V INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

V (formerly Eve Ensler)
Playwright
10/10/2011
Interviewed by Pat Mitchell
Total Running Time: 53 minutes and 23 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

V (Formerly Eve Ensler)

Playwright

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PAT MITCHELL:

How would you describe, what it was like for you as a child?

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V:

I would say that growing up was a very disturbing, pretty horrible experience, that most of my childhood was determined and structured and created by violence. That I'm, I was essentially a consequence of violence, in that everything about me was in response to violence.

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My father was very very… angry, raging person. And so much of my childhood was determined by his moods. So I was his captive. I was his prisoner. And… I… it took me a very, very long time. I remember once my brother and sister were visiting me years after we had left my family, and they were still tip toeing in my house. And I made us all put on shoes and stomp around the house just to really, just to get out of the idea that someone could come and get us at any moment if we made the wrong step.

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So I think… early on I… I got the power of violence to determine the boundaries of one's existence and to determine how far you could dream and how much you could think of yourself, because my father's violence and his sexual abuse really eroded my esteem in a very profound way. And made me feel stupid, and made me feel worthless, and made me feel that I didn't have a right to be here.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

V As A Teen

EVE ENSLER:

So I, I began without a floor. I always say some people got cement floors. I got bamboo shoots and when it rains, you know, the floor disappears. But, it also made me, I see now, incredibly tuned in to other people's suffering, and I'm very grateful for that now. Not grateful for the abuse but grateful for that… second sense that it gave me, or door opening that it gave me into other worlds, that I don't know that I would have had, had I been loved and nurtured. Hopefully I would have but one never knows.

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PAT MITCHELL:

So what was the manner of transformation from this violent household, this place of where you had no encouragement, no support, no self-esteem, what changed? Where did the change come?

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V:

Well I think from a very early age like probably 9 or 10 I started writing a book to myself and it was the creation of another persona, another self inside myself that was capable of writing and imagining that freed me. But I told this story before. I had this imaginary character, this friend, called Mr. Alligator, who I invented at a very young age. And… he really became my savior, and I see it now as a metaphor for my imagination,-

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-but he was this character that, after my father would beat me or be mean to me or they would be do terrible things to me, I would literally call Mr. Alligator on the phone and I would tell him to come and meet me, and I would pack my bag and I always put purple magic markers in the bag, I remember this. And then I would go and I would take my little suitcase and I would sit and I would wait for him all day to pick me up and… he never came.

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Well, he never came then, he came much later on in all different forms, but, the idea that he was coming made everything bearable. And I think in a way, that's what writing did. It was a way of writing myself out of the pain and the madness and the kind of suicidal fantasies that I had regularly in the depression and… I think knowing I could write and as long as I could write, I could find a way to transform that existence.

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PAT MITCHELL:

When did the writing get recognized? Is there someone who said, "Yes, you have talent here, let's do something here?"

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V:

Well, I wrote all the way through college and I certainly got recognition for my poetry then, and, and you know, it was published in small journals. And, I

then came to New York and I got published in several poetry journals, but I think if I look back when I really felt validated, it was Joanne Woodward. I had this kind of amazing experience where she had always been this… mythic mother figure to me.

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I remember when she was in Sybil and she played the therapist and called her 'sweetie' and I used to have fantasies that Joanne Woodward would come into my room and call me 'sweetie'. It was just like this aunt, cause I really frighteningly identified with Sybil. And, I then adopted a son, Dylan, and he was… and I sent him to acting school and he ended up having her be his teacher and he brought in a play of mine for her to read. I was really young, and she loved the play and she asked if her class could, if she could direct and they could perform it, and…

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It was at the time of the nuclear disarmament movement and I was very active in ending nuclear war and we were, the Greenham Common Camps were happening in England and we were camping out in the parks to protest the weapons in Stapleton, Staten Island. They were trying to bring nuclear weapons on board. It was very, very dangerous and I had this really huge moment of chutzpah where I just said to her, "Could I write you a play," cause I knew she was active in the nuclear war movement, anti nuclear movement.

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And she said, "Yes, but why don't you first begin by writing me a speech." And so, she gave me this opportunity to write her speech and I wrote her several

speeches, and then I wrote her this one woman show which she ended up directing Shirley Knight in. And those two women really for me were the beginning of my artistic life because they completely believed in me, and they completely nurtured me and they taught me so many amazing things. Can you imagine being like a young woman and working with Shirley Knight and Joanne Woodward?

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And we traveled all around America with this play, which was this anti-nuke one woman show with a guard that was a silent voice, and we played it at the Kennedy Center for Congress, and we did it at the Nevada test site, in the middle, with you know 500 police officers with mirrored sunglasses walking towards us to be arrested, and we just did it everywhere.

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And it was when I came to realize that art could have an impact on and make social change and that, my activist artist self could actually live in the same body and I, I wouldn't have to be as fraught as I had been, having those two… very, very, very strong streams running through me simultaneously. And I think it was after that, Joanne's recognition of me and her husband Paul Newman's recognition, and Shirley Knight's, their belief in me.

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They just had faith in me. They trusted me as an artist. And they nurtured me and they believed in me. And you know I had so much self doubt, and I had so much self criticism, and so much self hatred, it was just so hard. But you know those are the moments when somebody comes along and they just kind

of reach down and scoop you up and say, "You will have a life," and you know, it was after that that my whole life changed, really, if I look at it.

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INTERVIEWER:
Something else evolved during your writing of the play about homeless women, and that it was you began to do interviews with people…

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V:
Well, I think what's really interesting is for most parts, you know, I've been doing interviews for a long time and I actually don't 'put' their words. I mean, there, sometimes, in a sentence, they might say a word or a phrase but the way I've worked and it's- I always think what's happening in life is so much more interesting than you could possibly imagine. Just sitting down last night at the park and listening to people's stories? It's incredible what people have lived through, you don't have to invent anything.

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You just have to listen, and the way I work is that I spend a lot of time listening to stories, and then I'll take a phrase or an idea or a moment or a theme, and then I'll write a fictional piece, a literary piece based on that. I mean, people think sometimes that *The Vagina Monologues* are interviews. They are not. They are actually literary pieces created around an idea or a theme.

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For example, I interviewed a woman who told me that she had had a very bad experience, when she was younger, with a man during sex. And that stopped her from having sex for the rest of her life. Now she didn't tell me she had a flood. She didn't, she just told me that idea. That gave me the idea of, "Oh, maybe a flood or…" You know, and that instigated me to create this character because, I think, when things are very closely related to people's experience, you know, original experiences, particularly in the theater, that when they hear them, they go right into them.

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And I want to write as close as I possibly can to where people live and have it be on that edge of art and reality, like right on that edge is what's most interesting to me.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
V In Bosnia

PAT MITCHELL:
You did a piece on the women in Bosnia and, and actually, that whole experience in Bosnia where it set you very firmly down the path of writing about Bosnia women and girls…

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V:

Well, I think we all have these moments in our life where something seizes us, and you don't know it at the time that it's your destiny, but it come as a poem or a person or an image or a painting or, you know, a song or- And I was walking on the streets of Manhattan, and there was a picture on the cover of Newsday, and it was the picture of a group of girls who had just been returned from a rape camp in Bosnia.

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And I literally stopped and I looked at the picture and, I just picked it up and I was like, "A rape camp? Wait, there's a rape camp?" And, you know, I had, of course, read Susan Brownmiller. I was, you know, I knew a lot about violence. I had thought a lot about violence against women, but there was something about this picture, you know, in, in this, in this century, you know, of a girl being held and a group of girls, who were just released after having been held in a house, where they were raped repeatedly over and over, as a systematic tactic of war that just blew my mind apart.

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I just couldn't believe it and I took the picture and I cut it out and I put it over my desk and I just thought about it every day. And I thought about those women every day. And through a series of very bizarre, just very bizarre circumstances, I met this amazing woman named Laura Lloyd who was working at Hollywood Pictures, and I had written another screenplay, and it was a very bizarre screen play—which was also about sexual violence—and she had really liked it and she called me in to say that she was going to, you

know, commission it and she said, "But what else do you want to do right now?"

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And I said, "I want to go to Bosnia. And I want to talk to the women who have been raped and I want to see what I can do to help." And it was just bizarre that I was telling that to an executive at Hollywood Pictures. But she asked me what I wanted to do, so I told her. And she said, "Oh," and I told her about the situation and what was going on there. And then I went home and a week later, the phone rang and she said, "Hi, this is Laura Lloyd. We are going to option your script and I found the money to send you to Bosnia." And I was like, "Excuse me?"

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And she said, "I have a discretionary fund, and I have your transportation, and I have money for you to go write…" And it was just unbelievable. And then I had to beg and plead and cajole with the women in Bosnia at the Centre for Women War Victims to let me come, because they had, they were just fed up. They had all these journalists who had already been there and they had lost confidence and they felt used and, and finally this wonderful woman named Rada Borić said I could come.

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And sleep on their couch which felt like I had won the Pulitzer Prize. It was like the greatest thing that had ever happened, and I went, and I thought I was going for a week, and I stayed for months, and my whole life changed. I just went to refugee camps and I went all over Bosnia, and all over Croatia,

and I sat with women and I listened and I drank coffee with them and I held them and I cried with them and then I went—for some reason, I still don't know why—I had heard that a group of Bosnians had been sent to Pakistan, and I thought that would be a really incredible thing to go to Pakistan and interview women in a refugee camp who had been sent, you know, who were eastern European women who had been sent to Pakistan.

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So I followed this group of women there and—a group of people—and had an amazing time there, just in this incredible place called the Haji Complex, where women had been sent and men had been sent. They were just living in this very, very, very difficult conditions and everybody was sick and everybody had infections and, and everyone was highly traumatized but I spent weeks with them. And, that experience just opened everything for me about violence against women.

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I suddenly understood… what it was in a way I hadn't understood before, and the magnitude of it and the insanity of it, and that then, really, I wrote the piece, you know, *My Vagina Was My Village*, and I came back and I really started to work on this play called *Necessary Targets,* which was about women in a refugee camp and two Americans who go to "help," and, and the transformation of everybody in, in the process.

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And at the same time, I was writing *The Vagina Monologues*. And I think that combined with *The Vagina Monologues*, when I performed it for the first time,

I was just inundated with so many women who had to tell me their stories. And at first I thought they'd be wonderful stories about pleasure and sex, and in fact, they were not. They were about how women had been raped or brutalized or beaten or incested or cut. And it was so traumatizing at the beginning, just to be, just filled with women.

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I mean, the play was unleashing their need to tell these stories. And… that combined with the trip and the work in Bosnia was really how V-Day came to be born, because I couldn't just stand back and say- You know there were lots of groups working on the issue, and there were many people who were there before me doing this work, and I needed to do my part and, and I felt like I had this play that could serve and could in some way transform and help to transform suffering and… We then created this idea of V-Day, which was Vagina Day.

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Victory Day, Valentine's Day. And we were thinking we'd do one performance in New York city to raise money for local groups working to stop domestic violence and, and we were also going to raise some money for Bosnia. And that event at Hammerstein Ballroom ended up to be the most extraordinary evening where 2500 people came and all these fabulous actors from Glenn Close, to Susan Sarnadon, Lily Tomlin to Rosie Perez, and Whoopie Goldberg. And it just kind of blew that roof off.

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You know, the theater, but it also made it clear to all of us that V-Day was possible, that this movement was possible. And that was 14 years ago and now it's become a mad vagina movement around the world.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
V Performing The Vagina Monologues

PAT MITCHELL:
What did you do with *The Vagina Monologues* that was unique, and is still unique, as a way of fighting violence?

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V:
Before I wrote *The Vagina Monologues*, I was probably making 15 or 17,000 dollars a year. I was, like, a really struggling person. So, the idea that I had suddenly written this piece that was, a) making money was really bizarre to me. I had not been a money maker, you know, I was a way downtown playwright so I was very, I didn't really know what to do with that money. It felt very uncomfortable to me, first of all.

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But then I started to realize that the play could be a tool for breaking taboos, for getting dialogue going, getting women to talk about the issues, getting women to organize around the issues, whether it was changing laws or

raising money to, for, you know, shelters, or transforming consciousness, or bringing men and having dialogues with men. And, from that very first event I just said, "Why don't we- Whatever we do with this event, whatever we raise, will go to the local groups."

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Then, I had an incredibly inspired producer named David Stone, and I said to him, when we were making our deal, "There's two things I want in our deal. I want to make sure there's a woman of color in every group that performs the play, because there were going to be three women in the play after I left. And I want to make sure that $10 of every ticket goes to ending violence against women through V-Day."

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And David said, "Great," and so he- I think he added $10 to every ticket and that and the, you know, the percentage of the tour that I was able to raise out of my royalties and other royalties, we were able to raise $5 million which went to V-Day and starting V-Day. And, and at that point everyone was a volunteer. I mean, I'm still a volunteer but everybody who was working for V-Day was a volunteer at that point.

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And then, the play really started to take off in all different forms and I, I knew that I had a choice. I knew that you know the play could make lots and lots of money. But, a) I would never have been comfortable with that money, and b) I realized it could actually serve people's communities in a very local way. So what happened was that I basically said- a really wonderful woman came to

me and she said, “I’d like to take this to colleges, I’d like to bring *The Vagina Monologues* to colleges,”-

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-And let colleges perform it and that maybe the money they raised could go to local groups in their communities, and so they could, they could bring colleges and communities together, which I loved. And so they started at colleges to do the performance once a year, and all the proceeds would go, and then the communities started coming to us and saying, “Well, could we do performances as well,” so it just began to grow and what happens now is every year, there is around,-

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
La Crosse Community Theatre Performance
La Crosse, WI, 2022

V:
-I think 1400 places, 5000 events last year perform *The Vagina Monologues.* All of the money that was raised locally stays in those communities and goes to the local groups in those communities. So there’s this wonderful synergy that happens between art and activism. Between women who are artists and women who are serving the community, between men who are directing the play and supporting, you know, other men who are doing incredible work in

the community and, you know, I'm very, very proud, extremely proud that over 14 years, V-Day has raised probably $85 million… to end violence.

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And that's really happened through grassroots activists. That's happened through a woman in Minnesota doing her play, and a woman in Manila doing the play, and a woman in Angola doing the play, and a woman here doing the play, and, and sometimes, it happens. I remember the JCC to be an incredible performance at Town Hall and they raised $100,000 one night. And someone will do a performance and raise $100 in one night. And all of it's amazing, all of it's amazing. And I think to me the most exciting part is to see how people have become self empowered philanthropists and empowered activists.

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And that they know that they can take this play and use it as a tool for social change, and a tool for money raising, and a tool for breaking open taboos, and just putting on the play causes enormous disruption and I'm all about disruption. I believe deeply in disruption. So you see the play being done in Uganda for example, where people almost got arrested, but they got people to talk about it and that play ended up making more money not being done than it did having been done.

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Or you see it being done in Pakistan where it was done in a covert way, behind doors, behind, you know, screens at the beginning, and then they, they tested the water and they realized they could perform it publicly in Karachi, and they could perform it in Lahore. And just that work of busting through

taboos and disturbing people just a little bit, so that whatever that edge is needs to- I think it's why I love Occupy Wall Street so much. It's just that beautiful, cutting edge where people are disturbed enough even to actually begin to think about things.

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Because I think denial is so… thick. It's so… it's so… impenetrable. And I think you have to find ways that disrupt things in a mischievous way so that people's consciousness is open to hearing new ideas. And I don't, I don't mean shocking people and hurting people or violating people, but disrupting people. I think we need much more disruption.

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There is too much business as usual in the face of too much, you know, too many atrocities, whether it's to women's bodies or to the Earth or to the poor, and I love theater because it's disrupting.

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PAT MITCHELL:
What are *The Vagina Monologues*?

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V:
Well, *The Vagina Monologues* are a series of monologues based loosely on interviews that I did with hundreds of women and they're literary pieces,

they're theatrical pieces… that really look at women's relationships to their vaginas.

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I think if you tell the story of your vagina, you tell the story of your life in some fundamental way. And I had no business, I had no intention of writing a play about vaginas, to be perfectly honest with you. I was already a way, way downtown playwright and I would have assumed that would have assured my status there forever. But I was interviewing a woman- I was talking to a woman.

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I was at her house, and she was talking about menopause, and she got onto the subject of her vagina and just was saying that it was dried up and finished and dead and horrible and prune-like and I was like, "Oh my god." And she was a feminist and a very forward thinking woman and, and I was like "Wow." I can't believe she feels that way about her vagina, and so I just started to think, "Well what do women think about their vagina?" I have no idea, so I would just say to a friend casually, "Well, do you like your vagina?"

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And you know, the first woman said to me- My mother used to tell me, "Don't wear panties underneath your pajamas. You need to air out your pussy cat." And I thought, "Oh my god." So it began this series of me just asking women, and every time I asked the question, I just was in shock what people said. So I just kind of started writing it down because it bemused me. I had no intention of writing a play. And then I, I talked to a woman who told me the

story that she had had this really terrible humiliating experience with a boy when she was young and she had never had sex again.

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And I was like, “Never? I mean you never had sex again? You have never had an orgasm in your life?” And I just couldn’t believe I was talking to someone who had never had an orgasm. And then I started to think, “Maybe I should do something with this piece.” And so, I started to kind of more actively interview people. And I ended up writing that piece, *The Flood*, and performing it, and one other monologue, at a place called the Cornelia Street Cafe, in Downtown, in the Village. And everybody was just so excited.

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People were like, “You have to do this,” and I was like, "Do what? I don’t even know ‘what’ is,” and they were like, “You have to develop this.” And I was still very reluctant, and then I ended up putting like 4 pieces together and I performed it. I had another play running downtown, and I, I performed it one night, and this really wonderful critic named Alexis Green was in the house and she wrote a review and I was like, “A review? There’s nothing here.”

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And she just was so encouraging in this review, and talked about how important it was, that it really pushed me to take it seriously and then I started saying, “All right ,well, maybe I’ll actually write a play.” And, and then began a series of interviews. And, and, you know, from the minute I started performing it, it was just one of those amazing things. People just responded. It was shocking to me, I have to tell you. It’s still shocking to me. I, you know, I

do not understand the phenomena that is *The Vagina Monologues* and to be honest, I don't think I have that much to do with it.

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I think, yes, I did write it, but I think there are things where you are just there to serve whatever is meant to happen in that moment. And I think, the kind of violence and the kind of degradation that goes on to women, and the kind of potential for pleasure and for power and for enjoyment that exists in the vagina—both—it was really the time to be writing about it. And I think it just struck a chord for whatever reason and it continues to, 14 years later.

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And I just feel my job is to drink espressos and keep up with it, you know… But I also think that having now seen it performed on every continent in so many different languages that… It's really taught me how connected we all are, and how we may have, you know, violence against us manifest in different ways, or patriarchy revealed in different ways, but it's the same global story.

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And it's made me… truly aware that a global women's movement and a global movement where men are connected to a global women's movement, is what will be the thing that turns the Planet Earth. I have no doubt in my mind about that, that when women come into their bodies and feel safe and free in their bodies, it's no different than us honoring the Earth or treating the Earth and cherishing the Earth and that they're all connected, that it's one story.

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PAT MITCHELL:
What is it about that, that you're so captured…

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V:
Well I, I think I think there is something about being able to talk about secrets around your sexuality, and around one's vagina, and that- unleash energy and unleash desire, and unleash trauma, and unleash sexuality, and I think that energy is really the energy we need if we're going to move forward in the future.

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I mean, I think all of us to some degree are traumatized on the planet, whether you have been directly traumatized or secondarily traumatized by hearing the stories of somebody or witnessing. We're all traumatized. We're all these, these very wounded beings and I think so much of it is in our bodies. So much of the trauma lives in our bodies. Which is why, I think, often that the best ideas and the best thinking and the most- Don't undo and free us until it lands in our bodies.

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You know and, and I think when you go to the theater what's so genius about the theater is that things land in your body. Things release your body, things come to you in your body, and when you're embodied, and when you are able

to, to experience things and, and kind of catalyze things that way, you actually are freed from things and you're actually empowered and you're actually transformed. So I think, one of the, the vehicle of this message has been to theater.

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And I think when people receive the play something happens to them. I've witnessed it happen to people, where they come in one person and they come out somewhere else because the theater has the power to do that, you know. I think also that… there is so much, there is so much grief around, the pain women have suffered, and silently, and invisibly.

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You know how many women I've interviewed tell me, for the first time, never telling anyone before, that they were raped or that they were incested or that their uncle grabbed them or that they- You know just, just last week we were doing you know *Emotional Creature* in Paris, and a really close… The daughter of a very close friend who I had known as a child, took me aside and confessed to me that she was raped when she was 17 and she had never told anyone. I can't tell you how often that happens to me, when people come up to me and say, "Can I just talk to you."

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And I think there is so much sorrow around and so much grief, and so much buried, caught energy that needs to find its way back into the world. And I think, you know, there is also our hunger for pleasure. I mean sex is fabulous, sexuality is fabulous, and I think so much of this culture and every culture has

so many taboos and repressions and terrorism and fear, about the most gorgeous thing in the world: Sex. Could anything be more fabulous?

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Why are we here? I mean, just that we got to have sex in this world, and then I look at how it's been tainted and demonized and how fraught it's become and how guilty everybody feels around it, as opposed to just feeling fantastic. That we get to connect in our bodies and we get to be central and we get to love each other.

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PAT MITCHELL:
You mentioned *Emotional Creatures*, so let's go there next, because… *The Vagina Monologues* was really about the stories of grown men and women… And, out of that of course, we look to the next generation of women, how they're coming into their sexuality, coming into their age—you wrote a book about that. Talk about that.

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V:
Well, *Emotional Creature* really came out of years and years of traveling this planet. I have been so fortunate and so gifted to be able to travel the world and, you know,-

ON SCREEN TEXT:

V in Kenya

V:

-I've probably been to 60 or 70 countries and I've seen so many amazing, met so many incredible women particularly around the world. But I've also watched girls everywhere that I've been and I'm… I, I just am in awe of girls.

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Of their energy, of their resiliency, of their devotion, of their brilliance, of their just visionary, original way of seeing the world, and I'm also quite shocked to see the worldwide repression of girls in all the various forms that repression takes. And I, I just- It's been bubbling in there for years, wanting to do something. And I couldn't find the hook, I couldn't find the way in to writing something, and then I began to see this theme emerge around the world.

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Where it didn't matter here I was, girls were trying to please somebody in some form or another. Whether it was starving themselves in Beverly Hills or in high schools around America to be super, super, super skinny to look the way fashion centers tell you to look; or whether it was getting a nose job in Iran because Iranian women get nose jobs to look a certain way; Or whether it was you know having one's clitoris cut because there is a tradition of having your clitoris cut.

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So, your sexuality is maimed and subdued, and then you are more easily sold and you don't get educated and you are owned by a man. It doesn't really matter what the practice of pleasing was. It seemed to be this global theme. And once I got that idea in my head, I began to see a way I could create a text around that idea, and you know, this piece was not so much based on interviews as it was based on just traveling and watching and learning and listening to girls.

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And I think, to be perfectly honest with you, I am about 15, I think it's where I stopped. You know, I think everybody has the age they stopped at. I am trying to get out of 15, but not really. I kind of love being 15. And having all this time with teenage girls, you know, doing the productions in South Africa and Paris, I don't really ever not want to be a teenage girl, because the vitality, the life force, the passion, the love, the connection, the unabashed. The unabashed.

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Just, just love of life is just so infectious to be around, and I hope this new play- And I'm thrilled that there is music, and I'm thrilled I have been writing songs with this amazing composer called Charl Johan, and—from South Africa—and you know, just to write with him and to have created this music, where girls dance and sing and really allow an outlet for their energy and for their power and for their goodness.

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You know, and for their fierceness, and for their rage, and for their refuse, you know, their refuser parts, is so exciting.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
2010

PAT MITCHELL:
So, what's the, how will the *Emotional Creature* fit into the events or model for using art for activism?

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V:
I'm very happy to say that when the book came out it, it launched a lot of- It launched the V-Girl movement. Which is essentially a movement of young women and girls who are standing up to fight violence, but also standing up for their rights, and standing up to be educated, and standing up to have a voice, and standing up not to please; to be refusers, to take a stand, to have their own opinions, to determine and carve out their own realities wherever they live.

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And V-Girls has really taken off, already, online, and there are book clubs all around the world. And now we are doing, we, you know- Last year, we did readings all around the world, and the book clubs, and now the productions have started. We were in South Africa for 5 weeks in Johannesburg at The

Market Theatre… doing this amazing performance with mainly girls from South Africa, one girl from Zimbabwe, and one girl from the States.

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And the production was absolutely beautiful, and Jo Bonney, who is a wonderful director, directed it, and Charl wrote the music and, you know, I feel that that production has really launched the V-Girls movement in South Africa. They are about to do a huge march. They have been going into the schools, the girls talking about the issues… They have started something called Somu Sunday Summits where they are having backyard meetings of women and girls in their communities, and I see that that potential is, is really quite vast.

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We had I think 13 girls from around the world who are the V-Day action, team leaders, and last weekend- And we just had a gorgeous weekend with them, where they were really carving out what V-Girls is and what their plan was for the next year. And they have already been writing of just all these incredible things that have happened since they have gotten back in their communities, from Peru to Israel to South Africa and all over the states.

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And I think, I hope that V-Girls will be bigger than V-Day. I, you know, that it will be the next wave of this movement, and that girls will really lead us out of the terrible mess that we're in, you know, and chart the path because they've certainly got the energy and brilliance to do that.

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PAT MITCHELL:

So what's your hope for V-Girls?

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V:

I hope- What I hope is this: I hope that girls come into their voice and, and come into their energy and don't- And stop repressing what they know and how they know it and the way they know it. And by doing so they encourage boys to step into their authentic selves. I, I feel sometimes with boys that the tyranny of patriarchy has had a much more devastating blow on boys than it has on anyone.

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Because they have literally been forced to disassociate, and been invited, and pushed, and coerced to disassociate from their hearts. And I think you know that punishment towards men has been a horrible punishment. I hope- And I am actually seeing it happen, like so many boys are coming to see the play and they come out telling me in whatever language, "I'm an emotional creature and I want to be an emotional creature and I am claiming my emotional creature." And for those people who you know think I am anti-mind, and I'm not about intellectual ideas and, and having a, you know, intellectual pathway, of course I am.

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But I think what's happened in the world is that we have become so bifurcated. We are living so in our heads, and the head has come so to dominate that it's allowed us to do all kinds of things without feeling for what we are doing. I think if we had been in our hearts, in our brains, it would be very hard to be drilling down into the, you know, heart of the earth, into the soul of the earth. It would be very hard to poison all our rivers. It would be very hard to rape a woman if you actually feeling what a woman was feeling.

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And I think this disassociation, whatever form it takes, whether it's our ability to walk by people who are starving, or our ability to, you know, you know abuse a child… It's because we're not connected to our hearts, and we're not in compassion. And I really believe that the head and the heart have to come together. That there has to be an equal… an equality and a balance. And I, I look at girls and I see their capacity to hold both these things before they have been muted down, and shut down, and before the big guns come and tell them they're being too intense and too extreme and hysterical and out of control…

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And, and, and I think *Emotional Creatures* about- Be all that and, and, you know, be more than that. Be in your more-ness and don't be afraid of more-ness. It's the more-ness that actually moves the planet forward and brings about change. And if you look at all the people we admire in the world, it's cause they were more, and cause they were crazy, and cause they were passionate, and because they believed in things and people told them to calm

down and they said, “No, I’m not going to calm down.” You know, nothing ever got changed by people who were being behaved.

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INTERVIEWER:
You faced a stop moment, a disruption moment, last year, diagnosed with cancer. Could you go back to that, that moment in which all this life you had been following came to a sudden and unexpected stop?

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V:
We were just talking about it today because last October, I was just… A year ago, I was just finishing the last operation and I was in a very bad place. You know, I think for me, the revelation of cancer was obviously a shocking blow. I, you know, it’s just- I was on my way to Haiti in two days, and… I, I had symptoms. I had signs, I- That something was wrong and I just thought it was something really basic and not- And the next thing I heard, you know, I had a huge tumor, and 2 days later-

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Literally 3 days later, I was in surgery. Major, major surgery. Nine hour surgery. Life changing surgery. And you know, I'm happy that I was never a person who believed in security to begin with. You know, that I have always seen life as fundamentally insecure, and I’m really ok with that. I, you know, from a very early age I got that there was no security and that was not what I

was going to long for. Maybe, you know, world changing, maybe love, maybe connection, but security was never anything I ever thought was possible.

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But I have to tell you it was a new layer of insecurity, and it was- I think again when things enter your body, and you know, you are having your body cut open and things taken out, and I lost a lot of organs, I had a lot rearranged. It was, it was probably the most profound experience of my life without a doubt, and as hard as it was—and it was really gruesome, at parts, it was really difficult physically, it was really hard emotionally—it was actually amazing.

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It was actually amazing. And, and I don't mean that to be like an apologist for cancer. Because I think cancer is as grim as it gets, but I think we don't, we don't have the mechanisms in society sometimes, to learn how to take the worst situation and let it be the catalyst for our undoing which is then our transformation. Instead we resist it, and we hate it, and we fight it, and we, we, we don't let it open us.

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We don't let it- And I was very fortunate to be surrounded by very wise and very visionary people who helped me take this experience and let it be a kind of shaminic, or shamanic initiation. And for me, in the end, you know, I think we all carry our demons, we all carry our past, and we try to shed it as the years go.

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As the years go on, we try to, we try to take layers, and the onion, the peeling, the peeling, the peeling, but for me there was still stuff that was quite remnant and quite determining of my life, you know. Whether it was my feeling of badness, whether it was my sense that I didn't really have a right to be here, whether it was you know feeling like I was never good enough, or never amounting to enough—enough, enough, enough! It was always like I was never enough.

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And I don't know how it happened completely, but I know that the experience of cancer, and particularly the experience of chemo, became a real process of burning all that away. My wonderful friend Sue, who had been my former therapist, gave me this vision that the chemo wasn't for me, it was for my cancer. And it was for all the past atrocities that I had witnessed and heard, but also the terrible violations that had been done to me.

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And she said, "And when it's over, it can be burned away," and so your meditation through all of this is to imagine every time you are nauseous or you're sick or you can't move or you are fatigued, that the powers that be are doing their work. And it actually worked. You know, I think when we set our mind on something and we actually visualize it, things are possible. And I am the happiest person in the world today. I don't take anything for granted. Every day that I get to be alive is just actually extraordinary.

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And I have profound gratitude. Profound gratitude. I can't believe I got to live. You know, I look at the Congo where people don't even use the word 'cancer,' because when they get it, there is no cure, so there is no reason to mention it. I look at how many people in our own country don't have health care and die of very, very, you know, fixable diseases. And I feel insanely fortunate that I had health coverage and I feel insanely, insanely grateful that I had doctors that knew what they were doing when they were inside my body.

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And that I got to live and who knows how long I'll live for. I'm cancer free, 18 months now. You know, I don't feel it's in my body. I feel healthier than I've ever felt in my life. But I don't take anything for granted. You know, I, I… Everything just, you know, it's like that amazing veil gets lifted when you suddenly see a green lawn and it's green, and a blue sky and it's blue, and I feel that way about everything now. Everything just feels shockingly real, and often very beautiful, or very disturbing, but it's one or the other.

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And you know, I am living with a brand new body and sometimes it's very disturbing and strange, but it's a body. And it's, you know, I look at people complaining about their bodies, they don't look good, I'm like, "Really? You've got a body. I woke up with a body. It's good news." And, and I actually have to say that… I feel cancer, I feel what cancer is in a way that I never thought cancer before.

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I feel the metaphor of cancer. I feel the, you know, the weakening of our immune systems and allowing whatever this genome is inside us to begin to occupy and to begin to grow and spread is, you know, whether… The metaphor of that in the world and, and how, you know, whether it's the ozone layer or it's the protective gauzes that cover this planet;

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How we have created holes in them so that, you know, that cancer, that carcinogenic impulse, is spreading everywhere; and how we have to protect each other and how we have to protect the Earth, and how we have to love the Earth, and we have to love women's bodies.

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PAT MITCHELL:
Was there ever a time that you'd give up? To say, "Okay, I've done my part, now I'm going to take care of my…."

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V:
I don't, I think when I think about, you know, the idea that the tumor could have been a result of, you know- At one point it just felt like it was a flesh monument to all the stories of rape and abuse I had heard across the planet and it didn't make me feel resentful. It made me feel actually more connected, to the suffering of women.

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I felt like they were actually in my body. Those stories. And if that were true… And it was actually the women of Congo who saved my life, because every day that I woke up, we were in the process of building the *City of Joy* when I was going through chemo, and every day that I woke up, I knew we had to finish the *City of Joy*. And I thought of the women in Congo who get up every morning, who don't have vaginas who don't have reproductive parts, who have had so many things shoved inside them and, and they have been violated in so many different ways from so many different directions that their, their bodies have been fundamentally destroyed.

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And I think of how they get up every day and they go about their work and they feed their children and they love their husbands. And they carry hundred pound sacks on their backs and they dance. And it just seemed impossibly insane for me to be complaining about anything in the face of that. And not only did that save my life, but knowing that we had to finish *City of Joy* saved my life.

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And I really do believe that promises keep us alive, you know, and keeping your promise. I promised them that we would finish *City of Joy* and so I had to live to do that. And I think often that we, we, we shrink on our promises and we don't fulfill our promises to each other. And it isn't just damaging to the people if we don't fulfill the promise. It's damaging to ourselves because we don't rise to the occasion of honoring our promises.

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And, you know, I really do feel that the women of Congo saved my life. And when I went back after my surgery,. I went back like a few weeks later, cause I just had to be in the Congo. I just had to feel… I had to be with the women. I had to dance with the women and it was really funny because there was a period of time after my surgery where I was incontinent, and the women of Congo had, who had suffered rapes have fistula and they're incontinent.

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And when I went back, we were all in the world of incontinence together and it was really wild, it was really wild to be in the same stream to know their pain and to feel that connected to them. And it made me all the more committed to the struggle. It didn't make me want to give up. It just made me insanely enraged, and insanely crazy, and insanely devoted to making sure not one other person gets raped in a way where they become incontinent for life.

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
V in Congo

V:
City of Joy is a revolutionary center for women of Congo who have suffered gender violence, so that they can be healed and strengthened and empowered to become the next leaders of the DRC. City of Joy was built by the women of Congo. It was funded by UNICEF and V-Day, but V-Day is the

sole supporter of the ongoing activities. And it is owned by the women, and directed by the women, and it is theirs. And it's one of the most beautiful places on the planet. It's in this gorgeous valley, and there's this gorgeous wind, an incredible energy that comes from there.

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And there is a joy that I have never seen anywhere on this planet. In the midst of one of the poorest places. Immense suffering, of a volatile war that is breaking out, has outbreaks constantly and skirmishes and rapes and, but there, the City of Joy that is attempting to grow and spread in the middle of all of it.

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PAT MITCHELL:
What were your memories of the women's movement? What was its impact on you?

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V:
I wouldn't be here without the women's movement. I would not be this person if there hadn't been feminism. I was in college at, you know, when feminism really was happening, and, and the women's movement was really at its peak and I think for me, you know, reading Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett and Robin Morgan and all kinds of other people… really inspired me, and really made me see a whole other world.

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I, I don't think I would have ever believed I could have or be entitled to my voice and my feelings and my rights, had there not been a women's movement. And I walk in the path of so many extraordinary women who were brave and who broke down walls and who spoke out and who didn't shave their armpits and who, you know, refused, refused everything that they refused, and stood for what they stood. And, you know, it's interesting because, I think, sometimes, you know, the generation that's coming behind me doesn't really understand.

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Like, I was in the middle of the women's movement so I saw what women were doing. I saw the risks they were taking. I saw what women had to go through and how they were belittled, and undermined, and criticized, and reduced, and, you know, and I saw their willingness to stand up, and be in the fire, and that gave me so much strength and such a sense that I could do the same thing.

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And you know, we're about to do this Anita Hill conference. You know, it's 20 years since Anita Hill, and I was just re-reading Anita Hill's bio- you know, autobiography, and you know, speak truth to power. It's a very, very, very difficult thing. And having been, now, in the front lines a little bit myself for the last 14 years, you know, I think it's very hard to be criticized when we've been trained to be liked. It's very hard to disagree with people when we've been told that we're supposed to be agreeable.

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It's very hard to say, "That isn't the way to do things," when women are supposed to be polite. And you know, I had a gathering the other night with three really powerful women who were all on the front lines, and you know, everybody was just talking about the trauma. The trauma of speaking truth to power. The trauma of feeling like you've done something wrong, and how we really need to have each other's back, how we need to have each other's back as women, how we need to stand behind each other.

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That doesn't mean we can't disagree with each other and I think there's a really big, a very big difference between disagreement and undermining. I think we have to disagree with each other, and I think we have to speak our truths, but I think we have to be behind each other. And, and I feel one of the beautiful things about V-Day is- V-Day is this incredible, incredible movement of mentors,-

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ON SCREEN TEXT:
V On V-Day

V:
-Of leaders, of activists, of students, and we have each other's backs. And a woman can go onto the V-Spot any day and say, "I have trouble in Georgia with my play," and within one minute, she will have 20 women responding to

her to give her help. And that's the world we need to be. You know, if you're if we're going to speak truth to power, we can't do it alone. It's impossible. It's impossible, so we need each other.

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PAT MITCHELL:
What do you want people to say when they say, "Eve Ensler is…"

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V:
Wind. I want to be wind, that's all I want to be now. I want to be wind. I want to, I want to live in a way where that part of me where my ego was always so needing to be somebody and to amount to somebody, where it just gradually disappears. I want to just be here to serve. I want to just be in the, the path of wind, where you get to show up for people and love people and make things better, and not have to leave a mark, and not have to be anything more than the great thing that wind is which is sometimes caressing, sometimes it's, you know, a typhoon, sometimes it's delicate.

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But you know, I think… I think, I think so often, when we're marginalized when we're young, either we claim our victim status as our identity, or we march through the world proving ourselves, that we exist because we've been told so deeply that we haven't existed. And I think now, at this part of my life, I want to learn how to disappear.

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And I don't mean die. I just mean disappear. Just to be here but not here. To, you know, to stand by and support but not get in the way. You know, to nurture people and not intervene. And that's work, it's work because the ego is always there. it's always claiming its territory. It's always claiming its due, it's always wanting attention and you know, I'm really, really aware now of that dialectic in me, and wanting more and more to disappear.

END TC: 00:53:23:00