

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

NORA EPHRON INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Nora Ephron
Journalist and Filmmaker
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Interviewed by Betsy West
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

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00:00:08:00

INTERVIEWER:

Let's start off at the beginning. Can you tell me about your family, your childhood, what your upbringing was like?

NORA EPHRON:

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Well, in the beginning, it's always your mother, isn't it? I think my mother—I have three sisters and my parents wrote movies. And we grew up in LA, and my mother worked and most people's mothers didn't work, and it changed my life. It changed all of our lives to know that you could, in fact, have children, have a career and have a husband. My mother made it clear to us that we were going to work. That if someone said to you, "What are you going to be when you grew up?" Unlike all the other little girls, the answer was not, "I'm going to be a wife and mother." This was the fifties and it was the height of— of you must grow up to be a wife and mother, and that just did not fly in our house.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there a time when you realized that this was unusual?

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NORA EPHRON:

Oh, I knew it. I knew the entire time growing up that my mother was completely different from everyone else's mother.

INTERVIEWER:

Sounds like you had a pretty glamorous life.

NORA EPHRON:

It sounds more glamorous than it was. Obviously, I didn't grow up in dire poverty in Calcutta or something. But- but we... You know, a Hollywood childhood is many different things, and mine was not that thing where your

parents have screening rooms and famous movie stars are coming over all the time. My parents were in a community of screenwriters, almost all of them displaced New Yorkers. And almost all of them readers, fanatical readers, and that, in many ways, sets my parents apart from a lot of the other parents, almost more than what they did with the amount— I remember friends coming over and saying, "Why do you need all these books?" And the house was just wall to wall books.

INTERVIEWER:

Your mother also gave you some advice about taking notes.

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, my mother, my mother, my mother, my mother always said everything is copy. And if you went to her with some tragic story about how you hadn't been invited to someone's birthday party or whatever it was, she would blow it off in a way that I find counterintuitive now that I'm a parent myself. I can't imagine that your kids would come to you with a sad story and your response would be, "Someday, this will be funny and you will write about it." But that's what she did. And I have to say it must have worked.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have a sense outside your home that girls were treated differently?

NORA EPHRON:

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I knew that I couldn't live in Los Angeles when I grew up, because I was already different from the other girls growing up. I was, you know— In our house, where were you going to go to college? This was something we talked about very early.

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NORA EPHRON:

My mother had rules about where you were going to go. You could not go anywhere where there were sororities. So, that ruled out 98% of all colleges in America, leaving about eight colleges, the Seven Sister Schools and Stanford. That was it. And so all of that stuff that emphasis on— on life being a stepping stone to a career rather than to marriage was so different from everyone I was surrounded with. And she was so different from the other mothers.

INTERVIEWER:

And you didn't rebel against that, initially?

NORA EPHRON:

No, I thought it was cool. I thought it was great.

INTERVIEWER:

When did you know that you were good at writing and storytelling?

00:04:05:00

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, I think I had little moments in my life. I remember after I'd been a reporter for quite a while, I was at the *New York Post*. It was one of my— it was not my first job, but it was definitely my first great job. And I wrote something and somebody said to me that they had laughed. And it was just an amazing moment for me. It was like, "Oh, I wrote something that made people laugh." I can't begin to tell you. It was just life changing moment.

INTERVIEWER:

That late. I'm so surprised that you didn't have that moment earlier on.

NORA EPHRON:

Well, I think earlier on it was mostly, did I get it right? And did I leave anything out? And is this any good at all? It was very clear to me when I started out as a writer, that I was not a great writer. That I wasn't nearly as good as most of the people I was working with. So, I didn't— I have friends who started out fantastic writers. Joan Didion, from the beginning she was great. I was not great. I was sort of a competent journeyman newspaper reporter.

INTERVIEWER:

Just to stick with your childhood for one minute. When you were a kid, did you have a great anxiety, something you worried about?

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NORA EPHRON:

I put one of my biggest worries into *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), which was that I would move to New York and nothing would become of me, and I would die in my apartment, and no one would notice until the smell drifted out into the hallway. That was a concern of mine. You know, that all this ambition would be for nothing. And I have a very clear memory of standing in Central Park when I was in college and looking at all those buildings that surrounded the park and just thinking, am I ever going to know anyone here? I mean, that moment when you first come to New York and you don't know anyone. I've lived here most of my life now, and I know that on almost any walk down the street, I will see someone I know in this huge metropolis. But as a kid, you're just overwhelmed by how badly you want to come here and how frightening it is that nothing will happen to you.

INTERVIEWER:

So, talking about getting your start as a journalist, in the sixties, a lot of women felt held back as journalists. That they weren't given opportunities. How did you get around that?

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NORA EPHRON:

When I started out, I went to *Newsweek* and...to become a mail girl. And the person who hired me, this was in 1962, said to me, "Why do you want to work at *Newsweek*?" And I think they expected me to say something heartwarming about how much the magazine meant to me. But I just wanted to be in journalism, I wanted any way into journalism. And I said, "oh, I want to be a writer." And he said point blank, "Women aren't writers at *Newsweek*."

And this was, especially in retrospect, it's remarkable that he said that since he could now be sued for saying it. But the most remarkable thing was that there were writers who were women at *Newsweek* and yet he said that.

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NORA EPHRON:

There were sort of one and a half writers who were women at *Newsweek*. One was left over from World War II when they had had to have women writers at *Newsweek* because the men had all been drafted. That was, you know, it was sort of like it was just an historical accident that there was a woman there. And then there was a young woman who was sort of on her way to being a writer. But basically, they didn't want you to even think that that was a possibility. You were going to be a handmaiden to the men who worked there. You were going to deliver their mail, you were going to deliver their messages. And then you were going to, if you got promoted to— to the fantastic job of researcher, you were going to check everything they wrote.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you got out of that?

NORA EPHRON:

I left. I left. Yes. And so did— You know, one of the remarkable things is the number of very talented women who worked at *Newsweek* and left, Susan Brown Miller and Ellen Goodman. We were very, very lucky. And it's hard to think— It's interesting to me because all those men at *Newsweek* who stayed there weren't, I don't know. We did pretty well, the ones who left. Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER:

You went to the *Post*, you got your chops as a reporter. What was that like?

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NORA EPHRON:

Oh, working as a newspaper reporter is, and I have to add the words when you are young, it's just the greatest. You cannot believe it. I would not go so far as to say you can't believe you're being paid for it, because if you weren't being paid for it how would you do it? But it was just a giddy thrilling thing to work on a newspaper in New York City and cover everything. I got to cover absolutely everything. I got to cover murders. I got to cover trials. I got to cover politics. I got to cover fluff, huge amounts of fluff and I loved it.

INTERVIEWER:

And you also started to cover the women's movement.

NORA EPHRON:

I didn't start to cover the women's movement at the *New York Post*.

INTERVIEWER:

After the *Post*. Yeah.

NORA EPHRON:

Yeah, no.

INTERVIEWER:

After you went to-

NORA EPHRON:

I left the *Post* to become a freelance writer. And I had sold some pieces to *Esquire*, and they offered me a column. They offered me, actually, they asked me if I wanted to be the movie critic. So, I went to a movie thinking, what would it be like to be a movie critic at a movie? And realized that being a movie critic would ruin one of the great pleasures of life. So, I said, "I don't want to be a movie critic." So, then they asked me if I wanted to be a book critic. And I said, "Absolutely not." And they got kind of irritated with me at that point and said, "Well, what do you want to write about?" And this was 1972. And the women's movement was really starting. And I was a reporter. I was a journalist. It's like I'm just the wallflower at the orgy, and I'm not really participating in anything I'm writing about.

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NORA EPHRON:

And it was clear to me that if I didn't write about the women's movement, I would just kind of view it from a distance. That if I could write about it as a columnist, I would be forced to come to terms with it. And it was clear to me it had to be— you had to come to terms with it in order to live in the culture. So, I started writing about women for *Esquire*. And I basically, you know, watched the women's movement and got to do all the things I secretly wanted to do like go to the Pillsbury Bake-Off. And it was a great couple of years for me. I had a real window on what happened.

INTERVIEWER:

You wrote very personally also at that point.

NORA EPHRON:

Well, they were columns, they were— You know, I was writing essays and you can't write an essay without writing about yourself.

INTERVIEWER:

You joined a consciousness raising group?

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, of course I joined a consciousness raising group because how could I write about the women's movement if I didn't join a consciousness raising group? Which is to say that I used the column as an excuse to do a bunch of things that I probably should have done anyway.

INTERVIEWER:

You're a humorous writer. Do feminists have a sense of humor? Was it funny back then?

00:12:17:00

NORA EPHRON:

Well, some feminists have— Some people have senses of humor and some people don't. And that goes for feminists.

INTERVIEWER:

I guess what I'm asking is that the movement was tarred with the idea that it was humorless and just very earnest.

NORA EPHRON:

Well, I think that the anti-war movement was humorless, and the civil rights movement was humorless and nobody accused them of being humorless. But the women's movement comes along and everyone says, "Why don't they have a sense of humor?"

INTERVIEWER:

You wrote some tough things about Betty Friedan. What was that like?

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NORA EPHRON:

I covered the Democratic Convention in 1972, which was a huge historic moment for the women's movement because they were at that convention as a force. And- and it was the scene of a battle, basically. A kind of very gracefully waged battle by Gloria Steinem against a sort of ungracefully waged battle by Betty Friedan. So, I wrote about that. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What was Betty Friedan like?

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, Betty wasn't great, but she was... You know, she was... she... You know, all movements have leadership issues and the women's movement was no exception to this. And she felt that she had begun the women's movement, that part of the women's movement. Obviously, I'm not talking about the suffrage movement. But the movement in the seventies had begun in the sixties with her book, *The Feminine Mystique*. She really dropped this stone into the pond and the ripples were so huge. And now Gloria Steinem came along and sort of stole the movement from her. And the '72 convention saw all of that played out. The kind of war between Betty and Gloria, and the women who stood behind each of them. So, it was a very interesting story to cover.

INTERVIEWER:

I mean, it was generational in a way, right?

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NORA EPHRON:

I don't know that it was generational, but- but- but some people are better leaders than others. And Gloria was very gifted at making people want to get in a line behind her.

INTERVIEWER:

You wrote about things, you know, journalists are very serious. And you wrote about a lot of things that had never been written about before. When I look back on it, being flat chested, feminine hygiene, all kinds of things. Tell

me about your decision to do that. What that was like to break ground and talk about things that hadn't really been done before.

NORA EPHRON:

You know, I don't know... I don't know that when you... If you write about something that hasn't been written about, I don't know to what extent it's a sort of conscious thing. You just think, oh, I think I'll write about this and then you try to write about it. And then you've written about it. Years after I wrote my piece called, "A Few Words About Breasts," which really was this sort of, you know, I realized that a lot of women writers of my generation and earlier generations, and probably subsequent ones, do that sort of shocking thing that takes them from one level to the next.

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NORA EPHRON:

When I did... I did a play about Lillian Hellman and Mary McCarthy, and both of them... Lillian Hellman's first play was about a lesbian relationship. And Mary McCarthy's first sensational thing was a short story called, "The Man in The Brooks Brothers Shirt," and about a woman who has casual sex with a man on a train. No one had written about this stuff. And Gloria, being a Playboy bunny. These things... These things kind of... This kind of, can you shock people thing I think is a very common thing, but I didn't at the time there was nothing conscious about it. I wrote it, they bought it. I was very concerned that *Esquire* not illustrate it in a way that undercut the piece in some... You know, they were going to do some horrible, jokey illustration. So, I sold it with the proviso that they couldn't put any illustration with it. And

there was no question that... that it changed my... And by the way, it was the reason they offered me a column.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me what that piece was?

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NORA EPHRON:

"A Few Words About Breasts" was an essay about growing up with small breasts in a culture where it seemed like the most miserable fate that could ever befall you, you know. And it was a funny piece. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. And a lot of women really related to that piece. I know. I'm sure women have come up to you and said things to you over the years.

NORA EPHRON:

Yes. And now it's anthologized. So, I'm always hearing about it still.

INTERVIEWER:

So, your first novel, um, your first big hit involved, you know, turning a personal tragedy into a triumph. Can you tell me about that?

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, I wrote *Heartburn* after- after my second marriage broke up. And, you know, my mother, once again, always everything is copy. You know, when you

go through something awful and you grow up with a mother like that, she's kind of there. And when truly awful things are happening to you, there is this little voice in your head saying, "Someday this will be funny." You don't know when. You hope sooner rather than later. And one day I was sitting at the typewriter writing something else, and I started writing a novel about the end of my marriage. And I thought, "Oh, I see. I've reached that day when it has become something I can be funny about."

INTERVIEWER:

You had just a memorable line that every woman who's been involved with a CAD has repeated this line about your ex-husband's sexual appetite. You really did hit a nerve for so many women who felt they'd been treated so badly.

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NORA EPHRON:

I think one of the things I like most about *Heartburn* is that I'm really, really not interested in women as victims. It was my biggest quarrel with the women's movement. Was its- its generous spirit toward victims. Its assumption that women were so overwhelmed by the sexism in society that nothing that happened to them was their fault. And, you know, it isn't that I don't think there are victims. I just am not particularly interested in the sort of glorification of the victim. I've been mystified for years at the, you know, the sort of cult of Marilyn Monroe as victim. I don't get it. I just don't get it.

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NORA EPHRON:

So, you know, one of the things I like about *Heartburn* is that it is basically, look what happened to me and guess what? I have the last laugh because I get to be funny about it. And that's, you know, it's something I probably believe in as seriously as I believe in the few other things I truly believe in like the importance of a round table for a good dinner party.

INTERVIEWER:

You were criticized for writing about your personal life. What was that about, do you think?

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, I think whenever... I think that people... If you're a woman, they're just going to criticize you for almost everything. And there were people who really thought I shouldn't have written that book. I don't remember them when Philip Roth wrote about the end of his marriage. I just don't remember hearing from them that he shouldn't have done that, which is not to put myself in his league, only to say that it's something that happens when you're a woman. And it isn't really worth dwelling on. It just comes with the territory.

INTERVIEWER:

Why did you go into the movie business?

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NORA EPHRON:

In the late seventies in New York, everyone went and tried to go into the movie business. It was sort of like a fairy flew over New York, the screenplay fairy, and we all tried to write screenplays. And I, you know, it was sort of the next thing. I wasn't thinking, oh, now I'm going to do the next thing. But somebody came to me and asked me if I wanted to do something. And I thought, well, I'll try this. And then about 14 screenplays later, I had one made.

INTERVIEWER:

I mean, was it an easier lifestyle for you as a single mother?

NORA EPHRON:

Well, after—When my marriage broke up and I had two kids, I was very grateful that I had work as a screenwriter, even though, as I say, none of my scripts were being made into movies, but I was at least being paid and it meant I could stay home and work.

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NORA EPHRON:

And I think it was sort of... You know, I thought, "Well, I'll just do this for a while and then I'll go back to real writing." But then my first movie got made, which was *Silkwood* (1983). And I thought, "Oh, this is interesting. This is very interesting." I mean, it's very different to just sit at home and write a script, and then suddenly it's getting made. And it was made by Mike Nichols, who was incredibly open to writers being involved. So, Alice Arlan, whom I wrote it with, and I got to watch him cast the movie and we got to go to Texas

and watch him shoot the movie. And it was like going to film school or something. It was an unbelievable experience for me. So, I thought, well, this is something. I think I'll do this for a while.

INTERVIEWER:

Was the movie business any better for women than journalism was?

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, if a business isn't good for women, it doesn't mean you can't get in there and be a woman in that business, and then presumably more women will come into it after you. So, I think the movie business was atrocious for women when I went into it, but... but I still— You know, you kind of work with it. It's still not great for women, but the movie business is hard for everybody now. If you... You know, television is not a bad business for women, there are a lot of women in television. There are a lot of shows about women on television. So, there's that. And television is much bigger than the movies right now. But no, it wasn't great for women. But I was so lucky because I was living in New York. And New York is great for women. So, the movie business is bad for women, but New York is great for women. So, you could get work as a kind of New York writer, and sort of chug along and hope that things changed a little bit. And they did.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about *Harry Met Sally*. Who was Sally?

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, *When Harry Met Sally* is really... Harry is basically based on Rob Reiner, who is the director of... And Harry, like Rob, is very neurotic, very interested in analyzing every feeling he's having at all moments, and under the belief that everyone will be interested in them. And Sally, by the rules of math, has to be different from that. Has to be sort of... well, sort of like me. So, you know, that was kind of where the characters in that movie came from. But the idea for it was really Rob's idea.

INTERVIEWER:

Like you in what way?

NORA EPHRON:

Well a, you know, kind of, um, single minded and interested in how my food is prepared, and analytical and-

INTERVIEWER:

Upbeat, I guess.

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NORA EPHRON:

Yes, cheerful. Yes, Rob was a depressive and he was in love with his depression. He carried it around fondly with him like a little Teddy and he trotted it out for jokes. And he was more depressed than anyone. I am probably more cheerful than anyone. So, it sort of worked for the writing.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the iconic moment for you in that movie?

NORA EPHRON:

Well, there's no question that the orgasm scene is a great moment in that movie, and it's a great moment in the history of movies. It's just a fantastic scene that I had something to do with, but it was very much a collaboration among everyone involved in it. And— and I've seen the movie without the orgasm scene because the airplanes, in their wisdom, thought it was too raw for the airwaves. So, when you're flying on a plane, the scene is just cut from the movie and I was on the plane and it was on, and I kind of looked up, I wasn't listening to it. And I suddenly heard this boo go through the airplane because so many people had seen the movie and were waiting for the scene and realized it wasn't there.

INTERVIEWER:

You're a writer. You have a huge hit. Why'd you become a director?

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, I think at a certain point in the movie business, you learn that... Well, I think I became a director for a couple of reasons. One was so that my movies would continue to be made, because I would make them. Because one of the hardest things for a screenwriter is finding someone who wants to direct your movie. A movie that if you feel in any way personal about, the odds are no one is going to feel as personal as you do. And they're being asked to

spend at least 12 months of their life working on it. So, that was one reason. And the other was that, you know, if you write *When Harry Met Sally* or *Silkwood* and you get a great director, that's great, but you don't always get a great director. A couple of my movies I looked at and I thought, well, I could have screwed this up just as well as the person who directed it and he or she got paid quite a lot of money.

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NORA EPHRON:

So, I thought I'll try this. Fortunately, a woman named Dawn Steele had just taken over at Columbia, and she released *When Harry Met Sally*. And she called up and said, "You're going to direct, And I'm going to find something for you to direct." And a week later she had found a book by Meg Waltzer and a producer, Linda Obst, and I was on my way. That's a long bumpy tale after that, to getting that movie made because she was then fired and blah, blah, blah. But the point is, it was partly because a woman had taken over a studio and I had a big hit movie that I had written, and, you know, that happened.

INTERVIEWER:

So, what was it like to be a director?

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NORA EPHRON:

Oh, well, you know, in the beginning being a director is the greatest job in the world because— Especially if you're sort of, you know— If you write a movie, you have a picture of it in your head, you do know where everyone is sitting and what the room is shaped like. And it's very easy for you to take that. I was

way less informed about directing than I thought I was when I did my first movie. But I thought I knew how to do it because I had watched Mike Nichols do two of my movies and I had watched Rob, and I'd watched everybody. And I thought, "Oh, well, what is it you say action, you say cut and you have to know what the scene is about?" But of course it's more than that. And now it's all wound up in marketing and that's kind of takes all the fun out of it. But my first couple of movies, I just thought, "Oh, this is the greatest job in the world. This is it."

INTERVIEWER:

What do you like about it, especially?

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NORA EPHRON:

Well, I just think it's, you know, it's fun. It's fun to direct a movie if it's going well and if you're lucky, as I have been, to have great actors. It's exciting. I mean, it's a lot of pressure and it's tension. Are you going to make your day? And are you going to go over budget and all of that stuff. But basically, if you're working with people who make everything better, which is what good actors do, it's thrilling.

INTERVIEWER:

Julie and Julia (2009) must have been thrilling.

NORA EPHRON:

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Julie and Julia was thrilling because it was not only wonderful actors, but it was my other secret love of directing, which is that you get to have a huge amount of food around that you order to be purchased or made. So, that was incredible.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. It looked like fun.

NORA EPHRON:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

It looked like you had a lot of fun.

NORA EPHRON:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Why... why... You learn how to be a director. Why are there so few women directors in Hollywood?

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NORA EPHRON:

I think there are many more women directors in Hollywood than you think. It is true that the percentage of films directed by women is a sort of disappointing percentage. But when I started out directing, there were about

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three women directing movies. And now you don't have time for me to reel off a list of at least 40 names of women who are working as directors in the movie business. And they may not make movies as often as some of the men do and there aren't as many of them, but there are a lot of them and there are more than 40. Those are just the ones I can reel the names off of.

INTERVIEWER:

What's your perspective now? How has your generation changed maybe? Talking about yourself and what are you writing about?

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NORA EPHRON:

Women are so different today from when I got out of college. My class at college, almost nobody really wanted to have a career. Everyone who graduates from college now wants to go into the workforce. So, it's a seismic change, and—and women are succeeding in places where it was difficult for me to— In journalism, there were many newspapers that did not have women in high positions, or even as reporters. *The New York Times*, when I was at the *New York Post*, had about three women reporters. Now, the editor of *The New York Times* is a woman. This is so cosmic.

INTERVIEWER:

When you talked at Wellesley, I read the commencement speech. You talked about phases of women's lives. Can you talk about that a little bit?

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NORA EPHRON:

One of the things I think women are lucky about is that— I mean, I look at my life and I've basically sort of made a shift about every 10 years or so. Something different, you know, newspaper journalism, freelance writing, screenwriting, directing, doing plays. Women are often able to make changes, to move, to jump to slightly different things in a way that men often don't. Men often kind of stay on the same career track and get a little bored with it, by the way. And then they buy a boat or something. Women often jump to something else. And I think that's one of the secret ways women are luckier than men.

INTERVIEWER:

They can reinvent themselves.

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NORA EPHRON:

Yes. They're willing to reinvent themselves. They're willing to give up something— And a lot of women— You know, your priorities change in your life. I certainly had a period where it was a priority to me not to do anything that took me away from my kids. And then my kids were older and it was like, "Bye, I'm out of here. I'm going to be in Toronto for a couple of months. You'll be okay. You can come visit. You can get on the plane."

INTERVIEWER:

We've been asking people about the work family challenge. You've had three marriages, have your views about this subject evolved and changed how to balance your work and your family?

NORA EPHRON:

I have always believed that you could have work and family. And I have always believed that it wasn't easy to do that. And I think anyone who thinks it's easy to do it then gets irritated because they say, "Well, nobody ever said it was so hard." But I'm always saying it is hard to do it. And you're always feeling tugged in some way or other. You're always feeling, oh, I should be here or too bad I wasn't there. And, you know, your kids—When your kids are young, you really do have to make sure that they know you're there for them. I don't know what else it is to be a mother. I have a theory that your children remember only two things, when you weren't there and when they threw up.

INTERVIEWER:

Why do you think that some younger women think of feminism as a kind of dirty word, something that they're not interested in associating themselves with.

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NORA EPHRON:

A lot of the young women who might say they're not feminists, if you say to them, but do you think women should be paid equally to men? They say, well, sure. Do you think women have equal rights under the law? Well, sure. Do you think women have a right to decide what to do with their body? Well, sure. So, there they are. They're feminists. They just don't want to be called that. That's okay.

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INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember when Roe v. Wade passed?

NORA EPHRON:

You know, Roe v. Wade passed after New York state had legal abortion. So, it seemed that it was just the federal government ratifying what we had won in New York, which I, oh— I did March for that. I did. I got in a bus and went to Albany. Did.

INTERVIEWER:

For?

NORA EPHRON:

So that Rockefeller would veto the bill that outlawed abortion in New York. And he did.

INTERVIEWER:

Sort of amazing that we're still arguing over abortion.

00:37:22:00

NORA EPHRON:

It's remarkable that this argument is still going on. But I remember when I went up to Albany, there were about three buses that had started at 57th and Fifth in New York. And we were all very full of beans and we were going to go up there, and we were going to lobby all the assemblymen and everything, and stand out and wave our placards. And we got up there and there were

about 40 buses from Rochester and Buffalo on the other side. And with those horrible pictures of fetuses in jars, and I thought, oh, hm, there are more of them than I knew.

INTERVIEWER:

Same thing with the ERA.

NORA EPHRON:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Same thing, right? People didn't quite understand that it had touched a nerve. What's the most useful piece of advice that you received?

00:38:18:00

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, I think I've received a lot of useful advice, but a lot of it— a lot of it isn't, you know... there's no question that never buy a red coat, which is something my mother said to me, I put right up there and never start an article with a quote. That was a big piece of advice. I could probably make a whole list of little pieces of advice that you would look at and you would go, well, that doesn't seem like such a big deal. But it was a big moment. The other day I was somewhere and someone said, "Never wear a watch at night." And I went, "Oh no. Oh no." I've been wearing a watch at night for years and years and years, and I haven't been supposed to do that. So now that's right on the list.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. I know. I always knew there was something wrong with my watch too, but I think I need it, but I don't.

NORA EPHRON:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the advice that you give to young women?

00:39:16:00

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, I'm not very good at giving advice to people. I always think... When people come to me and they say, "I want to be in the movie business, for example, what should I do?" I say, "You should be a newspaper reporter for several years, and then you should be a freelance writer and then you should write scripts." I mean, I only know what I did. I don't know how anyone else does it. So, I'm not particularly good at advice. I do believe that if you want to be a writer, it's important to have seen something that— that— You can't just keep digging it all out of the well of your life. That it was extremely good for me to see some of the things I saw before I became a real writer, and being a newspaper reporter is the best way I know to see a huge number of things.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah, opens a lot of doors. Well, we know the many things that you wound up doing, but I'm wondering what did you want to be when you were a kid?

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00:40:18:00

NORA EPHRON:

Oh, a journalist, a newspaper reporter. I wanted to be— I wanted to be Lois Lane.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the accomplishment you're most proud of?

NORA EPHRON:

I'm most proud of the fact that my kids are great and I have a really nice husband, and I get to work at what I want to do, still.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you feel lucky?

NORA EPHRON:

Yes I do. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What was your very first paying job?

NORA EPHRON:

My first paying job, I worked wrapping books at Martindale's bookstore, Christmas of 1955 for \$0.75 a week.

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INTERVIEWER:

Early bird or night owl?

NORA EPHRON:

Former night owl. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

iPad or notepad?

NORA EPHRON:

Notepad. I can't write on an iPad. The key thing doesn't work.

INTERVIEWER:

You have to get a keyboard.

NORA EPHRON:

You have to keyboard. I know. So, you might as well have your computer.

INTERVIEWER:

You might as well get Airbook. That's my advice. Get an Airbook. Spontaneous or methodical?

00:41:30:00

NORA EPHRON:

Both.

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INTERVIEWER:

Diplomatic or direct?

NORA EPHRON:

Both.

INTERVIEWER:

Type A or easygoing?

NORA EPHRON:

Type A.

INTERVIEWER:

What a surprise. Higher math score or higher verbal?

NORA EPHRON:

Math.

INTERVIEWER:

Good at math.

NORA EPHRON:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Patient or impatient?

NORA EPHRON:

Impatient. Oh my God, am I impatient.

INTERVIEWER:

Prada or Gap?

NORA EPHRON:

Prada.

INTERVIEWER:

Prepare or cram?

NORA EPHRON:

Prepare.

INTERVIEWER:

Domestically skilled or domestically challenged?

NORA EPHRON:

Gifted domestically, except when it comes to housework.

INTERVIEWER:

10 minutes early or 10 minutes late?

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NORA EPHRON:

On time.

INTERVIEWER:

Book smart or street smart?

NORA EPHRON:

Both.

INTERVIEWER:

That's it.

NORA EPHRON:

Okay.

END TC: 00:42:27:00