

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Fredi Dworkin

Interviewer: Mary Rizzo

Date: June 24, 2024

Location: Boston, MA (via Zoom)

Mary Rizzo: —we don't miss anything, so that should be recording now. Then, I just have a little thing I'm supposed to say. Okay, so today is June 24, 2024. My name is Mary Rizzo, and I'm interviewing Fredi Dworkin at—where are you again? I can't remember. I'm sorry.

Fredi Dworkin: Boston.

Mary Rizzo: Boston, that's right. Okay. I thought it was Massachusetts, but okay—Boston on Zoom for the Queer Newark Oral History Project. This is the first session. Fredi, again, thank you so much for reaching out to us and for sitting down for this conversation. As you know, we have a set series of questions that we ask, but anything that you don't wanna answer, you don't have to. Anything that you think that I've missed, please throw it in, and we can just go as the conversation flows. You were already talking a little bit about your growing up in Newark. Why don't we just start with that? If you can just let me know, tell us when and where you were born, to start off.

Fredi Dworkin: Okay, so I was born in New York City, and thinking of that, I'm wondering where my parents were living, whether they were living with my—both my grandmas lived in Manhattan, and both my parents went—they met at City College in the late '40s. I was born in New York, and I realized just this morning that I didn't realize, why was I born in New York, and when did we come to Newark, but they came to Newark shortly afterwards. What's interesting about my grandma—my two grandmas is that my—I had one grandma who was—they were both Jewish, and one was very left. That was my father's mother. He was very political before he went to City College.

My mother, who was a couple years younger, three years younger, her parents were immigrants. Her older sister [*coughs*—excuse me. Her older sister was born just before they got on the boat to come to the U.S. They were really new immigrants, so I joke with my friends now that I have good *yichus*, which is the Yiddish word for where you come from, because I had the lefty grandma, and I had the bubbie grandma, although we didn't call her bubbie, but she was very much the cook, and the nurturer, and all that kinda stuff. Little hysterical from her about safety and things like that, whereas my other grandma was more urbane and more Americanized.

Anyway, I grew up in Newark in Clinton Hill for my first six years. I already knew that my parents—well, my father was probably mostly working or getting his master's at Rutgers in engineering, but I knew that my parents were political, and my mom was a community—was involved in community things in integration and so on. I was born in '54, so this is the late '50s. Addonizio was the mayor, and Spina was the police chief. There was a lot—as the mayor, he was very much an old-time democratic machine guy, like Daly. Even though he was a Democrat, he wasn't liberal at all. I think what my mother was involved in at that time—I would go to meetings with her.

When I was a little older, I would tell my friends I had been in more churches than synagogues, and I was proud of that. We never went to synagogue, but that the churches were really for political meetings. That's why we were going, and they mixed black and white, as far as I know, and so on. I think my class was mixed, also. I just went there for kindergarten. Then, we moved to Weequahic in 1960, the beginning of 1960, which was a Jewish neighborhood. For those listening, it's where Phillip Roth wrote a lot about from 30 years earlier, but it was still a very Jewish, and where we lived, middle-class neighborhood. In other parts, it was middle class.

In our direct neighborhood, we lived in one-family houses, but a couple blocks over, there were triple-deckers, or two apartment things. They were still middle class, but in the sense of being secure, but just to say how Jewish the neighborhood was, we had the first black kids in our class. There might've been others in our year, but in our class, when I was in fourth grade, which would've been—I would've been 10, so it was 1964. My parents kept me home for the holidays 'cause they said, "We should respect them," which is Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana, but for Shvues, all my friends stayed home, which is a little holiday. All my friends stayed home, and I was mad that I had to go to school. My mother said to me, "Oh, you go to temple, or you go to school." Get off your ass and go to school. She wouldn't use the word ass, but so my Jewishness was very much defined as a cultural, but anyway.

I went to school, and there was this black kid there, and he said to me, "Are you a Negro or a Jew?" because everybody—the 30 kids in the class, 28 of them, or 27 of them were Jewish, and most of them were out of school that day. We had maybe a couple black kids, and one or two Catholic kids, or Catholic, Protestant, but that was it. It was a Jewish neighborhood growing up. Our block, we

had a family on the—it was Stengel and—actually, I think the other one was Porter Street. It was this little block between—Lyons and Bergen was the big corner, and Weequahic Park was below. Stengel Avenue was just a long block down to Weequahic Park at the bottom of the street.

This little block of Stengel Avenue and Porter Street had a lot of people who were community activists. It turns out that the family that I thought was not political—and I actually don't know the whole story. I'll have to ask my sister and brother, if people knew each and then moved in. I think that that was part of it. The family that I thought—that was in our circle that I thought wasn't political were the H. family. He had become very left, and then been pursued. They had to go underground. Bobby, who was my age, his son thought that every time you moved, you changed your name. They were apparently very left but had had such a hard time during McCarthyism that they had gone underground. The parents are now turned to other things.

They were probably just exhausted, but the other parents, one of the things I grew up with—and I should've looked up the year, but we can look it up later—well, we were involved in all kinds of community groups. We also had a close little friendship community there, so we would block off the street once a year, and have our bikes out and picnic tables, and barbecue and stuff like that, but all the parents, quote, unquote, which is the parents that were friends of my parents, were involved in—oh, in Clinton Hill, my mother was involved in the community, in Clinton Hill Community Council, I believe. I'm not sure that's the exact name, which was probably working on schools, and police issues, and things like that. That I wasn't so aware of. I was just aware of the people around us and going to these meetings.

My parents also talked to us about why they were doing what we were doing. Again, I used to joke with my friends later that I learned to be a good Jew meant you didn't cross the picket line. That was very much what I was hearing even younger, like before six, in Clinton Hill. I had some sense of that. Actually, the first demonstration that I remember going to—I'm sure it wasn't—was when we were six, we were in New York at a Ban the Bomb thing, and it was freezing cold. It was the middle—it was January. My father offered to take me into a little luncheonette or something, and I bought ice cream. Then, I came out to the cold demo with this ice cream, and everybody was laughing at me 'cause I was this little girl with her ice cream. That's the first one I remember. That's about when we moved to Stengel Avenue.

One interesting little thing about buying that—well, two things about buying that house on Stengel Avenue. One is that my mom told me later that they almost didn't get a mortgage, and the cost of the house was \$13,000. That's about what my father made a year. This is for a four-bedroom house, and he was just an engineer. He was in his early 30s at the time, '68. He would've been 33, and we had a nice backyard. We had a front yard, so things were very different economically then.

When I say that we were middle class, they could buy a home, and my mother said they were almost turned down for a mortgage. The other thing is, is that my father went for a job interview, and it went very, very well, around the same time. Then, they had a knock on the—no. Then, I guess that they were called right afterwards and told that he didn't have the job. This they told me when I was a little older, when I was a middle school kid or something, or maybe in high school—that they think that the FBI made a phone call.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, wow.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. My parents weren't—I've never gotten their Freedom of Information Act. They were in the Party and had gone to a factory in '51 somewhere in Ohio, in Cincinnati, or Cleveland, or someplace, with my brother, who was a little boy. It didn't work out very well, and actually, I didn't know until my mom—until the last 10 years or so, my mom told me that they had been sent by the party to Newark. I had always assumed we grew up in Newark because their families were in New York. Their mothers were in New York City, and it turns out that they were—but I think when they moved to Newark, which was 1960, that—I mean mid-'50s—that they were already really leaving the party and just becoming community organizers.

Then, when we moved to Stengel Avenue, and I don't know exactly when this started. My mother started something called—well, first of all, they were involved in the Weequahic Community Council. Again, she told me much later, just fairly recently, that they had been trained in the Saul Alinsky Model, which I hadn't known. She had never mentioned that—of community organizing, which I guess was a building community organizations as a way of putting left politics in—organizing around the issues of the day for people, kind of. Again, *[distorted audio 00:14:07]* and so on.

The Weequahic Community Council, they were some of the founders, and my mother established the education committee. I think she had done work on education, also, in Clinton Hill. That grew into what was called the Newark Committee for Better Public Schools. I would joke with—and I've tried to look up the records. Unfortunately, when they moved, she had a lot of Newark Committee for Better Public—for the committee, she had a lot, a lot of data, and these big, fat books of maps and data from the school system and so on, in the basement in Newark. Apparently, it got lost when we moved, which is really unfortunate because that kind of social history isn't gonna be documented anywhere.

By the time I thought to document her, she already had early stages of dementia and really couldn't say much, but one of the people she worked with very closely—and I don't know if it was at Newark Committee or not—is Derek Winans, who I just saw is in your project. I think there might've been another gay man who died from drowning. I don't know if that was Derek who also was involved. My mother was involved—who knew my mother. They were close. Derek was very active with my mother. I would tell my friends up here in Boston later that she had a really great organizing model. The Newark Committee was this kind of very straightforward—on the surface. They would go down to City Hall all the time and testify and organize about keeping—the big thing in the '60s was keeping classroom size small 'cause it was going up over 30 per classroom.

I heard a lot about that, and also, I had some sense that kids in other neighborhoods—our local school, which was Maple Avenue, was all Jewish kids and academic, and not an issue, really, but I learned from my mother that other schools weren't so well-funded and well-run. She was very active, and I used to joke, again, when I was older, that the other part of my parents' plan that was very wise was they had a bunch of eight- and nine-year-olds, being us. We would sit around the dining room table, and lick stamps, and do mailings for them. We loved it. We thought it was fun. This is in the days of mimeographs and so on. That was very helpful for them. They also formed—she was very busy with Newark Committee. It was basically a full-time job for her that she wasn't paid for, but we could live on my father's salary, and that's partly how they split the family work, but she was really out of the house a lot, and while we were in school, certainly, but she also sent us to the Y, the Jewish Y after school because she had a lot to do. She was really the central person.

Oh, what I was gonna say about the model was that they had a board that represented all these churches, and synagogues, and community groups, and so on. The Newark Committee could speak on behalf of this whole community movement, which was very smart, but she was really the central person, and the people she worked with closely, which I think included Derek, to get the work done and to hold conferences and things like that, but she had the power of all these other groups behind her. I think that they had impact. I know that Addonizio hated her, and Spina, everybody hated 'cause he was disgusting, the police chief. He was really disgusting, and there was a lot of stuff about police and so on.

Mary Rizzo: Can I just—I just wanna—if you don't mind, can I just ask a couple of just detail questions?

Fredi Dworkin: Sure.

Mary Rizzo: What were the names—yeah, I just wanna get the names of your parents, just to make sure we have the names, their names.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. They were Donald Dworkin, and my mother's name—had an unusual name. Her name was Nadaline, with an N, like for Nancy. We think it's because her father probably had a very heavy accent when he went in 'cause he had only been in this country for a few years at that point, three years or so. When he went in to set up her birth certificate, we think that it was misunderstood or whatever. That was her name, N-A-D-A-L-I-N-E. Yeah, so you can ask me some more specific questions 'cause I have lots of stories.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, no. It's great. You also mentioned, so you had a brother and a sister, I think you said. Can you just—what were their names, and what was your—the age ranges. Who was the oldest, and the middle, and all of that?

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. We have a picture of us. We were in the paper when I was seven. I think my brother has the picture now since my mom died, and my sister, Naomi, was three, and she's now up in Boston and a psychiatrist. My brother, Steve, was a few years older than me, so when we had that photo taken, he was 10. The three of us are lined up, and I had said we went to this antinuclear demonstration. My parents had—I should research this more, but they gave us strontium 90 pills, which I know nothing about. *[Distorted audio 00:21:01]* my sister now 'cause she's more scientific, having gone to med school.

There was this article in the paper about us taking these strontium 90 pills because the water—or, maybe it was just fluoride pills. I don't know. I'm mixed up 'cause I was just a kid, and the fluoride in the water was—or, maybe they worked for fluoride in the water, but they were concerned about nuclear bombs, and this was a way of keeping us healthy in case, something like that. Who knows what was behind all that?

Then, I also had a picture as part of a picket on City Hall's steps when I was a little older, when I was about 10 or 11 with our friends, the Greenbergs, who had kids the same age as us and were very, very close with our parents. They were lifelong friends, the Greenbergs and my parents, and my sister still is very close to their daughter, one of their daughters. They had four daughters. Those of us in the middle range of age were picketing for something with schools, and there was a picture in the—I think it was before the "Star Ledger", whatever the—oh, the "Newark Evening News." We had a picture in there, too, and my brother probably has a copy of that, so at some point, we can try to find it. We were very involved in their life. I'm sorry. Did you wanna ask me anything else?

Mary Rizzo: Well, no. If you wanna just keep—if you wanna keep going, that's great. I think you've definitely already hit on several of our background questions, so that's great 'cause we are interested in your memories of the neighborhoods that you lived in and the differences between them. Oh, and I guess, too, since it sounds like you were—were you still living in Newark when the uprising, the riot—it's called different things—happened in '67?

Fredi Dworkin: Yep.

Mary Rizzo: Yeah, what was that like?

Fredi Dworkin: Well, let me jump to that later 'cause that's a little later. The other big thing politically was that my parents were very involved in—this is why I was gonna say I have to look up the year. Before Kenny Gibson became mayor, four years before, he ran as part of the New Jersey Freedom Democratic Party. He was the mayoral candidate. This was probably in 1964, and us kids, we did lots of mailings and lots of activities, leafleting, and stuff like that. Us kids got to go in the car with the bullhorn on top and say, "Vote for Kenny Gibson." We just loved that, but we also knew what the politics were. We understood, this is my upbringing is we understood that people needed to—this is what our friends and family did then. It was the right thing to work for everybody, for

justice for everybody in Newark. That was very much our upbringing.

I remember asking—two funny things that show—well, three funny things that show that I still had a kid's understanding. I had this very mature understanding, but also a kid's understanding. One was, I was riding back in the car—in the back of a car with my friend, J. J. said to—and their parents were in this same community. They lived somewhere else, but they lived a few blocks away. J. said to me, "There's ghettos in Newark." I said, "There aren't ghettos in Newark," 'cause my image was where I lived or even Clinton Hill, which was two-family houses but still nice. J. said, "Yes, there are ghettos in Newark," and I didn't know that when I was young, so I was probably eight or nine when she said that to me.

Then, when I was in fifth grade, so that's maybe 1965, we went down to D.C. for this big—it was so huge to me, 25,000-person march against the war. My mom came back to—she had been somewhere else in the demo and came back to us and was upset. We said, "Why are you upset?" She said, "They're beating on the SDS kids." She said, the Students for a Democratic Society. I was very confused because I knew Johnson was a Democrat. We had worked hard against Goldwater, and I knew Johnson was who we wanted to vote for. She tried to explain [the difference between SDS 'democrats' and LBJ as a 'democrat'] to me, but we were in the middle of the street then, so I don't think—in the middle of the demo and I was still baffled by why LBJ would beat up other Democrats!

The other funny thing that relates to coming out later was that that trip, I wore—that was probably the last year I wore these—I wanna curse—crinolines under my skirt, like these stiff, stiff crinolines. I think by the time—I never liked them, but we didn't wear pants in those days for birthday parties or anything. I think maybe I was a little teenage, if I had worn them—even though I was younger than that, if I had worn them in D.C. 'cause my parents wouldn't have cared if I had worn pants in D.C., but I wore those crinolines, still, and the skirt, so maybe I was beginning to get a little fem but not really. It didn't last very long.

By the time I was in seventh grade, I had been begging my mom for loafers, and by seventh grade, she said, "Okay. Now you can have loafers." What did I buy? I bought hiking boots instead, by seventh grade. It shows from fifth grade to seventh grade, but the little dyke was comin' out. Anyway, we also went to a Sunday

school. It wasn't a Workers' Circle Sunday school. I'm very active in Workers' Circle now, which is an old, Jewish socialist, or progressive organization from the early 1900s, but we went to—I think it was the IWO, a different set of—they're called *shules*, Yiddish schools. That was where we went for our Jewishness.

At Sunday school, in our history class, we talked about what was happening down South. That was what history was, nothing to do with the Bible. My sister, who's four years younger got Bible stories. We got no Bible stories. We were told, essentially, that if you're a good Jew, that this is our way of being Jewish is that we fight for justice, and we learned about Freedom Summer, and my parents were giving me books, and so on, and so on.

We sang a song that I still remember called "Die Gedanken Sind Frie," "my thoughts are my power." It was from German soldiers of World War I, which is a little ironic, but the English version of it is, "My thoughts are my power. No scholar can map them. No tyrant can trap them. We are free. Our thoughts are our own." That was my anthem. Then, later when I came out, I said—my mom was upset cause my brother was already, at that time, out. I said, "Ma, you taught us to be proud about being different. What do you expect?" That was kind of—the Sunday school was part of that, and all these other friends, the Greenbergs and so on, we all went to the same *shule*. It was actually very boring, but I learned a lot of my ethos from there.

I forget what the third thing was where I misunderstood about my leftist—what I understood in my head about this progressive view and what I understood as a kid were not well-meshed, but I forget what the other thing is. It might come up again, but I think it's pretty clear that it was very—my family was very political, and so were the friends' families. My parents were proud, or happy, that we lived on a, quote, unquote, integrated block 'cause integration was still a thing then. The family of color on our block who were friends of ours were the Flaggs. Alma Flagg was assistant superintendent, I think, in Newark. Her daughter, Lois—then Lois. She's changed her name since then—was about a year older than me. We all hung out together.

Then, during the riots, quote, unquote, our block was fairly removed from them. We were in the South Ward, and the part of the South Ward that was closest to the center of the city, one of the first five people or so who died was shot there, but it was mostly in the Central Ward that the active stuff was going on, but I remember driving to New York, and my mom driving us to New

York, and looking back and seeing the smoke over the city. I think that was the first time that I saw it, but there was a tank on our corner, and two stories.

The more important story was that Lois Flagg's older brother was stopped by the soldiers as he came in with groceries. He lived on the block, and he was the only kid who was ever stopped that we heard of. I heard that. I didn't know that. I didn't see it, but my mother made sure to tell us 'cause I was 13 by that time. Yeah, so I think we knew what was going on. We had already gone to a lot of demonstrations about Spina. I'm trying to think about—we already knew about police brutality, which is what started the insurrection was this cab driver being beaten up by the police. We felt physically safe, but we also knew—we understood what was happening.

We also went down—the kids also went down to the Newark Museum. We took the bus that ran along—I don't know the street in front of the Weequahic. I don't remember anymore what street that's called, but that bus would take us right down to the museum and the library, but we would go to the museum. I have some artwork, apparently, that was in the museum, so one of these days, I keep saying I'll dig it up from when I was six, but we would go—the kids would go down as a group every Saturday morning. Also, a little bit, we went to the library to do research when we were older because when I moved to Maplewood when I was 14, one of the shocks for me was that these kids had never gone to Newark, including to the Mosque [Theater], which was later Symphony Hall, or to the museum, or the library. It was like, I don't know, 15 minutes away. It was like, "What?" It was such a culture shock.

My last year in Newark—oh, I also wanna mention just in passing that when I was a little girl, my father—well, my father played in the New Jersey Symphony until it became professional 'cause he felt he had to keep his other job. He played cello. The symphony was performing, and I got to meet Thurgood Marshall when I was six years old at the Mosque. I still remember this big guy. I don't know how much of it is memory and how much of it is recreated, but that was—later, when I realized who he was, it was so touching to me. It's very much a Newark memory for me. It has to do with Newark and where I—and all that, and what my parents were doing in Newark. There were some ways that I grew up very white in Newark still, but with some awareness of the larger picture. I also don't know when the—oh, "The Troublemakers," do you know that film?

Mary Rizzo: I do, yeah, actually. I've seen it, yeah.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah, my dad is in it, just in passing at a cocktail party.

Mary Rizzo: Really?

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. I was gonna get a copy for my mother when she was about 80, and I never got around to it 'cause she would've loved to see my father 'cause my parents, in their 30s were the old people raising money, with having the equivalent of a rent party to raise money for the SDS NCUP [Newark Community Union Project] kids. 00:36:17. NCUP was happening, I think, while we were in Newark still. Another story from Newark, and this will be my last one, and then I'll say something about Weequahic High School, too, when I went there one year. What was I thinking of? Oh, so my parents were next door at the Greenbergs having one of these kind of parties for—I think for the Community Council or for somebody.

Stan Winters, who was part of our group, might've been running. I think he was actually running for South Ward committee man. Oh, and in Clinton Hill, we were friends with the Aronowitzs, with Stan and Jane Aronowitz. Jane was his wife at that time, and we were friends with his daughters and stuff. We were very close. I think he's just died. I always kept meaning to write to him to say, "I'm Nadaline's daughter," blah, blah, blah, blah, and say hello. His daughter, Nona, I think—she's a feminist. I don't know if she's a lesbian, but she's a feminist, his daughter that he had much later. Anyway, so—oh, so they were having one of these parties, and there was a table, a coffee table there where my girlfriend, Carol Greenberg, was standing behind the coffee table handing people drinks so they'd throw five dollars in the bucket for—not for the drink, really, but for Stan.

They got wind of—the other side got wind of this, and so they raided the party. The kids were at my house with a babysitter, probably, and I can still see my mom at the back glass door laughing her head off and saying—knocking on the door to open it and saying, "We all got arrested, but don't worry. It won't be a problem." We're like, "What is going on?" She was clearly not worried, so we weren't worried. I'm sure it was just—it was like harassment of them. Yeah, so that was part of it.

That was a Newark story, so my last year in Newark, I went to Columbia High School, which was totally different. Not Columbia, Weequahic, which was totally different. My seventh and eighth

grades were tracked, so we had tracking in the school. There were four classes of seventh graders and four classes of eighth graders. The top class, the academic class, was all white, had maybe two black kids each year. The second class was half and half. The third and the fourth class were all black. It [racist tracking] was very obvious.

In eighth grade, I went back to see my second-grade teacher, who I adored. I was running an errand for somebody, and I said hello to her. She used to have us bring in plants or leaves and identify them. She had all these test tubes up on the wall and would tell us—would write maple leaf or oak leaf. When I went to see her in the classroom five years later, six years later, I noticed it was gone. I asked her about it. Her name was Mrs. Kesselman. I'm sure she's dead, so I can say that. She said to me—and her class were black kids, who were very well-dressed, *et cetera, et cetera*, looked just like us but were blacks, or at that time, Negros.

I said to her, "Where are the tubes?" She said, "These little monkeys can't even read and write. This is second grade." My jaw fell. I was old enough to realize, probably more than she—I don't even think she realized how racist that was to say that particular term, besides that the kids that she was having a hard time because the kids were different kids to educate, possibly, than we were. I would like to think that if she had heard herself, that she would've chosen at least a different word, but it was just shocking to me that she would say that. I'm sure I told my parents that. I was like, "Whoa."

All the other white kids went to Music and Arts [high school], a few of them, or to private school, or moved to the suburbs between eighth and ninth grade, but my mother said to me, or my parents said to me, "Do you wanna go to Weequahic, or we could send you to the Little Red School House, a private school in New York?" Of course, now, I wished that I had gone to the private school, in a way, because I didn't realize how—Bill—what's his name from New York—Bill DeBlasio's wife—ex-wife—went there. She's probably my age. Anyway, it was a very progressive school in Greenwich Village, but it seemed crazy to me to go an hour into New York and an hour to come back, so I went to Weequahic.

I had one white friend, who was very different than me. Her brothers were druggies. She was a hippie. She and I were having lunch one day. I tried to sit with her during lunch 'cause I was just kinda overwhelmed. She said, "Oh, yeah. I [*distorted audio 00:43:05*]." She must've been 15 years old. I was very much out of

place there. I had a younger sister. My brother had already—he left Weequahic. He was three years older than me, and he had left, actually, before his senior year and gone to California to join a commune, and also because of the draft, so he never graduated from high school, so they never knew about him because they looked at the senior roles, I guess, to get—so, that was a big deal in our family because my parents were very worried about him.

We were one of the last—Newark, the South Ward had—we had the first black kids at *[distorted audio 00:44:04]* in fourth grade, and by ninth grade, all the white kids had moved out, four years. I think that there are a lot of things behind that. I think that happened to a lot of Jewish neighborhoods for a variety of reasons. There've been books written up here in Boston. I think that part of it was economic, that the families were getting solid enough financially to move to the suburbs—the Jewish families, but I don't think that that was the whole picture by any means.

One thing at Weequahic was that in the North Ward, which was working-class Italian, they were beating up on black kids, or on other kids. The students were having a march out, and this is—we moved in June of '68, so this is some time in that '67, '68 year. It was like all the students from all the high schools were walkin' out in sympathy with the kids who were walkin' out in the North Ward. My girlfriend, Carol, and I walked out with them, and so we're marching along with all these black kids down to City Hall, and our friends and other kids *[distorted audio 00:45:31]*. Why are you walking with us? Why do you think we're walking with you? 'Cause you're protesting.' 'Cause you're doin' the right thing, and we're with ya. *[Distorted audio 00:45:47]*. It was a nice moment for me. It was probably also a nice moment 'cause I felt in my own skin then, and even though I was among all these kids who were different than me, and day-to-day different than me in a way that I found scary or difficult, but this was great, and that went out very well. Bringing this all up, it makes me wanna go into the newspaper archives and look at the reporting and all that.

Mary Rizzo:

Oh, for sure.

Fredi Dworkin:

Yeah. We were around during the flames and stuff of the insurrection, but my brother just read this book by Bob Curvin. He was another one of my mother's friends who worked very closely, and he's written a—my brother said it was a very dense book about here. The other person I want to mention, who is in your archives, is Abby Malmgreen's daughter. Abby, the mom, and my mother worked together closely. Abby's mother was—Abby was a judge,

and so she was not doing the same kind of organizing that my mother does, but they did—I'm sure when my mom was trying to get things done in City Hall, that Abby would've been one of her consultants, I would guess, for—her name was thrown around a lot, so I know that she was involved in doing things with my mom.

Then, I called her daughter recently to ask her to do an archive interview with my mom, Gayle Malmgreen, who is in your archives, but it was too confusing, and my mom's dementia had already really started. I don't think we were—'cause I'm really sad that [*distorted audio 00:48:13*]. Oh, you know, I just realized another story that I have, when I was thinking, I don't have any lesbian stories from Newark. My visual memory is from the house on Stengel Avenue, so I was only 13 or 14 when I had this—that this memory is from, and I think I was talking a lot.

I guess I was learning about feminism, not [*distorted audio 00:48:56*] feminism, so I don't know what I was thinking of 'cause the first march that I remember being large was 1970, so maybe this didn't happen, but I said something to my mom about sexism in women, something like that. I was trying to tell her about what I was thinking about what we would now call women in oppression. My mom looked at me, and she says, "Yeah, but it's not—" part of her response at least, the only part I remember was that she said to me—and I'm sure she listened to me because they were very interested in us being political, or being leftist in our views, but one thing she said was, "But black people get murdered for being black," 'cause I knew about lynching.

I would thumb through the family of—oh, my brother has the Danny Lyon's book. He's the photographer behind this new [*audio cuts out 00:50:05*] movement book about—so, he had that in our house, and I looked at that a lot, about the early [*distorted audio 00:50:23*] about the organizing. My father had probably already given me the "Freedom Summer", so I knew about lynching, and I said to my mom, and then not many years later when I was, I think, 23, I started working in a battered women's shelter.

Then, I realized I was [*distorted audio 00:50:58*]. I didn't know about it. Later, I [*distorted audio 00:51:15*] with women, with African Americans, or now, even about those of us who weren't violated or had friends who were violated by their partners. It was just an inter—I was startled when my mom said that to me, and I kinda felt it wasn't right. Yeah, [*distorted audio 00:51:53*]. Not that I've left, left moving to my own movement, what meant a lot

to me personally, feminism, in those early days. It's just interesting that she [*distorted audio 00:52:13*].

Mary Rizzo: It's a great answer.

Fredi Dworkin: [*Distorted audio 00:52:15*].

Mary Rizzo: Sorry. You're breaking up a little bit for me now. I don't know. Do you wanna try turning your video off, and maybe that'll make the audio—'cause there's a lot of breaking up right now with the audio. Maybe that'll make that a little bit better 'cause I don't wanna miss—

Fredi Dworkin: Is that better? [*Distorted audio 00:52:39*].

Mary Rizzo: Oh, it still doesn't sound great.

Fredi Dworkin: Does it sound better?

Mary Rizzo: Yeah, it does sound still very—

Fredi Dworkin: Okay, let me see—okay. What I usually do is my phone, and the video, so hold on.

Mary Rizzo: Yeah, it's not great.

Fredi Dworkin: I have to go back into my email to get the Zoom. Yeah.

Mary Rizzo: That's much, much, much better. Awesome.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah, so I'm talking through my phone, and I'm looking at you through my screen.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, perfect. Okay, so let's fingers crossed. Let's hope. Let me ask a little bit, since we started talking a little bit about sexuality. I understand that you left Newark when you were pretty young, but did you have any memories, or do you have any memories of LGBTQ people in Newark? Was there any sort of sense that there were gay people when you were growing up, or is that something that you sort of came to realize, not just about yourself, but also that this existed later?

Fredi Dworkin: Well, I didn't know consciously, but the fact that as soon as I thought of Hilda, I said, "Oh, she's a lesbian." I should say how I got to meet Hilda. When I was in about fifth or sixth grade, or seventh or eighth grade, somewhere around there, I began tutoring

at a community agency. Hilda was also in the larger circle of my parents' activist friends. She might've been at that party and been arrested. Who knows? This is Hilda Hidalgo. Hilda wore pants, like khakis, with a belt. Later, I could—that was my indication. To my young dyke self, she looked butchy, to my young dyke self when I was a little older. I knew right away.

The funny thing was, when I—and I knew that—I sort of knew, but again, it wasn't—I don't think it was named, that one of the men involved with my mother in the—involvement in the Newark Committee, was gay. You can just see—he's seemed gay, to use a poor word. I don't know that that's the best word to use, 'cause he probably wasn't, but there was enough there that I picked up on. I don't think my mother ever said anything directly. Then, when I went back to visit Hilda when I was about 20, so in the mid-70s, part of what we talked about was she told me, from my parents' circle, who was homophobic and who wasn't. That was interesting.

I think, in general, that she felt like some people were more uncomfortable with her than others. I think she felt comfortable enough with people like my parents, who kept their mouth shut, kind of. It's not like they—they probably knew who her partner was but didn't talk about it with her, that kinda stuff. It was accepted, quote, unquote, but I don't think, especially from my parents—when I came out later, my father said to me something that I thought was actually very perceptive, especially 'cause my father wasn't a big talker at all, except about things he was excited about, like chess, and politics, and music, and things. He didn't do baseball and all that kinda stuff, but the things he was interested in, he talked about, but personal things, no.

He said something that I thought was very perceptive when I came out when I was like—to them, when I was 19 or 20. He said, "You know, this isn't something that we grew up with," which I thought was taking responsibility for his own discomfort, and I thought that was very perceptive of him to know that his discomfort was wrong, or wasn't—that he didn't agree with it. He just was acknowledging it and knowing where and acknowledging that it was—it might be what people more recently have gone through—some people—first meeting trans people. Now it's so common, but at first, I think for many of us who are not trans, it was sort of like—I know certainly for me, it was—I had this disconcerting reaction that I didn't feel comfortable with, and I had more of an analysis than my father did about where that came from, but I do think that it is hard to make those switches from one sense of knowledge to another, but that was fun that Hilda talked to me about that.

I think I sorta knew there were a lot of women running this agency, but I don't think I knew much more than that. A funny story about visiting with Hilda was that my mother drove—I asked my mom to drive me after I arranged it with Hilda. Hilda said, "Of course you can come visit." I told her I was Nadaline's daughter, and I said, "I've just come out," and, "Oh, come visit me." My mom drove me down to her house. Her partner had already died. She showed me her creche. She said with her creche 'cause she had been brought up—she was Puerto Rican and Catholic in her upbringing. She said, "We bought two, and we took out all of the men, and we put all the women there."

It was funny, but even before I got there, my mom said to me, "Can I come in with you?" 'cause she probably hadn't seen Hilda for a number of years. I said, "No," because I knew that we would have a totally different conversation if she came in the house. I did not want my mom there. She could call on her own, and I'm sure Hilda would've enjoyed seeing her, but not—when I was a baby dyke, I was out. Hilda had—what's in that little photo that I haven't found, is that Donna Summer's "I Will Survive" was very big in the bars, 'cause it had an "I Will Survive" button with the labrys on it, and I loved her button. Oh, I had to get one of those, and she handed it to me, so I'm wearing it in the picture as a baby dyke with my arm around Hilda, but even before I got into her house, I couldn't find her house.

They all had a lot of steps, and the numbers were up on the front porch with a couple of the steps. I was having trouble finding her house, and then I saw a house that had, in the window of the front door, "This House Protected by Attack Cats," and there were cats sleeping on the mat. I thought, "Aw, this is Hilda's house," and I knocked on the door, and I laughed 'cause also, that was something that was—that particular graphic image was also just around in the feminist, lesbian feminist community kinda thing. I already knew it, so it was like, "Yay, Hilda." I felt very connected to her.

Mary Rizzo: That's interesting. You—

Fredi Dworkin: I didn't—

Mary Rizzo: Yeah.

Fredi Dworkin: Go ahead.

Mary Rizzo: No, I was just gonna say, so it's interesting. You knew her when you were a child, or young, very young person, right, and she was already an adult. Then, when you come out, you went back to talk to her. What made you wanna go talk to her in particular? What were you hoping to get out of that conversation?

Fredi Dworkin: Let me turn off the audio for a moment, and I have to use the bathroom.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, yeah. Go ahead. Back on. Okay, go ahead.

Fredi Dworkin: Okay, so first of all, the crinoline story was when I was in fifth grade, and I must've been around that age, or just a year or two older when I was tutoring, I assume. I might've been in fourth grade, but as soon as—the fact that she was wearing khakis and this leather belt, I didn't know cognitively, or logically, what that meant when I was a kid, but she was dressed differently than—my mom and her friends would wear pants day to day, but not when they—not to work kinda thing. I think I knew just a few years later, when I was older, that she was out. Not only did I—or, maybe I asked my mother. I might've actually—I probably asked my mother, and my mother said, "Oh, yeah. I knew that about Hilda," and from that, I knew that that she was out.

I probably did ask her before calling her just 'cause I talked to my mother—at that time, I talked to my mother a lot more often. I was probably about 20 or 21, so I was pretty newly out, but I must've been in Boston because I knew disco. I pretty much came out when I came to Boston. Actually, I was thinking about it. I had inklings when I was at Antioch in my—I went to Antioch for a few years, and I had inklings, but it was scary to me. I can talk more about that, but by the time I moved to Boston after about two or three years at Antioch, I was getting much more comfortable with it. Then, when I first—I think I already thought of myself as probably a lesbian but hadn't said it out loud because I remember it very distinctly in Boston. This was 1978, so maybe it was after that that I went to visit Hilda.

I was in the kitchen of the battered women's shelter that we were—we had this radical feminist battered women's shelter, and it was one of the first in the country, if not the first, called Transition House. We had this little closet off the kitchen that had the emergency line. My friend, Peggy, was sitting there with her feet up on the desk and laughing, and with her red curls, and she was wearing these red pants with big, white polka dots, and she was laughing her head off. I remember saying to myself, "Peggy's a

lesbian, and she's happy, so I can be a lesbian, too." It was like the moment I crossed over, officially, in my—really let it in.

I think a lot of it was that I had felt queer, not as we use it now, but like uncomfortable as a kid. The idea of another discomfort—this is in the early '70s. Actually, I went to potlucks at Antioch, the gay potlucks, and I liked the people there, so I guess I was out, in a way, to myself, but I wasn't comfortable with it 'cause I didn't wanna be on the outside again, even though when I came out to my mom, when my brother was already out, I said to her, "Well, you taught us to be proud about being different. What did you expect?" She did.

What I wanted to say, too, about going to *shule*, was I was very aware that all the other regular kids went to Hebrew school, and I didn't go to Hebrew school. I went to Yiddish lefty school. I knew that, and my—I was very comfortable being different in that way, but I had a personal sense of discomfort with myself from the dynamics in my family and so on. I think I still heard somewhat of gay people as being—not that I really thought that they were unhappy, but there was a lot of discomfort in the air publicly, still. I didn't wanna be something bad, kind of. I already felt bad about myself, or something like that.

Even though I went to this potluck a couple years before it at Antioch, and this really butchy dyke gave me this book. She said, "You should read this book." I said, "Is it okay if I come to the potluck even if I don't know if I'm a lesbian?" They all laughed, and they said, "Of course you can," 'cause they knew I was a baby dyke. I was all of 17, or 18, or 19 then. Then, that was very young. Now, the kids—but this was way before anybody was on TV or said the word out loud much. This very butchy lesbian at that potluck, or at the regular meeting—it was like a meetup kinda thing—handed me "Patience and Sarah," or "Ruby Fruit Jungle," one of the two. I don't remember. I think it was "Patience and Sarah." She's like, "Go home and read this."

That helped, too, because it's women loving women, and it was great. I was happy about it, but seeing Peggy was a very important moment. I think a lot of—by the time I went to Hilda, I was just thrilled to have the chance to talk to her. I was totally thrilled, and we laughed. She gave me a whole lesbian view of my childhood. It was just terrific. It was like, "Yeah, I'm a dyke. I'm a dyke. I'm a dyke." I was so happy, so I must've been out in Boston for a bit at that time, and must've been to the bar if I knew what "I Will Survive" meant. We also had a radical feminist book store up here,

so I don't know exactly where in there I went to see Hilda, but by the time I called her up, I was—I remember visiting her and just having a wonderful, wonderful time, and I was so excited.

Mary Rizzo:

Yeah. That's a beautiful story. I guess I'm just struck by what I assume would've been the pretty significant age difference, right? She represented a different generation, and so I think it's just interesting for someone who was as young as you were at that moment to seek out the kind of perspective of someone who's so much older in that way. I just think that that seems really interesting to me.

Fredi Dworkin:

Well, it wasn't her perspective so much on lesbianism. I think it was more on—this was a friend of my parents. This is somebody I grew up with, and she's a lesbian. How exciting, that kinda thing, 'cause I was still young enough, and young enough as a lesbian to be excited by that. Not that I wouldn't be now. Like I said, I wanted to read Bob Curvin's book, and I'm obviously interested in Newark and all that kinda stuff, but it was like the getting together of these two worlds. I didn't mind them being separate. When I went off to Antioch, I was in a different world than my parents, and then coming out and all that kinda stuff, but it just was—it was just so much fun to have that connection with her and to my childhood, to have a lesbian view of my childhood.

It's like, people talk about sometimes, "Well, I always knew I had a gay uncle, but it was so great when I came out and got to talk to him about it, and also hear his stories of my parents," and all that kinda stuff. I think I don't know. I don't think it wasn't that I was interested in her personal perspective on being lesbian so much as that it was like communal. It was like we had this shared bond. Now, that's old hat to me. I've been out more than 50 years, or 50 years—50 years, close to 50 years, whatever, around that. Now, it's old hat to me, but then, I was just a baby dyke.

Mary Rizzo:

Right. Do you have any sense, either from that conversation with Hilda, or just looking back, about were there queer spaces in Newark where folks could gather, again, either sort of that she told you about or that you had some sense of in realizing it after the fact?

Fredi Dworkin:

No, not at all. Well, I was a kid. We moved when I was 13, so I wouldn't have heard about bars, even if I had known people. If I had known anybody, or had any sense of anybody being gay, it was people who—adults who were the one or two guys I remember from my mother's circle. I don't even know if I knew

my—I think I knew that gay people existed, kind of, but this was—I was still wearing dresses to school every day. We didn't get to wear pants until I was in 10th grade, I don't think. It was a different day, and a different age.

I remember my mother—I'm shocked now. This was from 1972. I remember my mom sitting in the backyard of our house in Maplewood and saying, "The bank turned me down for a credit card," on my father's credit. That was 1972, and now you look back at that, and you say, "Ah. How could it have been?" but that was—it wasn't long ago. Well, it was long ago, but it wasn't—that was when I was already a young adult that she had been turned down. I think she was able to get it at another place, but it made her angry, which was good. Her left-leaning politics might've come first, but she used them to build on feminist politics later.

Mary Rizzo: Right. For you, I'm interested, too, because you talked about being involved with this battered women's shelter, and then also coming out and being involved in lesbian community. What was your sense of the relationship between your feminism and your sexuality? Were there tensions between those things and how you—

Fredi Dworkin: Not at all.

Mary Rizzo: Okay.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. I just saw Jewelle—what's her last name? The woman who wrote the vampire books, Jewelle Gomez, a little picture. I was Googling something else just this morning, and she called herself a les/fem, F-E-M, and it made me laugh, but in those days, in Boston, we were lesbian feminists. Boston had a very, very active political community. We were radical feminists. A lot of us were red-diaper babies. Transition House was started. The Boston Area Red Crisis Center was started. Elizabeth Stone House, which was a shelter for women having behavior—emotional issues, who were—as an alternative to being institutionalized. Bike shops, mechanics, all kinds of things were going on, and we also had a great bar. We had two bars. We had the bar, The Saints, which was the political bar, and then there was the dance bar around the corner.

We called ourselves radical feminists. This was before Mary Daly and the separatists. I'm sure there were some separatists around, but most of us were not, or at least in my crowd, but I also don't think that Mary Daly had come on the scene yet. It was a very

public separatist thing. I just got really—well, I had a very frustrating kind of thing at my community with some young trans people who were talkin' about white feminism meaning Betty Friedan kind of feminism.

I understand perfectly their anger at TERFS, the Mary Daly types, 'cause not only do they have their opinions, but they're very loud about them. I also grew up with the politics of every human deserves justice, and so I found the TERF ideology just disgusting. In Boston in those early days, there was one woman who identified as lesbian who let it be known that she was trans, and the Mary Daly types, the separatist types in the Boston community ganged up on her. I thought that was awful. I wasn't comfortable with her, and it turned out that she was clapping me on the back, and that I never—even before I knew that she was trans, she just—it was like, why—I had met people who were butchy, but there was something that made me uncomfortable with her, and I think it was probably because she had really—she still had these—what felt like now, aspects that I didn't put it that way in my mind, but that made me feel uncomfortable. It's like, "Why are you doing that?"

Whereas, I think I already knew enough that if a butchy woman did it, I think I knew about butch/fem. I had read Joan Nestle, and met her, and stuff like that. Anyway, but I would always—even more recently, there were—we had a foofaraw here, and we have—oh, one of the elder communities puts on gay and lesbian lunches that are—every week there's another one somewhere. We had one that was basically a lesbian lunch, and men and trans women started coming, and the men were being a pain in the ass and yelled at us for being—and went to the sponsoring agency, which was run by a gay man, and complained that we were discriminating.

All of the other lunches were gay men, all of the other lunches. Not that women couldn't go, but there were—to our one, there were four or five. Then, Dale, who is the head of the agency, came and scolded us. It really pissed me off, but I noticed that the trans women coming—and this was a few years ago. I think I would feel differently now, but it was new to me to be in—sitting right next to trans women, but I would always be polite and friendly. I realize that my discomfort was my own stuff, and that even if it wasn't—and I knew, it's just so much my politics about being respectful and just to people who are outsiders, who are marginalized.

Anyway, I don't know how to put it better than that 'cause I'm having a—I'm a Jewish antizionist, and I will not talk to Jews who

are Zionist at this point 'cause they make me too angry, but this is different because I see those people as having power that they're misusing terribly. That's where my anger comes from. I guess it is the same about that they're not seeing Palestinians as people worthy of [*crosstalk 01:20:01*].

I never had a—to me, it was all the same, kind of. Also, because we were talking about systems, it wasn't Betty Friedan, middle class women can do anything. It was very much about sexism, violence against women, and the—it was a very systemic look. It was after the Lavender Menace. I came out just after that, probably, but it was—we had an analysis that being out was—because we deserve the liberation, too, and we deserve to fight the injustices that were happening, and still happening to women and to lesbians. Anyway, it's interesting. I'm getting all fired up.

Mary Rizzo:

Yeah. Did you experience any discrimination due to your sexuality?

Fredi Dworkin:

No, because I lived in—I think the only time that I thought maybe it would impact me was in the mid-'90s, so I was already in my 40s—like I said, Boston had a very large women's community, and we would hang out together all the time. Holly Near would come, and during intermission, everybody would see each other. Hundreds of women, we all knew each other kinda thing. We'd see each other at the bar. We'd see each other in our organizing, and all that kinda stuff. New Words was a huge—the feminist bookstore, radical feminist bookstore.

It was very central to us, the women's center. I had this whole community, and so I didn't feel any need to be closeted, but at some point, 'cause I never finished getting my degree, I needed a job, and I decided to become a nanny. All of a sudden, after being out, probably in whenever, it was the first time I had some hesitation about, do I tell people. At one point, I was kinda chatting about it with people, I guess, a little bit, trying to think out loud, and this woman who was bi, who was also a nanny, told me, "Hey, I'm bi, and that's none of their business what I am. I just don't say anything about it." Then, that made me feel better that I didn't have to decide, and I didn't have to come out because it wasn't their business. If they were gonna be cranky about it, let them be cranky.

I was so comfortable that I didn't—some people, when they come out, need to announce it everywhere, but I had already been through—I had already been out for 20 years, 25 years, so it wasn't

a need to be—I didn't feel closeted by not telling them. Eventually, I began telling people because the families I would like to work for are people who would be—also, I lived in Boston, which is liberal. There was a lot of Jews in—I had one family that was Soviet Russian Jewish that I interviewed with, and I told them that I was critical of Israel. This was a long time ago, and they called me up and said, "I'm glad you told us that, and you're right. We would be uncomfortable," which was fine 'cause they have a right to their own politics, but I didn't wanna hear it, which is why I told them, but that was very different.

Mary Rizzo:

Right. Were you a nanny then—how long were you a nanny for, or have you—are you still a nanny?

Fredi Dworkin:

Twenty years. No, no, 20 years until I got sick of it. Also, a mother, these younger mothers, they were—it's almost like they needed feminism all over again. They were working, but they did all the childcare arrangements with me. Their husbands were there at the interview, but didn't do stuff around the house. It just was just getting to me, and then this whole new child—I'm very strongly child-centered, and I also encouraged my kids to be independent as well as being warm with them.

The last job that I had, it was actually two mothers 'cause I used to do twins, and then I did these two mothers. They were into micromanaging their kids at six months. It was just disgusting to me. It felt very invasive, and it also felt like—probably, I was burnt out. I know I was burnt out, so that wasn't helping, either, but I had no patience with it anymore because it's sort of like, my model of the strong, independent woman—even my friends who were heterosexual were still very on their own two feet, and so it felt like going back in the closet, even though they were heterosexual, into being not—anyway, it wasn't my vision.

That's the other idea, is that my vision of feminism—I had mentioned in the email to you about being Jewish growing up. There's this great book, that if you haven't read, you should read about—from 1990 or something by Elizabeth Ewen, E-W-E-N. You know what I'm talking about? She was talking about—she was a historian, or something aligned to that, who was comparing the stories of working women in the very early 1900s who were Jews and Italians. One of the big differences was that the Italian women were raised by patriarchs, and the Jewish women, not that there wasn't sexism, patriarchy, but our Ashkenazi culture certainly from Eastern Europe, the roles of women were very different.

You put that together on the left thing—like, my mom used to tell me all the time how Soviet women were engineers. She was so proud of that. She was talking about in the '30s and '40s, early on before communism. Women in Eastern Europe, Jewish women in Eastern Europe, had to—often were the peddlers, and the—not the peddlers, but they were public-facing, and also literate, and also loud-mouthed and encouraged to have opinions, which Italian women are also, but from a different point of view in a different way. I think that it's not coincidental that so many lesbian feminists of that decade were Jews. Many, many, many of us were Jews, and for a matter of fact, at BU, we had somebody—I don't even know who planned it, but it was about Chicago Women's Liberation, and our bodies, ourselves.

The Chicago Women's Liberation was similar to Boston, but it was 5 or 10 years before us kinda thing. The women were a little older, and more of them had been straight and never came out, and a lot of those women were also Jewish, but I think that that sense of independence and depending on yourself, not in the sense of about being—and also education. Women weren't blocked from education for decades and decades and allowed to have thoughts and feelings, even though—all that kinda stuff, that culture was really a rich source of—and also, we're trying to—this greatest movement of queer, lefty Jews is also into Torah a lot. There's a lot of Torah organizations now, queer Torah things. Some of us are trying to tell them, and they're not hearing it.

There's one person who's big in that community who's very big in Yiddishkeit. Yiddishkeit isn't about Yiddish, just, but that from the 1880s up through McCarthyism, up until McCarthyism, that there was a very Jewish left that I was brought up in, and even people who aren't brought up in it, knew about it kinda thing. Nobody has a clear answer. People have partial answers about why Jews were so particularly active in the labor movement, *et cetera, et cetera*, and in the left movement, but there was a long history of it, and I was lucky enough to get it post-McCarthyism because obviously, that was very challenging for a lot of families that were a little older. I didn't grow up with any Zionism at all.

I came home from the Y one day, and I asked my mother—it must've been Israel Independence Day or something 'cause I asked my mother, "Why are they all carrying flags with the Star of David on it?" I didn't know that that was Israel. *[Laughter 1:31:11]*. Yeah, I must've been like 8, or 9, or 10, or 11, and I still didn't—I knew Israel existed, but I didn't even know it to recognize the flag. I was totally puzzled by that. I guess what I'm trying to pull

together that all of these independence movements, the Jewishness, and the lefty, and the lesbian, and the radical feminists all were part of the same thing, and were trying to get the young people, who were defining their Jewishness in part, by do I identify as lefty? Do I identify as religious, and they are canceling out parts of Jewish culture.

Like I was saying—I don't know if I said this or not, but they—anyway, I don't wanna—this trans person was—this trans class that I was part of in my Jewish community, which is progressive, and very progressive and has lots of lesbians and queer people, that they were talking about white feminism as if it was Betty Friedan, and they were totally canceling my activism. That really pissed me off. Well, I said something, and they wouldn't listen to me. That really, really pissed me off.

Like at the beginning of this new radical, Jewish, queer book that just came out, which is by two rabbis and has a lot of religious stuff in it, they talk about different forms of Jewishness, and they barely touch on the tradition that I came from, which was secular with a capital S. I don't consider myself secular with a small S anymore, but I'm part of this secular movement of the boom of all these things. Anyway, I think all those movements came together and were a force in creating radical feminism as well as other things, too, other movements, and the Freedom Summer people who went down many, many, many Jews, the white people who came from lefty families. Anyway, I'm starting to go off.

Mary Rizzo: No, no it's very interesting. It sounds like there's a book that you need to write.

Fredi Dworkin: [*Crosstalk 01:33:54*]. I'm sorry. I got the connection to Newark 'cause I got all those roots in Newark.

Mary Rizzo: No, that's great.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. The [*foreign language 01:34:04*] was in East Orange, by the way, across the way from Edison.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, okay.

Fredi Dworkin: Which we weren't told then was a big antisemite. I don't think people knew that then.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, right.

Fredi Dworkin: [Crosstalk 01:34:15], right. Yeah.

Mary Rizzo: You haven't mentioned your—do you have kids, or did you ever get married, or any of that?

Fredi Dworkin: I never got married, either to a man or a woman. I had an abuse experience when I was three, and it also has to do—anyway, I don't wanna say this on tape, but anyway, 'cause it impacted—it had something to do with my mom's relationship with Newark [unintelligible 01:34:54]. But anyway, she switched me out of that daycare not knowing that I was hurting, and moved me into a Jewish nursery school, and that was much better for me. I was much more [crosstalk 01:35:07] and loved, and comfortable. Part of the story that I'm thinking about now, I've been doing a lot of very deep trauma work back to that three-year-old self very recently, and my parents and I had very tempestuous relationships. It would become tempestuous, and then it would calm down.

I'm seeing more and more about how, especially my grandmother from Eastern Europe had—my mother's mother—had a lot of trauma because I don't think she was ever in a pogrom, but she knew about them and grew up—she didn't leave until she was 25 or so, and she certainly knew the dangers, and felt them, and communicated them to us, and brought my mother up with a lot of—my mom ended up having a lot of anxiety. My father's probably came from—I don't think his stuff was so Jewish related as my mother's emotional stuff. They didn't help me very well with that three-year-old stuff.

Then, unfortunately, when I was 16, I was abused again in a very difficult way, a youth group leader who—and it was my first sexual experience. I'd kissed people before, but it was very violating, and I was very alone in it, which was really part of the terribleness of it. That's why Antioch, which I went—that was at the beginning of my senior year. I had to stay home for another year because I had been so depressed as a senior. I needed some time before going to Antioch just to unwind a little bit from the severe depression right after this experience with this man. It was over a number of months, and actually, Judy Herman, of all people, who is the founder of the sexual abuse trauma movement, said to me a few years later when I told her about this—she said, "Oh, if that's still bothering you, you should get some help." It's like, "What the fuck, Judy? What do you mean, if that's still bothering me?" He stuck a knife in me, and you're talking about if that still bothers me. Of course.

Anyway, so because of all those things, when I went to Antioch, I was sleepin' around with guys, which was fine. They were lovely men, but I carry a lot of trauma with me, and my feminism really helped because then, when I came to Boston, I could talk to people about it, and we actually did some [*unintelligible 01:38:13*], too. My love life has been—it's not been there, which is unfortunate, but there ya have it. It's just the way it is.

Mary Rizzo: Well, I'm sorry that happened to you. That's obviously very difficult, and yeah, I'm really sorry.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah. I was able to connect with the friends from that group later. One of them came—he called me up out of the blue. He met my mom folk dancing, and he asked how I was and that he was coming to Boston. I called him up before his coming up here, and I said to him, "Kit." I said, "I have something that's gonna be very heavy to tell you," 'cause everybody in the group, all the kids, he was the oldest, worked close to this man, but I knew that he would understand, and actually, some of the people had already told me, in retrospect, as soon as they got out and were in college, and I'd see them at Thanksgiving or something. Oh, that was weird what happened with so-and-so. I'm sorry I didn't say anything, but they were all—like, I was 16, 17. We didn't know, and this was before people were talking.

Kit and I had lunch together, and he was so wonderful with me. It was very healing. That was just only about 10 or 20 years ago. It was just so wonderful to actually connect to somebody from there and get that warmth, but I've done a lot of work on it. Like I said, my feminist analysis really helped, and I think, also, my lesbianism gave me some distance because the abuser was a man.

I was part of the generation that were first having babies. I was exactly the age as them, and I would've liked to have kids, but I knew I couldn't have a partner, and they all had partners, and I was barely making a living, which was also trauma-related. I think being lesbian—I'm glad I wasn't a heterosexual when my friends were having—my lesbian friends were having babies 'cause I didn't feel that kind of same thing that a lot of heterosexual women talk about, about having a partner, having kids, blah, blah, blah, blah, and how painful it is. It gave me a little separation and space that I needed to feel good about who I was instead of who I wasn't kind of thing. My identity wasn't as tied up with that. Yeah, so again, that really—the strength that I got from coming out.

Mary Rizzo: Yeah. That's really beautiful.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah.

Mary Rizzo: Yeah. Fredi, is there anything else that you wanna add? I feel like we've really talked about a lot of stuff, but is there anything—and I appreciate the time that you've spent. Is there anything else that you think that we should've talked about, or that you wish I would've asked you about?

Fredi Dworkin: No. I just wanna say that I tried to allude to how my Jewishness was important to me, and it wasn't Jewishness, per se. It wasn't at all religion. I had no religion growing up. It was a cultural, a very strong cultural and political perspective. I'm now very active, and I have been for 30 years, with—I mentioned the Workers' Circle. It used to be the Workman's Circle, and the kids wanted us to change it to Workers' Circle, which was great. I got the *shule* started so that other kids could have a sense of Jewishness that wasn't at all about religion. It took a while.

We've always had our [LGBTQ] members, including me, from the beginning of this chapter of the Boston Workers' Circle. It switched over from the older folks who were more outlying in the '70s or '80s, like a different gate. Many of us, from the beginning, were out as gay people. That was always fine and positive. Since then, we've had a lot of—it took a while for, I think, the lesbian families. I don't think we've actually ever had gay male families bring their kids to *shule*, and I'm sure the *shule* had to do a little work with the other parents, but now the kids in *shule* learn about—talk about gay rights, and trans kids, and we have out kids in the *shule* and all that kind of stuff.

It's a more actively—it's always been very equal. There's never been barriers, even among the kids and the families now, also. To me, that's just a part of my identity, but I'm very—this just isn't going to be that we're not formally an antizionist community, but we're an outsider community. We actually lost tens of thousands of dollars from the Jewish community because we called for a cease-fire. They canceled our funding, or partial.

Mary Rizzo: Wow.

Fredi Dworkin: I know, because we called for a cease-fire. We dared to do that in November 'cause we knew what was coming. The lesbian community, to me, in Boston was very important. The community I grew up with, with the *shule* and the Newark circles were very important to me. Then, my women's community, and then

Workers' Circle, so those are three big communities that integrated, like our day-to-day, our joy, and our dancing, and our queerness, and our Jewishness all together. Even with COVID, I miss seeing people in person, but it's still my central community right now. It's been great, and you can see our chorus online.

Mary Rizzo: Cool. Oh, I'll look that up. That's wonderful.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah 'cause we're reinterpreting, again, what to do. A lot of us had trouble with—like when we were commemorating Warsaw Ghetto, and I think at that point, Workers' Circle wasn't ready to say anything about the Palestinians yet. We said just in passing, this is maybe eight years ago, and some of us really started freaking out about that, but anyway. It's important. Community is very important. It's how we strengthen each other and have fun.

Mary Rizzo: Yeah. Right.

Fredi Dworkin: All that kinda stuff. Oh, and I also have stories for you about the Lesbian Herstory Archives, but those are—I'll tell you that some other time.

Mary Rizzo: Okay.

Fredi Dworkin: I visited Joan Nestle in her apartment to start it.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, wow. Oh, fantastic.

Fredi Dworkin: We started on Ninety-Third Street, yeah.

Mary Rizzo: Oh, my goodness. Awesome.

Fredi Dworkin: Yeah, the archives mean a lot to me. Unfortunately, I just didn't get it together to include my mom. Left that part out. There we go.

Mary Rizzo: All right. Well, I'm gonna stop recording.

Fredi Dworkin: Okay.

Mary Rizzo: Duh, duh, duh.

[End of Audio]