

2-23-2011

Margaret Knapke interview for a Wright State University History Course

Christopher Erb

Margaret Knapke

Follow this and additional works at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/history_oral_history



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Erb, C., & Knapke, M. (2011). Margaret Knapke interview for a Wright State University History Course. . https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/history_oral_history/45

This Oral Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dayton and Miami Valley Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact library-corescholar@wright.edu.

Profile

Narrator Name: Margaret Knapke

Interviewer: Christopher Erb

Author: Christopher Erb

Date of Interview: 02/23/11

Subject: An interview with an active member of Dayton's anti-war and human rights movements.

Margaret Knapke is a human rights activist and peace activist who has participated in many direct actions and civil disobedience actions in the name of those causes. Her reiki and holistic bodywork practice is not only a career that helps others but also a personal release for the rigors of her activism. Margaret began her empathic life as a counselor for battered women and actively worked to start one of the first advocacy groups in the area for women who are victims of abuse, the Artemis Center. Through her study and work at the University of Dayton Margaret became acquainted with Catholic activists for human rights and began working with them.

Margaret has been advocating human rights, specifically in reference to U.S. policy in Latin America, since the early '80's and has even spent time in a federal prison for her civil disobedience. Early in her activism against the School of the Americas, a U.S. training facility for Latin American military officers, she burned herself out and found she needed something to center her. This is when she met a torture victim who was one of the peppiest people he met who told her to find her joy in order to continue her work. The joy she found was the holistic body healing she performs and sees as a way to center her and her clients in an effort to create right relationships and build communities. It is this belief

in community that Margaret holds dear and drives her to continue to speak out about U.S. foreign policy and its human rights repercussions.

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: Radical Communities

Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University

Archives or repository

Interviewee/narrator name: Margaret Knapke

Interviewer name: Christopher Erb

Others present:

Place: Margaret's House (Living Room)

Date 02/15/11

Length of recording: 1:14:14

Original format: mp4

[00:00:37.16]

The beginnings of Margaret's activism including armchair activism.

[E][R][V]

Humor/ Assessment/ Equality

[00:03:00.17]

Distractions by one of the cats, finishing school, meeting Roy Bourgeoisie and getting interested in Central America.

[E][R][V]

Humor/ Sorrow/ Admonition/ Community

[00:05:52.27]

Salvadoran soldiers training in the U.S., the beginnings of SOA Watch and their first direct actions and the effects of Archbishop Romero's assassination.

[E][R][V]

Humor/ Regret/ Happiness/ Community/ Awe

[00:12:00.26]

What is the SOA, what they do, how it has changed since 9/11, and its role in human rights violations.

[E][R][V]

Sorrow/ Sadness/ Assessment/ Condemnation/ Community/ Democracy

[00:16:57.17]

Direct actions and the road to imprisonment over conscience.

[E][R][V]

Sadness/ Sorrow/ Confirmation/ Assessment/ Solidarity

[00:21:14.24]

Margaret's early motivations banned and barred from Fort Benning and mental preparation for trial and possible imprisonment.

[E][R][V]

Sorrow/ Guilt/ Assessment/ Confirmation/ Determination/ Solidarity

[00:27:59.13]

The trial, sentencing and the judge.

[E][R][V]

Humor/ Relief/ Assessment/ Confirmation/ Judgment/ Community/ Democracy

[00:34:57.29]

Paying her fine creatively, turning her sentence into community service.

[E][R][V]

Happiness/ Creativity/ Humor/ Assessment/ Confirmation/ Community/ Solidarity

[00:42:39.20]

Burn out, reiki, finding a center, other holistic body work and modern Central American Relations.

[E][R][V]

Happiness/ Amazement/ Anger/ Irony/ Assessment/ Condemnation/ Community/ Solidarity

[00:53:49.28]

Debating the ex-head of the School of the Americas, the tension building up to it, the awe at doing it and relief after it was over.

[E][R][V]

Fear/ Awe/ Relief/ Happiness/ Judgment/ Assessment/ Equality/ Freedom

[01:00:39.23]

Dealing with comfort zones and activism

[E][R][V]

Concern/ Assessment/ Community

[01:02:11.24]

A trip to Colombia, Colombian MP's, and direct action on foreign soil.

[E][R][V]

Happiness/ Irony/ Excitement/ Assessment/ Confirmation/ Solidarity/ Understanding/ Equality

[01:15:04.18]

Deep feelings about holistic healing, and maintaining her own center.

[E][R][V]

Happiness/ Affirmation/ Unity/ Compassion

[01:19:48.14]

Radicalism, problems with two party systems and connecting with each other.

[E][R][V]

Happiness/ Optimism/ Condemnation/ Democracy/ Equality/ Community

[01:32:10.11]

Radical movements in Dayton, and other resources

[E][R][V]

Excitement/ Enthusiasm/ Affirmation/ Community/ Democracy

Christopher Erb: This is Christopher Erb, I'm sitting down with Margaret Knapke [pronounced with the first /k/ silent]...

Margaret Knapke: /k/nap/k/(ee) [pronounced with two hard /k/'s]

Chris: Is it Knapke? [pronounced correctly]

Margaret: Yeah

Chris: I've always, I didn't know that, I'm sitting down with Margaret Knapke and we're going to be talking about her work in peace activism as well as human rights activism and we'll also be talking about her professional life as a holistic healer.

Margaret: Yeah, body worker, Holistic body worker.

Chris: It is February 23, 2011. Margaret, how did you get involve with community activism or community service?

Margaret: I was thinking about that question earlier today and I can't honestly say that there's one singular moment of epiphany but I recall, I grew up in a small rural community, very conservative. When I was in high school the Vietnam War was building, if that was the first time I started paying attention to the world certainly I did that. Then of course the Kent State killings. I think in addition to that I, if I can say this, I think I just have a really good bullshit detector. [Both laugh] Certainly when I was young, in high school, I was certainly aware that my country was using a disproportionate share of the world's wealth. I think I was suspicious that all of the history I was taught always had a very glowing interpretation of U.S. involvement anywhere in the world. Certainly I thought long and hard about how our European ancestors came to be in this country. That was probably the first thing that started to gall me, probably. So it wasn't really until I went off to college that I started thinking more theoretically about things, more systematically. Quite frankly I think for quite some years I was pretty much an armchair resistor. It was pretty much an academic exercise for me.

Chris: What we call slacktivist?

Margaret: [laughs] Slacktivist? I don't know, a little harsh but...

Chris: Oh I love to consider myself a slacktivist.

Margaret: [minor distractions by one of Margaret's cats] When I was an undergrad I got involved, I went to the University of Dayton and I got involved in the Peace Studies Institute. As the name suggests, we were primarily about crafting peace oriented, non-violence oriented curricula. That was my first involvement at the university level. I don't think it was until I was in graduate school, by the time I did my undergrad at UD, I left Dayton for a while, travelled a little bit, ended up going back to UD to work on a masters and complete a masters in Philosophy. It was when I was back doing that work, I was also

working with battered women at the time; I had a job as an advocate for battered women. I helped to start one of the organizations for battered women in the city and I was finishing my degree and I was teaching at UD, philosophy, as an adjunct professor. No, at the beginning I was just a part-time teacher, it evolved into something else. The National Lawyers Guild, right around 1980 maybe '81, invited Roy Bourgeoisie, Father Roy Bourgeoisie, who heads SOA Watch, which did not exist at that time. They invited him as a Marinal priest who had spent many years in Latin America and was now going around the country talking about U.S. policy toward El Salvador and they invited him to campus. I went to hear what he had to say, I don't think I was expecting too much from someone with the name Bourgeoisie. [Both laugh] I can remember actually thinking wow, what a crazy name. I went to hear him speak and he spoke from such an authentic place and I credit him with really giving my armchair analysis human texture, a really human dimension. He just made it all seem so much more real, I mean foreign policy wasn't just some abstraction, foreign policy was how the Gonzalez family was going to, whether they were gonna have dinner or not. Whether or not he was gonna make it home from the mines. It just became very microcosmic and very personal and that was a really significant transformation in my life. I do consider Roy, who's a good friend of mine still, I consider him to be a very important mentor.

Chris: So he started SOA Watch?

Margaret: He did, but it didn't officially start until 1990. We were down there, he was down there, he just caught a little item in the back of the New York Times one day. He'd been run out of Bolivia, he had been a missionary there and was run out of Bolivia. Two U.S. sisters he knew had been, were two of the four church women killed in El Salvador, so he got very involved in trying to figure out what was going on there. So then he went around the country started talking. He notices in the back of the New York Times a teeny tiny item about some Salvadoran soldier coming to Fort Benning and he thought 'this can't be good, I'm gonna go see what this is about.' He just moved himself to Columbus Georgia which is right outside Fort Benning and five hundred and twenty Salvadoran soldiers had been brought. This was while the School of the Americas was still down in Panama. I can't prove this, but I have a feeling the Pentagon was kinda testing the waters because they would end up moving the school to Fort Benning the following year. I think they were kinda testing the waters. Roy started, first it was a one-man show then he built some solidarity around trying to do outreach to these soldiers. Initially trying to figure out why they were there, what kind of training exactly they were receiving. I and others from other parts of the country would go and spend time, we would vigil and we would do different things. Roy and Father Larry Rosebaugh, who recently passed, and a woman, Linda Ventremekia, {?} the three of them did this really great civil disobedience action, which I always have wished I had been a part of, [laughing] this is I think one of my very favorite actions I have ever heard of. First of all, before we get to that, Roy and the others had had to do some intelligence gathering to find out where these Salvadorans were on the base. They found the barracks, where they were and at the time Fort Benning was fairly open, it was pretty easy to get on to if you knew where you were going. Roy and Larry and Linda would go into their barracks and they would leave flyers in Spanish in their shoes and their clothes, trying to do outreach with these guys. They were feeling the need to kinda ratchet

things up a bit, weren't sure what to do. We're talking about it one day and the mail came and it was a Catholic Worker community I think in Chicago, had sent Roy a tape of Archbishop Romero's last homily the day before he was assassinated. It was this amazing homily, he had made a heartfelt appeal to the Salvadoran soldiers to stop, 'God's law requires that you disobey illegitimate orders and you must stop killing your brothers and your sisters,' and the very next day he was assassinated at mass. They had this amazing homily and what they decided to do was get some fatigues and kind of camouflage themselves and late at night they went onto the post. They actually took some media people with them as I recall. They climbed some pine trees just adjacent to the barracks, the soldiers lights were just starting to go out, they were going to sleep so they climbed up, with the tree climbers on their boots and they lashed themselves up high into the tree and Roy had a big boom box. They waited till all the lights had gone out and all of a sudden Archbishop Romero's voice goes floating through the pines. The lights came on in the barracks and Roy said these soldiers came out, some of them fell to their knees, they were looking up at the sky, they really thought they were having a visitation from this recently murdered Archbishop. The MPs didn't see it that way; they located them pretty quickly and got them out of there. These three were in the slammer, they were in the county jail and it was about time for these five hundred and twenty five Salvadorans to graduate, so some of us went there and we thought; 'we need to mark the graduation somehow.' We were trying to figure out again where exactly it was going to take place and we couldn't know for sure, we had thought we might go in and disrupt it somehow and make a statement about what the U.S. was doing to people in El Salvador. I don't mind telling you that made me very nervous, [laughs] the thought of doing that. I would have done it had we known for sure where they were gonna be, but we didn't so we decided we'll do a less dramatic action that was a sure thing. What three of us did that morning was to take a big banner we had made that said 'Salvadorans Graduate to Genocide,' that told it I thought, that was a strong statement. We took it to one of the administration buildings and held it, got a lot of attention till they arrested us. That was my first arrest at Fort Benning.

Chris: When was this?

Margaret: I think it was '83, '82 or '83.

Chris: Can you tell our listeners a little bit about what was going on at the School of the Americas, why this was so important.

Margaret: Again, we didn't really know that much about the School of the Americas at this time, I knew nothing about it. Roy probably knew something about it, but again it was still down in Panama at that time. The U.S. Army School of the Americas began in 1946 in Panama and its where the United States Army would train Latin American officers and police in counter-insurgency techniques basically. What they call 'low intensity conflict techniques,' its not about low-intensity for the populations being targeted. Its a way of targeting those populations using their native armies under our instruction and letting this suppression of truly legitimate movements towards economic and political democracy, letting the suppression of those movements take place with barely a ripple back in the

United States. That's the 'low-intensity' part of it, that it could be done in such a way that it wouldn't register so much back here. Although we would be paying for it, our tax dollars

Chris: Certainly they were not low-intensity at the place, at the time of...

Margaret: Oh no, no, no, the people on the receiving end of these policies, well over 600 graduates of the School of the Americas have now been identified as serious human rights abusers. I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit but it started in '46 and very quickly became known throughout Latin America as La Esuela de Assasininos, the School of Assassins and the School of Coups. Latin Americans saw very clearly what was happening here with this training and how it was being used to put in dictators who would work more often than not at the behest of the U.S. foreign policy makers. Because of the terms of the Panama Canal treaty, when the school started to get into the '80s they knew their time was, their lease was almost up and they needed to find another place for it, so they chose to move it to Fort Benning Georgia. It's still there, in 2001, January 2001, this is I think entirely due to the efforts of the School of the Americas Watch, in January 2001 the Pentagon officially closed the school. Then immediately reopened, they claim, a different school but it was actually the same place, the same front door, they even used the same course catalogue for quite some time, but they called it the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation and that's what it's still called. We still call it the SOA or SOA WHInSec. They moved that there in '84 it was in '89 that the six Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter were murdered at the University of Central America in San Salvador. These were Jesuits who were very outspoken proponents of the poor, you could say they were involved with liberation theology, which the School of the Americas has prided itself on helping to wipe out in Latin America by the way. These Jesuits were killed along with the two women and that happened in November of '89 and Representative Joe Mokeley said 'What the hell is going on in El Salvador, how can all this be happening? We're sending what is it a million dollars a day to these people, what is happening down there?' So he took an investigative committee down there and determined that, I don't know that he came up with all this, in '93 when the UN Truth Commission published their report on El Salvador they identified 26 soldiers who participated in that massacre and nineteen of them had trained at the School of the Americas. So that happens in '90 and when the anniversary of the killing of the Jesuits rolled around in November of '90 that's when Roy and some others started, had a fast there at the gate, and that's really officially when SOA Watch began.

Chris: Do you want to, why don't we go ahead and talk about the next time that you went to prison.

Margaret: The next time, ok.

Chris: There was just the two times correct, or was there three?

Margaret: I was trying to remember, I got arrested, I think I've been arrested three times down there, because the first time I didn't give them my information and so they didn't give me a Ban and Bar notice. The second time I got arrested as part of the big November vigil and mock funeral procession on to the post, I think that was probably '96 or -7. I'll just

begin by saying that a part of the work of SOA watch, in our efforts to try to educate U.S. taxpayers about how we're spending at least 20 million dollars every year keeping this school going and what the human rights consequences are for people throughout Latin America. That work goes on year round in individual communities but every November we commemorate, not only the killing of the Jesuits and the two women, although we use the anniversary. Its really a commemoration of the hundreds of thousands of people who have been killed throughout Latin America, either by SOA grads or people under their command. We converge there every November and there's, most of the weekend consists of a perfectly legal gathering just outside the front gate of Fort Benning. We'd get a permit from the city of Columbus and we'd do that. Its a great opportunity to hear from people from Latin America, to hear from people who are doing work all throughout our country and beyond, to network with people, share resources all of that, teach-ins and all that. Always then on Sunday morning we have, I'll say that at least parts of Friday and Saturday have at times a festive kind of air. Then on Sunday morning it becomes very serious, very somber and there's a mock funeral procession that takes place. In the early years when Fort Benning was open, before 9/11 it was very easy to simply go onto the post, really anybody was allowed onto the post, you didn't need special permission to be there, it was an open post. However, they claimed the right, the legal right, to prevent people from going onto the post in order to engage in political discourse. That's what they said; they said legally they can keep people from engaging in political discourse on a military reservation. That may be, but we can't help but notice that they often invite people to [laughs] partake in political discourse, when its discourse concurrent with their own. At the end of the vigil we would always have this mock funeral procession and a lot of people would engage in it simply on the Columbus city property. Those who were willing to risk arrest would take it further, onto the post, so even if a word weren't spoken, symbolically its very clear what we are saying and they never wanted us to bring that onto the post. Our hope always was to get all the way onto the post to where the School of the Americas was located but we could never get that far. I did that one year with, I don't know how many hundreds, or I think were maybe two thousand people went on that year. We were all arrested and most of us were given Ban and Bars and released. The way they did it back then, technically they could prosecute you the first time but they really didn't want to. What they would do instead was give you a Ban and Bar notice, which says 'ordinarily this is an open post and you can come as a U.S. citizen, however since you have already engaged in political discourse once, you're not allowed to come back,' basically. Ban and Bar, you're banned and barred from being here.

Chris: So you're banned for anything at that point in time, you can't go onto base even for non-political discourse?

Margaret: Unless you got express permission I guess, but you can't just venture on. Once I had that in my name I knew that, were I to go back on again, I would very likely be prosecuted. By now we've had, I was just looking at the current figures today, I think by now we had 245 people do time in federal prison, the charge is almost always a misdemeanor charge, "criminal trespassing" they call it, criminal trespassing. There've been a few people who have been charged with felonies, if there's been some little property destruction. One year I remember some people edited the sign and they got at least a year

in prison for that. They were considered felons so it was really hard, they were on probation for a long time, it was hard to travel or do a lot of the work because of that. I didn't enter into this level of civil disobedience lightly. I knew that it would be pretty dramatic in convenience in terms of the way, the kind of work I like to do, the kind of work that I do, commitments to family and clients and all of that. What kept coming back to me, I kept having a particular image I'd seen in a documentary that was shot in Guatemala, its a scene of people who had been killed and there's in particular one little boy. The remains of one little boy and his face is just, I can't even if I wanted to I can't forget his face. When I'd be weighing, 'is this really a good time for me to do this, is it gonna cost me too much, is it gonna be too hard?' Then I'd see that little face; you know he had no choice, nobody asked him. Many people, by now I've had the opportunity to go meet and spend time with in Nicaragua and El Salvador and Colombia, nobody asked them if its an OK time to be displaced from their homeland for instance. So I began, even as I went through this process of trying to make a decision, I began to see how privileged I was, even being able to weigh things out so carefully. I'm not saying people shouldn't do that, I don't romanticize going to prison, I really don't, I don't think its necessarily the best way for each person to do the work. If we all went to prison it would be pretty hard to get any mileage out of it because we wouldn't have anybody back home doing the media work, for instance. I don't put it up on a pedestal, I don't romanticize it but it felt really important for me to be able to advocate with that degree of seriousness. Knowing full well that it would give me added volume, I knew it would and it did. It felt to me, ultimately, that when I made the decision to do it that, in 1999, knowing that I would probably be prosecuted, it was a decision to mother. I saw it as a way that I could advocate for children at risk in Latin America that a lot of people can't because, maybe their taking care of their own kids, I don't have children to take care of. I'm single, so by design my life is simpler than many and in part because I want to be free to do these kinds of things. I really decided and it wasn't simply a rational decision, there was a lot of imagery coming to me from my subconscious, I was having dreams about it. It really felt like an appropriate for me to express a mothering protective instinct toward those Latin American kids, and their parents.

Chris: You say it was in 1999?

Margaret: So it was in '99

Chris: So that was, there was really only one more November demonstration before the base was closed then, wasn't there?

Margaret: Right

Chris: It was the decision that had to be made too.

Margaret: Well, people are still doing it. [Laughs]

Chris: Are they? OK.

Margaret: Oh yeah, people still get on the base; they work harder than I had to.

Chris: It seemed kinda cosmic for it to be that close to the ending of it and for you to have come to that conclusion.

Margaret: I did the action, I was actually one of the three people who led the procession onto the post, we were wearing, not everybody involved in the movement is Catholic by any means, or even religious necessarily, although there is a strong spiritual vibe to the whole movement. We were, the three of us who were leading the procession, we had, what are those called, those heavily embroidered mantles that priests wear, I think that is what its called, a mantle. We took the procession on and we were arrested as we expected we would be, ultimately they arrested I think, they arrest a whole lot of us, they press charges against 23 of us and then they dropped charges against 13 of us. I won the lottery, [laughs] I got to be one of the ten and frankly I was really glad, I was really glad that I got to be one of the ten, because I wanted to be able to do that piece. Honestly that day in the courtroom was one of the most important days of my life, it felt, it was full of grace really. It felt so much bigger than any of us and if felt like there was something very important moving through us. I could give you many examples of that but sufficed to say that it felt like a very profound privilege for me to be one of the ten conduits who got to share the message.

Margaret: Our situation was a little bit different that year because the judge who had been prosecuting all the previous people, they called him 'Hanging Bob.' [Both laugh] He was a really, this guy had quite a history in Georgia. He was on medical leave or something, they had an interim judge in from Macon Georgia who really knew nothing about the issue. He was fresh, he really knew nothing, or he certainly acted as if he knew nothing about the issue. I don't think he knew anything. He was a liberal judge who was appointed by Clinton and so I think he really saw himself as a liberal, well meaning, rights-oriented judge, I can only guess but I suspect that's the way he saw himself. I actually liked him, he let each one of us speak at length and I'm a much better writer than speaker so I took the crafting of my statement very seriously. Even as I did that I felt something moving through me, even at that stage it really felt like this was much bigger, this was beyond my skill-set. [Laughs] Something better than I could do by myself was happening on the page. I trusted that, I basically memorized it, it was my intention, I made a copy, I'll give it to you if you like, it was my intention, I always saw myself standing in front of the judge and looking right at him and delivering it to him. Before our trial our judge, our attorney I should say, took us in to show us the courtroom and he said 'the judge is over there and you guys are in this little box over here.' I said 'how do we look at the judge?' 'Oh, you don't look at the judge you'll be looking at the courtroom. I just said 'no, that's not how its happening.' [laughs] I just knew how it was going to happen. It just so happened alphabetically I was the last person that day, so everybody else had gotten up in the box and given powerful statements but giving them to the audience. When I got up there, in this tight little wooden box, I started moving my chair around the best I could and I'm kinda looking at him then I turn in my chair so I'm looking at the judge. The prosecutor said 'your honor, we're not gonna be able to here her.' I lean into the microphone but I'm looking at the judge [laughs] I tell you Chris, it was amazing because I started to give it just the way I wanted to give it and as I did he leaned towards me. We really connected and I really felt heard by him. Then he had some questions, so we had a nice little back and forth, it just felt, I just have to say it felt like

grace was all over the place helping that to happen just the way it needed to happen. He ended up, we adjourned for a while, I think it was the next day he gave us his decision and he said that he really had to admire us, he really respected us greatly. Nevertheless he had to find us guilty and he wasn't gonna pass sentence right away, he wanted to look more carefully into who we were and we had to come back in three months to be sentenced. It ended with a great feeling of respect, well three months later we're waiting in the courtroom, he comes walking in and I knew immediately something was very different. He was angry and disrespectful, some of the people who went before me, again my name starts with a K but somehow I was at the tail end of all this. My friend Judy who was one of the most brilliant, kind and wonderful people on the entire planet and he is chiding her and accusing her of being self righteous; "Well your all self-righteous and blah blah blah." I was thinking 'OK,' some of my peers were saying 'somebody got to him, that's it, people at the base got to him.' I said 'maybe.' but maybe the other possibility is that, liberal judge that he is, and I think with a certain, he struck me as a very sincere person. I said that I think on some level he understood that if even a fraction of what we were telling him about the school and about U.S. policy towards the region, if even ten percent of that were true he didn't really know his country. I think that that really shook him to his foundations. I wrote him, when I went to prison I wrote him a letter and he wrote me back immediately. I didn't expect a response at all. I wrote him a letter and I said 'I just want to comment on something you said to us in the courtroom, you said that we are very self-righteous. We're passionate and we're stubborn, but we're not self-righteous, in fact if anything, I'm sure we all fault ourselves for not doing more much sooner because we know how many lives have been lost. I don't think its correct to say we're self-righteous.' I went on to speculate about why perhaps he had changed his mind about us and he wrote me back, immediately. He said 'I remember you well, I have great respect for you.' He said 'I can't comment at length cause I might be required to preside over another one of these trials.' He said 'suffice it to say you did what you had to do and I did what I felt I had to do.' Those aren't equivalent, he gave himself some wiggle room there I think.

Margaret: As I'm getting ready to go to prison many people, we call ourselves prisoners of conscience in the movement; many people go for six months. Because he didn't know how he felt about things and because he was new and all that, for a number of reasons I think, he gave us lighter sentences so I only did three months in federal prison down there in Lexington, Lexington Atwood Federal Prison Camp. As I was getting ready to begin that, it was just ten years ago, just this past summer I was having vivid, in the course of my day I would have these vivid memories of prison. I thought 'that's interesting, why would I be thinking about that right now,' and all of a sudden I realized it was exactly the ten-year anniversary of my going there. My body on some level knew that and was reminding me of that. As I was getting ready to go I was thinking about the fact that I not only had this sentence to serve but he had also given us fines. When he was in his pissed off mode at the sentencing, we had asked our attorney if he could designate that we could, rather than pay money into the government, because a lot of us were tax resisters anyway, knowing that half of our taxes go to the military, people just had conscience problems with that. We had asked if we could divert our fines, we would pay them, but we would like to divert them to something that would feel very useful and life affirming. 'I don't know that I'd even be allowed to do that but even if I were, I wouldn't.'

Chris: This is your attorney?

Margaret: No, this is the judge. I wake up one morning and I'm lying in bed and thinking ok, I have this \$2500 fine to pay, the judge didn't understand the wisdom of our suggestion but I'm just gonna do it that way anyway. I'm gonna do it that way anyway and all of a sudden I just had some vague idea of an art exhibit, I'm not an artist but I had a vague idea of an art exhibit and the theme was 'Healing from Torture, Through Community.' 'I don't know how this is gonna happen, but I think somehow we're gonna do this.' That very day I meet a woman who happens to be an artist and I say 'maybe you wouldn't mind being a sounding board for me. This is an idea I woke up with this morning, I'm not an artist, I don't really know the arts community, does this sound doable to you?' I ran it by her, gave her some background; 'Yeah, that sounds like a great idea and if you don't mind, I'd really like to help you organize it.' [Laughs] 'By the way one of my best friends is a big curator and she knows all the artists in Dayton.' I had not even a week before I'm to report for prison and I have a meeting with these two women and the guy who owns the coffee shop says we can use his coffee shop and I write a cover letter for them and they take it and run with it. They keep me apprised of the progress and it was a wonderful thing for me to know, in prison, that that was taking shape, that we were going to be able to do this when I got out. They had twenty some, twenty-five artists did original works, many of them on that theme; a few had works that they thought were already applicable. When I got out we had, this is one of my favorite things, the art exhibit was called 'A Matter of Heart; Artists for Human Rights in Latin America,' and we had it at the coffee shop downtown on Ludlow street, Jim Contway let us use his coffee shop. We raised \$4700 selling artwork, we made note cards, we had almost double the amount of my fine, we sent it too the Marjorie Kovler Center for Torture Survivors in Chicago. I chose them because I know they work with a lot of Latin American refugees, I thought undoubtedly some of those people had been victimized, their families, by the school. As it turns out the Kovler Center writes me and they say 'Would you mind if we used this as seed money for a new project we have in mind, we want to do outreach to torture survivors in Momostenengo in Guatemala. It could not have been more perfect, [laughs] the School of the Americas has left a horrible, horrible trail of death and suffering throughout Guatemala, two-hundred-thousand, mostly indigenous people killed there. It was wonderful, they used our money as seed money and they had a physician, a psychologist and a social worker from one of the big cities and they would go to Momostenengo, which is in the highlands, in the deep rural area. They would work closely with a shaman from the area, he lent them legitimacy and they were able to do outreach with torture survivors.

Chris: That's amazing!

Margaret: [ecstatically] I know! I have to tell you this piece too, I couldn't help myself, I thought about our judge so often while we were putting this together, so I wrote him a letter. We had all kinds of programs and newspaper articles about it, I sent him a packet of information and I said, 'I know you said that we could not divert the payment of our fine, you didn't see the wisdom of that, I disagree. I just want you to know that because of the sentence you imposed on me and the way my community has rallied around me to deliver

on that sentence, as a result of all that, you have helped to bring this amazing intervention to torture survivors in Momostenengo Guatemala.' Ten years later that makes me cry! He didn't respond to that one but I'm sure he was moved.

Chris: At the beginning of your conversation about the judge I was thinking there were eleven conduits that day. Then with the three-month mark I was like no, maybe not, because of his change. Maybe there were eleven conduits that day, if you look at the way you look at that letter.

Margaret: Yeah!

Chris: You talked about part of your decision to take this step that you knew would get you arrested and possibly sent to prison was your professional work, can you tell us a little bit about how your professional work and your activism worked together.

Margaret: Yeah, actually, earlier today I was thinking about one point that I wanted to touch upon is that, I did this work early on, I was in my mid to late twenties when I really started working seriously on Latin American issues, at that time it was Central America. I wasn't very wise in the way I approached it, I would immerse myself in horrific data all the time, I would work, work, work as hard as I could. When I got tired, I didn't think it was OK to rest, I actually, I'm almost embarrassed to tell you this, one way I would make myself work harder; I had two photographs a friend had brought back from El Salvador of two cadavers. A young man and a young woman, I would look at these photographs and get all riled up and work some more. I was working as hard as I could but it was coming out of, it was legitimate anger, but more importantly it was coming out of guilt and that wasn't helpful, it really wasn't helpful. It's one thing to take my share of responsibility for U.S. foreign policy, its another thing to recognize the systemic issue and I'm not personally responsible for everything that happens. More importantly, it was actually a Salvadoran who helped me to see this. In the early days there were five or six Salvadorans who had gotten into the United States somehow, so activists were moving them around carefully and quietly. They were giving talks in churches and living rooms, it really kind of helped people understand what our government was helping thier government, the Salvadoran government, to do to the people. By the end of that war seventy-five thousand people had been murdered, most of them civilians and unfortunately our taxpayer dollars underwrote it. We were taking them around and they were at a church here in Dayton, one of them, Fernando, was a labor person, unionist who had been arrested and tortured in El Salvador and was released somehow, or got away. I knew enough of his story to know he had a very hard time already and yet this guy just exuded good humor. [Laughs] He just crackled with humor; he was smiling all the time. One day he came up to me and he took my cheek; 'Oh you are so serious.' And I said, 'I do NOT understand you.' [Both laugh] 'I have some idea what you've been through; I've heard some of your story. I don't understand how you can be so joyful.' What he said to me, he kinda laughed and he said, 'If we allowed ourselves to forget for a single day why we do this work we wouldn't be able to do it anymore.' Honestly it took me years to really understand what he meant, what he was saying, he was saying; when people are deprived of their lives, its tragic only because life is such a precious thing. If life is so precious, its worth celebrating, even when its precarious, he was

trying to tell me, 'you've gotta find your joy if you are gonna be in this work for the long haul.' Its taken me some time but that is what got me into doing healing work actually, because I had gotten myself into such a state of depression and it was a friend of a friend who offered me some energy work one day. It really didn't fit into my worldview, I was pretty agnostic about all of that, I really didn't understand it but I was pretty sure it didn't fit in my worldview. I even said to him, 'I don't really believe in this stuff but, ok.'

Chris: When was this?

Margaret: This would have been in '85 maybe 6.

Chris: It was all still 'pyramid' at that point in time wasn't it?

Margaret: It was what?

Chris: All pyramids and that stuff at that point in time.

Margaret: Pyramids, what do you mean?

Chris: Like the energy pyramids, was it still that kind of...

Margaret: No, this was reiki he was doing.

Chris: This was reiki?

Margaret: This was reiki yeah. He didn't explain it, he didn't tell me what it was, what to expect, I lay on a couch and he worked with me for about an hour or so. I had a really strong reaction to what he was doing, I think because I was so much in need, that was part of it. I just remember when he finished and left the room, before I even sat back up I thought to myself, 'I don't know what the hell he just did, but I gotta learn how to do it!'" [Both laugh] 'This is really important, and if it doesn't fit in my worldview, I'm gonna have to change my worldview.[both laugh] I've studied a lot of things, I've made doing holistic body work my livelihood for twenty-some years and there's always more to learn, you're always developing and that's one thing I love about it. I've also come to see, for a long time I kinda felt that I was juggling things, 'here's the human rights work over here, but I have to make time for the healing work,' and over time I began to see its all about healing. The human rights work is a form of healing, that's one of the things I said to the judge on either the first statement or the sentencing statement I don't remember but in one of them I said that anytime we really come to terms with difficult truths regarding our country's foreign policy its really an opportunity for healing for all of us. It truly is, and it's an opportunity to heal, what I consider our deeper nature and one of the things that keeps me going is that I really do believe we are hard-wired for community. I believe that is our deep nature and I also think that as a species we have an incredible capacity for self-deception [laughs] and distraction. I do believe that in each one of us that deeper nature keeps asserting itself and so if I won the lottery tomorrow, which is unlikely because I don't play it, but just theoretically, if I were to win the lottery tomorrow I would spend a whole lot more time

doing the healing work that I do and that includes, I mentioned reiki, but also polarity, cranial-sacral work, something called somatic trauma resolution, which is specific to the nervous system. I've had some opportunity to do that kind of work in El Salvador in Colombia with war traumatized people but I would love to do much more of that. It's, I was able to go to Colombia, I really didn't know very much about South America at all for many years and then as things began to heat up, I was in prison actually when Bill Clinton started the whole 'Plan Colombia' thing, which has been a real debacle for the people of Colombia. Shortly after I got out of prison I was part of a delegation to go down there, I had studied a lot but I wanted a human encounter, so we talked to people all along the political spectrum, including our embassy people. We spent a lot of time out in the countryside talking to the indigenous and the afro-Colombians and the peasants organizing and the women organizing and human rights workers, just amazing, amazing people. One of the groups we met who was, their acronym is ASADES that stands for Association for the Families of the Detained and Disappeared, so we spent an afternoon with them listening to their stories, about their loved ones they've lost and the woman who runs the organization, she got into it when her husband was disappeared. This is how she decided to invest herself in her grief. She wanted to be of service to other families like her own. There's a political aspect to it to, trying to have accountability for disappearance, disappearance is a political tool, its not simply kidnapping, when you kidnap somebody you're wanting something in return, money or another prisoner or whatever. When you disappear people you're trying to sow not only grief but real terror, you're trying to undermine the popular organizations. I was there in 2002 and was just really moved by these people and this group in particular. In 2004 I went back with Judy, who I mentioned before, was one of my codefendants and whose a wonderful psychotherapist. She and I and some friends went back to Colombia to Popayan in the southern part of Colombia in 2004 to do trauma reduction work with some of the families there so that was extremely, it was a drop in the bucket, but it was also extremely satisfying.

Chris: Its very nice that the interplay went both directions too. It was the human rights work that got you there, its very compelling. Obviously with the exception of the '99 funeral march are there any other compelling actions that you have partaken in that stand out that you feel need to...

Margaret: You mean the civil disobedience?

Chris: Or marches, or anything. Logan told me about one time when you two tried to shut down the, this isn't a very compelling one, but its a very entertaining one, anything like that. Are there any that are compelling enough that you want to share? You've done a lot.

Margaret: I've done some fasting at different places, I had an opportunity, I was telling this story to a friend earlier today, she said, 'Tell Chris that story, I think he'd like that.' I'll be outing myself a little bit but... I was invited to debate Colonel Weidner, who had been the commandant of the School of the Americas and someone new was coming in, I can't think of his name off the top of his head. Actually it was a student whose family had a personal tie to Weidner, so he was willing to show up for her at this university out in San Antonio. She really wanted Roy Bourgeois to come and debate the colonel, but Roy called me and said,

'would you do this for me? Would you handle this for me?' I said, 'Sure,' so I really researched the colonel, I did, I spent a lot of time on him. [Laughs] I looked at other debates he'd had with other people, presentations he had given and I'd heard him speak before. He's very slick, he's got a real PR, he was a PR machine for the School of the Americas, so I did my homework. It was gonna be pretty tightly formatted as a debate, I had my script, as I said, I'm a better writer than a speaker so I had my little script I wrote. I hear from the student organizer, maybe a week beforehand, not quite a week, and she says, 'Oh by the way, Colonel Weidner's gonna be using a PowerPoint so if there's any equipment you need, just let me know.' I'm thinking 'Oh damn, I didn't even think about that, he's gonna have the advantage of pictures and I'm a word person.' I wasn't thinking about pictures so this is what I did, [laughs] this is kinda a little personal C.D. thing I guess. I went to the library, the downtown library, Montgomery County Library actually has a lot of good photography books so I was going through all those photography books on Central America and South America and some of the photographs, some of the photographers, I was very familiar with from the 80's. They were down there taking pictures during the wars, Harry Madison was one. Really iconic photos from Nicaragua and El Salvador, I've got my script running through my head thinking, 'I can use that, oh I can use that.' I leave the library with maybe ten of these books and post-it notes sticking out everywhere. I went to a print shop and I said to the guy, 'I'm really in a time crunch I need slides made of all these photographs.' He says, he looks at the books and he looks at me and says, 'Maam, this is copyrighted material, I can't make slides of this.' I looked him dead in the eye and I said that I have the express permission of each of the photographers. [Laughs] In my heart of hearts I knew they would want me to use them. He looked at me and said, 'OK.' The next day I pick up the slides, they worked really well with my script, I get on the plane, they whisk us to the campus, the colonel let me know, 'They say, should we flip a coin to find out whose gonna go first?' I said, 'Colonel,' I don't know why, I just thought, I guess I just knew that I had the truth on my side [laughs] I felt utterly confident, plus some really great photos. I just felt so confident and I said, 'Colonel whatever you like. You want to go first, you want to go second? Whatever you want to do is fine with me, we don't have to flip a coin.' 'Well, I, I think I'd like to go second.' 'That's fine, I'm ready to go,' so I jumped up there, I passed off the slides and the script to the student. We were in some kind of a science lecture hall or something, an auditorium, I'm making motions and [both laugh] but you know, an auditorium where the seats are elevated. I go up there and I start my presentation and the first slide goes up and I just kinda glance over my shoulder to make sure its not upside down or something. I was expecting maybe a foot-by-foot frame; the ENTIRE wall is filled with these amazing faces. Part of my presentation, I was saying this is not just about facts, this is about the names and the faces behind the facts and they were right there. I was just so dumbfounded, it was another one of those moments of grace, I hadn't planned that, it just worked out that way. I felt really good with how that went.

Chris: That's awesome.

Margaret: It was a good debate.

Chris: How did it end up?

Margaret: Well, we didn't...

Chris: No points or anything?

Margaret: No, it wasn't anything like that but I will say that, I think they were surprised. The one, the replacement for Colonel Weidner, I wish I could think of his name, I can see his face real clearly, I can't think of his name, he's not there anymore, but he had come up to me ahead of time, they both had introduced themselves, they were very gracious ahead of time. The new guy let me know that he knew what my work was, basically he was like, 'I see you do reiki, I'm familiar with reiki,' and all this stuff and I'm thinking, ok so he's letting me know he's done his homework, well that's OK, that's OK. I suspect they were expecting a different presentation, I don't think they were expecting it me to be quite as forceful as I was and really and truly holding the school to account. So I felt good about that.

Chris: Have your motivations changed, or how have your motivations changed for approaching your activism through the years?

Margaret: It strikes me that we can't have it both ways and it took me, I think, a while to get this, but if we're truly gonna have a systemic critic of things, if we're gonna understand that the media plays a role, educational institutions play a role, people are not encouraged to really have a clear view of what the U.S. empire is doing around the world, if we're gonna take that kind of systemic approach then we can't at the same time get overly frustrated when people don't want to move out of their comfort zone. I guess I've learned to be more patient, I think I've learned to be more patient and really understand that, and I think my other work has helped me with this as well; to understand that each individual is truly in a process. I want to be able to speak to them in such a way that if they haven't already had an experience of it, maybe they can just begin to have an experience of community with someone in another part of the world. Maybe I can tell their story, someone I've met in Colombia, maybe I can tell their story in such a way that they don't feel so 'other' to this person who has been pretty comfortable thinking of them, if they think of them at all, as 'other.'

Chris: We 'other' a lot in our society.

Margaret: Yeah, we do. I went to Colombia the last time, which was this past August, I went with a small group of people, it was a direct action group, our intention was twofold really. We wanted to go and have some intensive meetings with members of the various human rights groups because we saw ourselves as being on the verge of a real escalation, not only in Colombia but in the region because last October, the United States, under Obama, and Colombia had signed off on the U.S. Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement, through which the United States would be able to lease seven different Colombian bases for ten years. Colombians understood and really people throughout the region understood that this was a serious escalation. We wanted to go first of all to talk to the human rights people, the people on the front lines, about it and then we wanted to make an expression, as U.S. citizens opposing this escalation. We really weren't sure how it was gonna play out, we weren't we were gonna get out of the airport if they knew what we were planning, we

just weren't even sure how far we would get with that. What we somehow failed to overlook was that we were there the very week, running up to the weekend, when they would be inaugurating their new president. Somehow, [laughs] everybody on our team overlooked this fact, so what that meant was that there was all kinds of international press there and it also meant that Colombia was gonna be extra careful and for that matter the U.S. embassy presence there in Colombia, it was gonna be extra careful about not letting us claim too much attention. It worked out really well, we met with amazing people, the Movement of Victims Against State Crimes, we met with those folks, we met with Mothers of Soacha who have lost seventeen sons as false positives. A false positive is when the Colombian Army kills someone, they basically have to keep track of successful kills of guerillas and under their security doctrine, the United States wants to see results for their investment so they actually keep track of how many guerillas they've killed. Having X number of kills gets rewarded, so there's some incentive to boost your numbers and that's the false positives. In Soacha for instance, Soacha is what's called a misery belt around, south of Bogotá where a lot of displaced people end up trying to eek out a living and obviously high unemployment in this particular community. Some men had come in and said, 'We understand there a lot of young men here who need work, there's a farm over here looking to hire, we could provide transportation.' A lot of men said 'yeah we'll go work,' and they were killed and counted as false positives. Its horrible, its just horrible but its extremely well documented, the practice and the State Department even acknowledges it happens. We met with the mothers of these people and just as an example of how courageous, you asked me earlier who gives me hope and who motivates me, its these people who work anonymously but put their lives at risk to do so, very humble courageous people. When they were telling us their story and I was saying that it was fully my intention to come home and write about their sons and about their work, we brought a photographer. 'Would it be OK to use your names, is it OK to use your pictures?' You just ask these security questions all the time and when we asked these women, these questions they just looked at us so puzzled and the one said 'They've already killed our children, what more can they do to us?' For them it wasn't even a question, of course you put it ALL on the line to try to advance that truth about what's happening. We met these amazing people, we had those meetings in Bogota, the capital city and then we went to one of the seven bases that the United States was hoping to lease, and at that point had signed off to lease, its called Tolemaida, in Melgar Province, we went there and our plan was to simply go get as close as we could to the front gate and hold our huge banner that we brought in one of our suitcases. It was bilingual and said in Spanish and English "U.S. Military out of Colombia." Honestly when we first drove by the base and it was just crawling with military police and soldiers, I'm thinking to myself 'There's no way in the world we're gonna get in place, I just don't see how we're gonna do this,' but certainly we were gonna try. It was if there were a force field around us [laughs] and probably the fact that they weren't expecting to see a van full of gringos pull up. We just walked, there was this huge statue in front of this base, it would be two stories high, two guys lunging forward with guns and there are bodies on the ground as part of the sculpture, just horrible. We went right in front of that [laughs] right underneath it and held our banner. They came right away, the officers came out right away, and said that no 'you can't be here, you can go across the road or you can go over near the bushes or you can go over there, but you can't just be here.' We just said no, this is exactly where we need to be, this is where we're gonna be. I'm sure they called the

embassy right away and I'm sure the embassy said 'Whatever you do don't arrest them!' [Both laugh] 'Don't arrest them, that makes it more of a story, don't arrest them!' So we stood there for hours that afternoon and the property fronts on a very busy highway and there was A LOT of traffic going by, and slowing down and thumbs up and thumbs down. It was a kind of conversation we had going on with the people there and the next day we came back and they knew we were coming back, so we knew it would be more difficult. Sure enough they had cordoned off the area with all these young MPs holding batons, so what they didn't know was that about seventy-five of our closest Colombian friends were going to join us that day. A lot of the people from the human rights groups with whom we'd met with early in the week and they brought the members of their groups. It was an amazing experience, it was AMAZING, and they were able to, Colombia has the worst human rights record of any military in the hemisphere so this is not a military that these organizers would ordinarily want to confront, but they knew they could because there was media there. We could provide a little bit of an umbrella for them, a little bit of protection that way and we talked with them about it ahead of time. 'Their not gonna do anything while we're there and the cameras are there but we're going home again, so are you sure that this is something that you want to do?' Their response was 'they already know who we are, we do this work all the time. This would just be another way of doing it.' They wanted very badly to do it that way, one of the things that I really loved about it was that there are all these really young MPs, some of them were kids, they had braces, they had little decorative braces, they were kids really. I understand, its a poverty draft like ours but more so. The ones that were assigned to be real close to us because they noticed we kept moving closer in to the front gate with our banner whenever we could, then it got to the point that they were standing there with us. They got an opportunity to hear all these amazing organizers from Colombia who had a bull horn, they brought their bull horn and they spoke about what was happening to their union members and what was happening to the young people in their community. Whatever indoctrination they had been getting on the base they were getting the antidote that day for several hours, at least and that felt really good to me. It felt to me, as it turned out we got a lot of coverage in the media, throughout Latin America, the U.S. didn't care but Latin American media had it. We were on TV in Venezuela and we were all throughout Colombia, we were in Mexico, it really got out. Even if that had not happened it would have been worth it to me just to spend that afternoon, those two afternoons really but mostly the second afternoon, with those young men who were being given an opportunity to hear a different story about what's happening in their country. It felt good, when we broke we shook hands with them, they'd spent the day with us under the hot sun because of us.

Chris: I took a class on Argentina last quarter and we studied the Dirty War for a long portion of that and we read a book on it. I'm under the impression that, talking about these soldiers, I'm under the impression that one of the common tactics in these kinds of military venture, especially in Latin America by way of inculcation at The School of the Americas is that you don't do it that many times. You don't go on disappearances; you go on one disappearance then your shuffled off somewhere else so you're disconnected from it. Which is why, the Ecuadorian soldiers at Fort Benning and these guys at this gate in Colombia were receptive because they, everybody is culpable, they make everybody go but you only go once or twice, so it doesn't affect you as much and it doesn't bear on your

personality much. I have two questions that are based not specifically in your work but just general modern worldview questions but I want to make sure before we move on to that if there's anything else about your story.

Margaret: Did I answer all your earlier questions? I just feel like I'm rambling.

Chris: Somehow you have managed to answer all of these questions so I feel it would be vaguely redundant to say them again if this is the information I wanted to get out of you, you gave it too me already.

Margaret: Do you have a sense of my other work, of the bodywork; do you have a sense of what that's about?

Chris: Well you know, I was encouraged to include that by Denny and based on the way he told me to ask you that, I'm not really sure that you have responded about the body work the way he expected you to. Denny has certain impression of your passion for your bodywork that I'd like to have come across here.

Margaret: Yeah. I've really come to understand that, and this obviously ramifies for the social-political realm as well but I've really come to understand that each one of us, on a real deep level, understands what our needs are, regardless of how confused or depressed we might be. That's a different level of awareness, on a deep, deep level we know what our needs are and so the work I do, what I try to do when I'm working with a person they are usually lying on my table. I take my cues from their, what I call their 'body mind,' and my hands, I kind of think with my hands when I'm working with people and generally I will be led either to do some subtle energy work to begin with, or I might be drawn to a particular part of their cranial-sacral system and work with some difficulty therein. It all has to do with taking my cues from the person on a real deep level so that I'm able to help them bring themselves back into balance, a deeper kind of balance, so things work better on a physical level, emotionally, mentally, trans-personally or spiritually, whatever language your more comfortable with. I really believe that when the Buddhists talk about right action and right livelihood, I think all that has to do with helping us to find our right relationship with each other and what is political work than that? Its about helping people find their right relationship with each other.

Chris: That's an interesting, I like that, it is.

Margaret: That's the way I've come to see it. Because of the work I do, first and foremost it helped to keep me sane because really had become utterly dysfunctional early on when I burned out and got real depressed. It helped me to find my center again and to put down deeper roots so that I could work from the joy that's inherent in vitality, I was able to find that again. I think it also, like those young MPs at Tolemaida, I could look at them and I didn't see them as the enemy, I didn't see them as someone I needed to be afraid of, I saw them, I know enough about their country and I know enough about the situation there that I could easily understand how they ended up standing with us at that gate, could EASILY understand it. I guess I feel that the work helps me to have greater compassion for myself

and for others so I think I am able to work from a deeper and saner place than I did in the early years but that's something I had to learn, Fernando helped me to learn that.

Chris: That's a good place to be, it really is in this modern day. On to my general, thought process questions. I've been doing research lately on different liberal movements, we can classify the human rights movement and the peace movements as liberal movements and I've come to a personal conclusion, I could be wrong, I'm totally willing to be wrong on this. Liberalism is, in and of itself its own self-defeating enemy, in that there are so many directions to take, there are so many directions for progressive reform and in order to make big things happen all of these arms come together but then once the big thing happens we're all back at each others throats sometimes. What's your take on that?

Margaret: Its true, peace activists sometimes don't get along too well.

Chris: Exactly.

Margaret: It was in the women's movement too, sisters didn't get along so well sometimes [laughs]

Chris: You can see it in Obama's election he's there, once he's there, once he's taken the place of that conservative George W. Bush that the liberal movement wanted out, now we're back at each others, and even his, throats, because of agenda issues.

Margaret: Right. I wish I had some real nice tidy way to respond to that. First of all, let me say I don't think of myself as a liberal, I think of myself as a radical, and I mean that philosophically. Liberals and radicals have different views of human nature.

Chris: Logan said the same thing when I asked him this question.

Margaret: Liberals believe that we exist first and foremost as individuals, as rational individuals. Radicals believe that, and radicals have this in common with conservatives, radicals and conservatives both believe that we exist first and foremost in relations, but we evaluate relations differently, radicals and conservatives do. I consider myself a radical in that I believe that we exist first and foremost in relationship with each other and our capacity to individuate has a lot to do with the power structure. That wasn't really your question.

Chris: There's no real answer for this question, I just want your take on it, we're not gonna get us all together, its not gonna happen.

Margaret: Yeah, and part of the problem is that we've got a two party system and I think Rahm even said this when he was still by his side, they know that most of us are not gonna vote for a third party because there wont be enough of us voting to make it count and so he feels we're kind of a captive audience for him, a captive constituency. He's so incredibly eloquent, I still like to hear him speak I want so badly to believe him. Clinton never did that to me, I never believed in Clinton and he proved me right. [Laughs] Yeah, Obama, there's

something about him, he's so incredibly charismatic. So far he hasn't done anything much that makes me feel any confidence that he is at all willing to take on the corporate agenda. I don't know, I have many friends, activist friends who have completely written him off and said 'Oh my God, he's obviously totally committed to the corporations and that's all he ever cared about.' There's still a part of me that wants to think 'Oh, he's just so pragmatic, he's got some kind of a plan, when he has more leverage he's really gonna come out in a principled way for human rights.' But he hasn't done that yet; he really has not done that yet. I didn't expect any more than this from Hilary, but he and Hilary both as far as I'm concerned have utterly failed the people of Honduras, they have just stood by when their democratically elected president was removed. Yeah, they gave lip service that that shouldn't have happened, but when push came to shove they are behind the new guy who got 'voted in' because most people were boycotting the election. [Laughs] They have failed the people of Honduras and this was just months after Obama had stated at the Summit of the Americas, 'The United States, we take a lot of criticism, we're willing to admit where we have been wrong in the past.' Well, he's not doing that, he's simply not doing that and obviously this Defense Cooperation Agreement he signed with Uribe before he went out of office, its horrible, there's absolutely nothing in that that signals any kind of regard for human rights in Colombia. I'm trying to be somewhat optimistic, I think my optimism has to, honestly Chris its really hard for me to picture a third party alternative that could get enough traction to actually amount to anything. Maybe the most hopeful thing I've seen lately is that, with the economy tanking, and the bank bailouts and all of that and discussion of hedge funds, at least, we were talking a little bit when you first arrived, at least people are talking about the gross disparity of wealth. Activists have talked about it all the time but its the first time I can ever recall hearing it on a mainstream network, a discussion of that gross disparity in wealth.

Chris: And it happens relatively frequently in the mainstream media.

Margaret: Yeah, maybe there is some coming to terms and maybe, if maybe there will be some pressure from that that can be placed at least on the Democrats. My take on Democrats and Republicans is that domestically Democrats are better, at least some of the time, but in terms of foreign policy they're both utterly disastrous. I can't say that Democratic institutions or administrations have ever been kinder to the people of Latin America than the Republicans have. I think we are just in the process of very, very, very, very slowly waking up and how can we give the general population a really strong cup of coffee so that they can really start to see clearly. The thing is, this goes back to something we were talking about earlier, it took me a long time to learn that its not, you cannot engage most people first and foremost on an intellectual level. Its not because people are stupid, its just that's not how most people operate. Most people operate of their gut, I believe, and their heart, and the Republicans are so incredibly savvy at how to manipulate people that way. I think that liberals and radicals both have to get a whole lot better at engaging people, sharing difficult information with people, in a way that doesn't disempower them. That's the hard part, I can remember many years ago giving a presentation on El Salvador, this was at the stage when I was just immersing myself in statistics every day and the latest massacres. I was giving a presentation to the Marionist Brothers somewhere and [laughs] I'd been going on for quite sometime and finally some guy in the back of the room said

'Stooooop, stooooop, tell us what we can dooooo!' [Laughs] He was absolutely right, I was pummeling them with difficult information and I wasn't giving them any way to feel empowered. I've gotten a lot better since then, thank God. I really think that that is something that all of us who care to have a good society here and care to, if not to be a force for justice around the world, at least to stop taking people's resources from them and undermining, to be a more benevolent presence on the planet. All of us who want that for our country, we've got to learn how to share difficult information in a way that doesn't leave people feeling desperately sad and helpless. Rather, we need to give people a way to feel connected to community, new ways to feel connected to community and to broaden the community.

Chris: You talked about waking up, a lot of people waking up, that's a nice juxtaposition for my next question, this is the one that I talked to you a little bit about before, In the face of our, we've talked mostly about your human rights work, I know you most from peace work, though I know about your human rights work, we've actually marched together a couple of times against the war in Iraq. Given that our pull out from Iraq has been hardly a complete pull out and we've actually escalated in Afghanistan, recently on Real Time with Bill Maher; I heard Bill Maher ask Cornell West a question about the peace movement. He asked why, in the face of this escalation and not full pull out, why is there no longer a vociferous anti-war movement on the left? Cornell West's answer was basically that President Obama has pacified us to the point that we believe that he is our only choice and the decision that he has made is the only choice that can be made in this particular instance, so the peace and the anti-war movements have backed off.

Margaret: I'm afraid I have to agree with that largely. I do know that people do continue to try to confront, there are people, I know people who have tried to confront Obama on the issue of Guantanamo and the wars and they get precious little coverage in the media. I think there's more confrontation going on than most of us know about. For instance, Veterans for Peace just a month ago, they chained themselves to the gate in front of the White House, Daniel Ellsberg among them.

Chris: I don't even remember hearing about that.

Margaret: I know; Chris Hedges too. A lot of people were chained to the fence and it didn't even get into the news. There is that, I think there's always a lot more organizing going on than we know about. I think that's true in our local community too, there've been people marching regularly, friends of mine in D.C. will wear the orange jumpsuits and show up representing the prisoners in Guantanamo, that gets very little coverage. If you're on a list serve you'll get a link to YouTube but it doesn't make it into the press.

Chris: The fourth estate is not anymore.

Margaret: Yeah

Chris: I have one question that I, has always intrigued me. Why is there such an immense radical movement in Dayton? Do you know, it's been here since the '60's and it's been a huge

place for all kinds of things. Is it Wright Patt, is it the Peace Institute at U.D.? Is there anything?

Margaret: Edgar Casey says we're a major energy vortex, maybe we are, there's a lot of good music here too, the arts. There's a lot of stuff that goes on in Dayton. I guess I've never thought of us having a huge peace movement here, I've thought that we have a lot of small efforts that go on and sometimes they come together and coalesce.

Chris: It's been consistent. There's been no break here.

Margaret: Right, I'm part of what we call the Dayton Pledge of Resistance and that's been together since the Contra war in the '80's

Chris: Even Logan was telling me last week, in that period in the late '70's when there was no real hardcore war to protest, though there were actions to protest, there was no steady on-going war to protest, but they were protesting DP&L for rate hikes and things like that. We've always had something to protest here in Dayton and we always do it.

Margaret: Have you ever seen, this would be an important thing for you to archive, years ago the New American movement put together a slideshow, its on videotape, Dayton People's History. It should be out there at Wright State, if you can't find that, Nancy Garner might have a copy of it. Peter Chase, John Robertson, I know there are copies around and that would be a good thing to have. Yeah, it goes way back, there have been radical organizers in Dayton, I think forever.

Chris: Logan was telling me that he chauffeured Howard Zinn and Mother Jones around. [Laughter] Unless I'm remembering wrong. {In fact I was, it was Jane Fonda, an easy mistake to make} I'm sure he said Mother Jones.

Margaret: He might have said that, he probably [unintelligible]

Chris: Thank you very much, is there anything else that you feel like...

Margaret: Probably but we could probably talk for a week, let me see, as soon as you walk out the door I'll think 'Oh, I wish I would have.'

Chris: I may make this an ongoing project as something maybe that I can do as an independent research. Put a thing together and not just an interview and its transcript going into the archives

Margaret: If you're going to continue, I've a number of people I think would be really good for you to talk to, that have done really long standing serious work here.

Chris: Well, this was great, thank you very much.

Margaret: You're welcome, I enjoyed it.

