

(Laughter).

VanderMolen – You probably by that time you needed a short break to gather yourself together.

Izant – Yeah. But we were calling, the Zero Discharge Alliance was calling on the elimination of the production, use and disposal of chlorine, which is, when it's combined it tends to bioaccumulate, binds with a lot of other chemicals and forms a persistent toxin in the environment. It's of particular concern with water quality here in the Great Lakes. But

incinerators, when you burn plastic forms dioxins, burning cadmium, there's a lot of this chlorine, there's a lot of chlorine products that are created in the incineration project. So that's how I got involved in this, from that end.

VanderMolen - It kind of built on each other and the realization popped in.

Izant – Yeah, now that I'm involved very directly in my anti-nuclear the last 3 years much to my irony is the company that designed and built the Detroit incinerator is a company called Combustion Engineering, they were formerly in the business of building nuclear reactors. But after Three Mile Island in 1979, business for nuclear power went down so they figured well we'll just figured we'll build waste to energy incinerators. We'll burn garbage to boil water instead of splitting atoms to boil water. But it's all about – so really what it's all about for me all these years is about safe energy. I realize more and more that this is what I've been working on is to try to help educate people to think deeply about safe energy and what it means ultimately to live more gently on the earth. To lead, a lot have a life that is not all about just mindless consumerism and increased energy use, increasing footprint on the planet but to figure out ways to reduce our footprint to live more gently, to have a way of living together but still with electricity, but not to the extent that we risk terrible harm to human health and to the environment.

VanderMolen – To the planet itself.

Izant - To the planet itself. And we are seeing the limits of this starting to take effect. The science is already there.

VanderMolen – The science is already there its just finding how we can do it the best way.

Izant – How do we shrink our economy without collapsing it? How do we power down, how do we? So no easy trick.

VanderMolen – No it's not.

Izant – It's too important. It's, from my point of view, the most important subject on the table.

VanderMolen – It is very important, I agree to that.

Izant - Yes – if you have any invested interested in your children, your grandchildren, your great grandchildren, and all the children of all the species on the planet. We want to ensure that there will be a life for them.

VanderMolen - It's true, and right now we don't know that.

Izant – No, at the rate things are going it's not a pretty picture.

VanderMolen – Was there any one protest that happens to stand out in your memory?

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Izant – Of course getting arrested and going to jail (laughter) that

VanderMolen – So, you did have that experience.

Izant – Yes, that was a memorable day. That was June 5th 1989, and this was a demonstration that was organized by, sort of like the women's, the group of women that formed kind of as an offshoot to the Evergreen Alliance we called ourselves WEAVE - Women Empowered Against Violence to the Environment. We took on a major organizing demonstration, activist demonstration and we rallied about 500 people one day to the gates at the incinerator and we had a blockade. There were, I don't know, a couple dozen of us that got arrested that day and got sent off to jail. Its very, its memorable to me for a lot of different reasons, but certainly significant was the fact that my son was about 5 at the time, 5 or 6, yeah 5 going on 6, and we're there, he says to his dad as the police are taking me away "But Daddy I thought you said Mommy was doing a good thing?" (Laughter) My husband says "Well son, she is doing a good thing". He says then "Why are the police taking her away Daddy?" (Laughter). He knew that we had raised money for our bail cause it was our intention to get arrested in this civil

disobedience action. As my husband and my son are leaving he says to my husband, “Daddy, I think we’re going to have to go back to the bank. Mom’s going to need more money” (laughter) when I got out of jail that day, the first thing he said was “Well Mommy I hope you’ve learned your lesson”. I said “Yes, and I hope they’ve learned theirs too”. Out of the mouth of babes you know.

VanderMolen – The truth.

Izant – Yeah and he was right. Mom was definitely going to need more money. Mother Earth – that’s kind of how I’ve taken that comment. That yes mother earth needs more people engaged in this kind of work, and it does cost money. Our legal battles cost money, supporting an organization that’s dedicated to any kind of mission such as this requires funding. So that kind of leads me to my next segway. So at this point I’m out of a job with Greenpeace, I go to work for this food co-op that used to be down the street. I’m working with them and life goes on. My husband convinces me that maybe it’s time to kind of back off a little bit from the environmental movement. He says I’m not telling you to stop but you gonna hafta recognize the fact that your son is growing up and he’s got his own ideas of what he wants to do, Cub Scouts, sports, homework, school, blah, blah, blah, friends. He said “You know if you don’t stop and pay attention he’s going to be like grown and then you’ll just wonder what happened”. Of course he was right, so I stopped and I remember we did - and this before cell phones, email, and I only had an answering machine on my telephone - and I remember I took the dramatic, made the dramatic move to unplug my answering machine’ which felt like political suicide, that I was unplugging. It was really good to finally just take some time out, and that time out lasted about 7 years. (Laughter) But meanwhile I was able to go back to art school, I was able to, I felt like I had given so much of myself in this one direction I need to start to round out and was able to get back to work, get back to school, eventually finished my degree in art.

It was actually an art class I had called “Art and Artifact” where we went out to the Cranbrook Science Museum and were able to go through all their collections. I came across this artifact that was made from caribou bone that was from the Inuit culture. One of the last things I had done before I took the big time out was I had gone to a program the Sierra Club put together about the problems of the proposed drilling in the Artic Wildlife Refuge. They brought a bunch

0:33:21.1 of Kutchin Native American people to Detroit and they talked about their way of life and how this was going to be impacted by destruction of the caribou habitat. They were very; they called themselves the caribou people. Their way of life was really dependent having that sort of intact relationship with the caribou. So I came across this artifact made out of caribou, it really, I had this really quite profound emotional – psychological - spiritual moment, and I just thought I have to get back involved in this environmental movement because (*note: Carol gets teary-eyed relaying this moment of her life*) I know too much. I'm someone who, I don't know why I've been chosen to have this kind of, have such an engaged type of effort because there is a lot of sacrifice involved in this work. It's not easy work it's largely unpaid, there is a cost involved in this. But I really felt so moved by this experience that I just thought I have to get back, I gotta get back at it. And the only thing I realized after all this other work I had done previously is that I didn't want to keep on having to reach into my own pocket to finance this work. And I also knew I had to get more active with the politics. Like it or not, our elected leaders make real decisions that impact policy and like it or not, it's real. So I looked around and realized, I thought the Sierra Club would be a good organization for me to get involved with. It had national name recognition, had a local group I could get involved with. It has a democratic structure, it's a fundamentally a grassroots organization, but well-funded.

(Laughter)

VanderMolen – That was one key right there.

0:35:20.5 *Izant* – And they do the politics, and they engage in a lot of politics. That was in 2000 I got involved, joined the political committee Southeast Michigan Group Sierra Club. Didn't take very long, before you know it I'm the program chair, I'm ordering the monthly meetings for them. Three years later I'm chairing the Southeast Michigan Group. So I did that for 10 years, I was involved with the Sierra Club. I needed to take some timeout again, my parents became sick, it was their end of life story, I got really involved with their care, so I backed away again from a lot of my environmental work. They passed 4 years ago, that kinda of coincided with the end of my run with the Sierra Club. Then I took some time out again. But I found out about, I mean I had known about the proposed third nuclear reactor, at the Fermi site, near Monroe, I

knew about that from the beginning because one of my closest colleagues in all of this is a guy named Michael Keegan, he lives in Monroe. He has been on the, in the vanguard in the anti-nuke movement in the Great Lakes for years, 30-40 years. I had known him because he had come to Detroit to do a lot of support with the Evergreen Alliance years ago. I was always aware of this proposal, then after Fukushima, March 11, 2011, it really hit home with me. Then it wasn't long and there was an effort to try to form an anti nuke group. So here I am, co-chairing the Alliance to Halt Fermi-3, now going into our 4th year. (Laughter) So there's just no end to it.

VanderMolen - It's just amazing how it's just rolled one into another, with just short breaks after you regain your life so to speak.

Izant – The good news is that I managed to stay married through all of this. I've raised a brilliant son. My son owns his own company. He's involved in the whole energy efficiency world; we talk safe energy all the time. This is what he's all about. He says “Mom I wouldn't be doing anything that I'm doing today if it wasn't for everything that you've done.” So that of course, that makes mom feel really good. It's awesome and I'm working on my art as I can, but I feel like I've been able to marry the artist and the activist. Of course I've been a business woman all these years. I would not have been able to do what I have done without the kind of financial base that my husband with his work and our business have provided us.

VanderMolen – And without his support....

Izant – Well, without his support - he's the unsung hero in all of this. I'm the one who's always got the agenda that won't quit, but he is, yes, the unsung hero who supported me.

VanderMolen – It's always good to have someone behind you like that.

Izant – Um hum, even though he's not always very happy about it (laughter) often times he's definitely not happy about it.

VanderMolen – Especially when the little one is asking ‘Is mom going to jail?’, or ‘Why is mom going to jail?’

Izant – Well that was actually a proud day; my husband knew exactly why I was going to jail.

VanderMolen – Good.

Izant – Other than that, just a note of the video clip that I sent to you. I was not at that demonstration.

VanderMolen – OK, I thought that you had mentioned that you were in the back of that, so it must have been someone else that was replying within the email.

Izant – Not me. This was the day my husband dragged me kicking and screaming - this was the day we moved. And I was like - no you don’t understand, I’m supposed to be at a demonstration today. He said no – we’re moving.

VanderMolen – That was someone else in that email string then.

Izant – He said ‘we’re moving’, had I prevailed that day I would have been part of the group that got arrested. But my husband prevailed, we moved. Moving day. (Laughter)

VanderMolen - From that protest, from that video clip, you’re protests were peaceful.

Izant – Oh sure.

VanderMolen – There was a lot of singing, a lot of talking, and discussion. And of course some got picked up and put on the bus.

Izant – Yeah.

VanderMolen – But there was nothing that was seriously unlawful.

Izant – No there was nothing violent, no attempts at arson, sabotage, or anything like that.

VanderMolen – You mentioned earlier your artwork. I remember reading in one of the articles about puppet heads.

Izant – Right, right.

VanderMolen – Were you part of that, building those?

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Izant – Yeah, right. There was one woman in particular named Kathy Rashid. She's an artist, very well-known artist in this area. She kinda took the lead on this puppet making aspect of what we did. Certainly I was one of the worker-bees. My skills were really, I was the person who saw how what we were doing in our little world was connected to all these other fights, all these other grass roots struggles. I was very interested in knowing what other people were doing, because in some ways our group was quite introverted. We were pretty insulated and introverted in our, in the way we went about things. And I wanted to learn from others. While a lot of my comrades with the Evergreen Alliance, they weren't as interested in what other people were doing, but I was very interested. And that's how I developed the reputation as the organizer. Because I started to know all these people that were involved in all these other local grassroots efforts.

VanderMolen - That takes a lot of coordination, and knocking on doors and shaking hands.

Izant – Yeah, and spending endless, endless, hundreds, and hundreds and hundreds of hours on the telephone. Because at that time we didn't have email to connect us. We didn't have listserves and email, we didn't have cell phones. It was you either go in person, go to where other groups are meeting and identify yourself, and introduce yourself and talk about what you're doing. Listen to others dah dah dah. A lot of it was on the phone.

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VanderMolen – Do you think it would have been more successful or less successful if social media had been around?

Izant – That’s a very good question. That’s a very good question.

VanderMolen - Would social media, it could have been blown out of proportion by the wrong people.

Izant – Today, I am constantly being encouraged by the young people that I’m involved with in the anti-nuke work that I do to get more involved with social media. But I’m still kinda the old school organizer. Like Cesar Chavez said, first you talk to one person, then you talk to another one, then you talk to another one after that, and then another one. And I still think it’s so much about establishing a personal relationship with people, making some kind of personal connection. Because why should I bother to come and get involved with what you’re doing if I don’t even feel like there’s any kind of personal connection between you. I don’t have a Facebook account, I don’t Twitter; I’m not plugged into that world. A lot of people say you’re never going to be as successful in reaching young people until you do. So I don’t know, I’m still very, I’m not convinced that’s going to be my role. (Laughter)

VanderMolen – Right maybe one of the young people who keeps suggesting it, let it be their role.

Izant – That’s right. (laughter)

VanderMolen – And then you continue....

Izant – I’m going to start a youth committee and you, youth person, you’re going to organize it, you’re going to set it up.

VanderMolen – Because there are more like, of our age, we’re contemporaries. That are not as plugged in, either as, or at all. And so a young person on Twitter and Facebook and everything

else is not going to be able to reach them. But they would be effective and helpful with your organization. But the same goes for the young people, they need they need that cyber contact for some reason, I'm not sure why.

Izant – I'm not saying it's not effective, I'm just probably not going to do it (laughter).

VanderMolen – I can totally understand.

Izant – Because I really like having, I like being able to have certain kind of boundaries in my life that allow me to continue to have a personal life, a private life, the life of an artist, a contemplative world that can sustain *me* at the center of who I am as a human being. And that's so important especially as you get older. Because otherwise you really risk your health.

VanderMolen – Definitely. Speaking of art, has any of your artwork been affected, or does it reflect

Izant – Occasionally. It has. There's a young man on my board right now, with this anti-nuke group, he's always encouraging me to turn more of my art into a sort of an activist kind of venue for my activism. But he's not an artist, so he ...

VanderMolen – He doesn't see the person or the personality within the art that might be taken away if it is pushed into the activism.

Izant – Yeah, he just very interested in our issue getting out there through any means necessary. He would like me to use my talents to this end. But my talents at this time in history are still, I'm still the organizer, and more and more the person who knows how to write grants and get funding and raise money for the group. So I'm still the business woman.

VanderMolen – The business woman whether you want to be or not.

0:48:06.6

Izant – There’s a great quote, I can’t remember if Alice Walker or Mia Angelou, or Toni Morris, or one of those 3 women says: “Activism is the rent that I must pay for the privilege of living on planet Earth”. And as a landlady of 35 years I know about paying the rent, collecting the rent. That really speaks to me in a very direct way. So yes, maybe this is the rent all these years, this activism I’ve been engaged in is the rent that *I* have paid all these years. I continue to, people do recognize my leadership and I appreciate that. I was nominated for Michigan Environmentalist of the Year in 1991, I was Michigan Environmental Council, I got the Spirit of Detroit award in 2006 for environmental justice. I’ve gotten awards from the Sierra Club. Not that’s what it’s about, but it’s been great to have some recognition for my work. More importantly is the fact that I’m able to draw people in, to roll up their sleeves and do this work. I like to think that we’re having some fun at it at the same time. Girls just want to have fun you know (laughter).

VanderMolen – That’s true.

Izant – We work really hard. Most women I know work very hard.

VanderMolen – We work very hard at it, but we want it to be enjoyable too.

Izant – That’s right.

0:50:07.7

VanderMolen – True. This Fermi, Alliance to Halt Fermi-3. You brought me a handout which I will include in the packet, if I can have it.

Izant – Most definitely.

VanderMolen – Do you find that this as difficult to get across to people as.....

Izant – This was a lot more difficult.

VanderMolen – A lot more difficult?

Izant – Yeah, you can't see it, can't taste it, can't smell it. It's very removed from the public eye. Most people don't really understand what nuclear power is to begin with. 'How'd you say you do that again?' But everything about it, the mining, the milling, the processing, all of it is a very expensive, dirty, and dangerous way to go about boiling water.

VanderMolen – And the disposal.

Izant – And the disposal. There's no real good answer to what they do with radioactive waste. That's clearly the Achilles Heel of the project. And then there's all kinds of government subsidies, we wouldn't even have nuclear power if it wasn't for all the government subsidies. But then that's true for most extractive industries, coal, oil. The financing of all that would not be as attractive without all the kind of subsidies that go in. All it takes is one bad day and then you have a radiologic nightmare.

VanderMolen – Right.

Izant – You've got a problem at a wind farm; well that's a mechanical problem. Some birds might get hurt, some people might get hurt if you have some kind of mechanical failure but that's the extent of it. You're not unleashing some monster, some Godzilla onto a region. To this day we have no idea what the fallout's gonna be from Fukushima.

VanderMolen – No.

Izant – That's just continuing, that story is just continuing to unfold.

VanderMolen – You don't hear much in the news that I've seen.

Izant – No you have to seek it out. That's true with any of the nukes. There was a big article in the Detroit Free Press a few weeks ago about Michigan's energy future and there was not word one mention of the proposed Fermi 3, there was not one word mentioned about Fermi 2, there's

not a word mentioned about Hooking Palisades on the west side of the state. It's as if nuclear power, it wasn't even on the radar.

VanderMolen – But yet they're still very controversial.

Izant – And if all you do is watch television, you think DTE is building wind farms and promoting energy efficiency; where meanwhile it's a far more sinister (Laughter) operation. It all boils down to trying to help educate people to understand what a safe energy future would look like. What is sustainable safe energy future could look like.

VanderMolen – These expect to, this is a home grown alliance to halt Fermi 3. Have you had any contact from the other organizations for support?

Izant – Oh yea, we have 17 - right now we have about 600 people on our mailing list, these are 17 member organizations (note: *looking at the hand out*) and yet we're very networked in with national anti-nuke groups. Definitely.

VanderMolen – I see you have an annual meeting and holiday tea on December 7 (2014).

Izant – Coming right up.

VanderMolen – Coming right up. Coincidentally on Pearl Harbor day.

Izant - Yes. That's right. When you have a minute take time to read that.

0:54:52.4 *VanderMolen* – It looks very interesting. If someone's interested in getting involved as an activist in environmental justice, what would you recommend or suggest?

Izant – I think that most people, they want to feel....it has to be a subject that you're passionate about; it has to be an issue that really seems to speak to you on some level.

VanderMolen – Not just something to go out and claim I volunteered for this or I did this. You have to really believe in it.....

Izant – You won't become an activist, you may volunteer a day here, a day there. But it's not going to really engage you mind, body, soul unless it's something you're passionate about. Now sustaining your activism is something that, a good group will recognize your efforts, will reward you with actually giving you a role to play within the organization. Will continue to have the respect and recognition and rewards of being a part of a group of a lot of people. What keeps a lot of us going is the comradery. It's the people that you meet through this work, the relationships that you form with others; I guess it's probably the same kind of satisfaction a lot of people get from going to church. That kind of thing. Because there's no, you're not getting paid to do this, it's not your job in the same formal way of understanding what a job is.

VanderMolen – True.

Izant – That's your part of something that's bigger than your own little personal soap opera.

VanderMolen – And essentially have a spouse or family behind you that supports you.

Izant – Well, that helps.

VanderMolen – That helps tremendously.

Izant – That helps. I gotta be honest; when I first got involved with the Evergreen Alliance my marriage was very problematic for me at that time. I was not prepared to leave my husband and get divorced because I was really very determined maintain an intact family unit for our son. But a lot of the anger that I had about what was going on in my marriage, instead of turning it on my husband I went out and I turned it, took on a much bigger battle. But it was a way for me to channel a lot of my rage. Goodness is that my marriage is much healthier today, we've been able to come full circle and I'm going to celebrate 32 years of marriage at the end of this month.

VanderMolen – Congratulations!

Izant – Thank you. Our son is going to be 31 next week, so yes I'm really happy to know that my husband and I have been able to hang tough and remain a family unit, that's what means so much to both of us.

VanderMolen – That is very important.

Izant – Especially.....

VanderMolen – With the effort you've shown with the organizations and the activism, yes that is very impressive.

Izant – I'm so thankful that we've been able to, as I like to say 'instead of sticking it to each other we've stuck it out'. We have something really beautiful.

VanderMolen – And a son to be proud of.

Izant – Oh, a son we are enormously proud of.

0:59:26.4

Izant – Other than that I'm not sure what I can tell you here. Mentors through the years - my mother to start off with, Rosalie Bertell, Lois Gibbs, Brenda Liveoak, you notice a lot of women.

VanderMolen – Yes, very strong women.

Izant – Strong women.

VanderMolen – Outspoken women.

Izant – Outspoken women, that's right. Women who aren't afraid to be unpopular.

VanderMolen - Right. Which was in the '70s, '80s, was not necessarily normal.

Izant – Well, I guess not. I don't think it's ever, I think that women still are..... I'm sure it's a case-by-case; I still don't think that women are really encouraged to speak out. In '08 when Obama and Hillary Clinton were vying it out for the Democratic nomination. I was working as a teacher's assistant at that time at a charter school over on the east side here in Detroit. I was working in the 3d grade and the teacher was an African American woman, I asked her - what do you think, do you think fundamentally our country is more racist or more sexist. She said - absolutely more sexist. Absolutely hands down. Women still don't get the respect for our leadership.

VanderMolen – I don't think so.

Izant – We'll see what happens in 2016, I'm not necessarily a big fan of Hillary Clinton, but I would like to see a woman elected to be our president.

VanderMolen - That would be an interesting time, it would.

Izant – I would like, I want to see more and more women engaged in positions of leadership. Not to diminish men, but to raise the level - level out the playing field. Let's just level out the playing field, that's all anybody is asking for. The environmental justice movement, that's all anybody is asking for, just level out the playing field. You wouldn't think that was so threatening, but its hugely threatening.

VanderMolen – It is. And it's not just here with the nuclear energy or the incinerators.

Izant – Right, in pretty much all aspects of society. This continues to be part of the human, the social justice project that exists on planet earth. And we're not going to run out of work to do for a long time. Anything else?

VanderMolen – Nothing else I can think of, I think you’ve been very thorough. You have lived a very interesting and determined life. And I mean that in a positive way. Listening to you has been a pleasure, and eye-opening.

1:03:06.8

Izant – Thanks.if you want to look through it, this is the PhD project that Elaine Wellen, she interviewed a whole bunch of us in ‘96, women at the grass roots.

VanderMolen – Right, I saw it online when I was searching, but of course it’s not been scanned so it is not available. We can sit and take a look at it.

VanderMolen - I just wanted to say thank you.

Izant – Well, thank you.

VanderMolen -for allowing me to sit here and talk with you. It’s been, like I said very interesting, very eye-opening. For contemporaries, we’ve had such different lives. We’re only like 3 years apart in age, but I can see the passion still in your eyes, and hear it in your voice.

Izant – I’m very, I’m blessed. Maslow, Alexander Maslow the psychologist, there’s that little pyramid. Round one you gotta make sure you’ve got basics, food/ clothing/ shelter, just fundamental things in place before you can advance to the next level of self-actualization and that moves up from there. I’ve been really blessed to have a solid secure foundation in my life. I probably took a lot for granted growing up, but having been married to my husband for the last 32 years; he’s helped straightened me out on that. He’s a self-made man, came from a very humble beginning, and he has helped me understand what it means to put the roof over your head, to put the food on the table, to ensure a stable foundation. And then to go from there to advance yourself. I’ve been really blessed to have that kind of secure foundation upon which to build and to develop my character. To be more self-actualized.

VanderMolen – And to have the experiences growing up, with your mother’s volunteer activities, and you said your aunt also. And you’re scouting and that all has led to this.

Izant – It all goes into it without a doubt. And I think, too, I had my mom, I had all these really amazing women influencing me growing up, but I also saw my dad who was just totally supportive of my mother. He was of course a very passionate person himself. His sailing and just his love of the outdoors. Together my parents were really great role models for me. I have a cousin who has been quite an activist herself; she's 8 years older than me. She's also had a really positive influence on me. We're all shaped by those around us.

VanderMolen – We are. Thank you again. I really appreciate it.

Izant – You're Welcome. Thanks for giving me the opportunity.

VanderMolen – It's been enjoyable. And we'll end it now, and we'll just sit and talk.

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