MARLO THOMAS INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Marlo Thomas
Actor & Activist
6/7/2011
Interviewed by Nancy Armstrong
Total Running Time: 38 minutes and 18 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

I'd like to start out talking a little bit about your family, your childhood, where you grew up.

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, I grew up in Beverly Hills, California, with my dad, who was a very famous comedian, and my mom and my sister and brother. I'm the oldest in my family. And being the oldest, I think it gave me sort of an authority place because my parents traveled a lot, so I learned very young how to stick up for myself. When my parents were gone, if somebody- if a nurse or a nanny or a cook or a butler or somebody, did something to my brother or sister, I would say, "You're not allowed to do that."

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And I'd be like, eight. "I'm sorry, but that's not allowed." I was like the monitor. And so I think that was a really interesting experience to grow up that way, to feel that when my parents were gone, I was the authority. So I learned how to speak up to authority. So I think that's a big part of who I am.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So tell me about your dad. What was he like and what was that relationship like?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, my dad was a very warm guy. He was Lebanese and people from that part of the world are not like, wasp people. They're very emotional. They

have their heart on their sleeve. My father always told us he loved us. He kissed and hugged us all the time. I'm always amazed when women tell me that their father never told them they loved them or they never sat on their lap. I sat on my father's lap until it was really inappropriate.

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I loved him and I loved his laugh and he was just a cuddly, nice guy, and he was funny. And I think that funniness really gave me a look at life that everything wasn't so serious. Everything didn't need to be taken with a heaviness. And whatever happened- Like I was in an elevator one time with him and I was a little girl. And there were a lot of people in the elevator and I was kind of scared, all the big tall bodies looming over me. And so I was hanging on to my father's leg, and after a while he looked down at me and he said, "Please madam, I'm a married man."

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And everybody in the elevator laughed. And it made the world seem like asmall, friendly place, as opposed to, "Oh, that's a lot of big adults." That was his way of being, just making light of things, and so I think that's what was formed into my personality.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
And you got that acting bug from him. When did that happen for you?

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MARLO THOMAS:

Well, when I was a little girl, I used to go to the studio with my dad, and I think I got the acting bug just being there. And it was exciting. The process was exciting to me. We'd get in the car, and I was around eight, and I would cue him on his lines, and he was making a movie with Margret O'Brien so it was perfect. She was only like, a year older than I was. And he would say to me, "Oh honey, you do that every bit as good as Margret does." So of course, I mean, we'd get to the studio and I'd watch them and I'd sit on the director's lap and he'd direct around me.

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And then we'd go to lunch in the commissary and I'd sit next to a man dressed like a pirate or a cowboy. I mean for a kid, it was better than Disneyland. It was real live people in costumes and playing parts and being different people. It was so exciting and I could do it. I mean, I was good at telling jokes and I was a good storyteller. So it was just a natural thing.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about your mum? What was her role, and how did she feel about it, and what was your perception of her?

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MARLO THOMAS:

Well, my mother was Italian, so like my father. I was very lucky to have two emotional parents. I think I was lucky. It was a little crazy but it was lucky. And she was a mama. She really took care of her children. She was really a mama bear. She was very ferocious about her children. Unfortunately, for my mother, she was raised at a time when women gave up their careers to be wives and mothers. And so she had her own radio program. She was a singer, and it was in Detroit.

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So when my father and she were going to get married, my dad wanted to go to Chicago where the bigger nightclubs were so he could make his mark as a comedian. And so my mother just naturally, without much to do, just quit her radio show and went with my father, the love of her life, to Chicago where he began his career. And I think in those early years when she was having babies, she didn't really notice it, that she'd given up anything, because she was getting so much. She was having babies and married to the man she loved and everything was a gift.

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But then as time went on, she started to look for herself again, and she couldn't find herself and it was hard. I think she was the wife of a very famous man, it was kind of odd now for her to try to have a singing career. She didn't have the confidence to think, "Do I step out of the role of being Mrs. Danny Thomas and all of the sudden, become a singer?" She couldn't put it together again. And I've always felt guilty about that. I've always felt that she gave up her whole life for us and we could have done it on half.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What impact did that have on your path, your perspective on who had the power in your family and what you wanted for yourself?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, I think I knew, always, that my mother was sorry she gave up her career. And she didn't make me feel guilty about it all, but she always talked about when she sang and what it was like, and she talked about the excitement of having a program everyday. And when we gave a party, she always sang. And we always had these famous people that were my dads friends, and they would come and play the piano—Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole or someone. And they played the piano and sing, and my mother, completely undaunted, would get up and sing right after them.

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Well, she had a great voice, but she didn't have any intimidation about following all these great singers. And so whenever there was an open mic anywhere, she sang. So you could see the joy in her face when she sang. She loved it. So I think I stored that away and it's a big reason why I never wanted to get married. I thought, "This is what marriage does to you. It takes out your life. It takes the energy out of you."

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It doesn't have to, and I think nowadays, because of the women's movement and because of the examples of other women, we're seeing that it is possible to have a husband and children and a home and also have your career. But it wasn't- I mean when my mother got married, that wasn't even ever thought of. In fact, she would've been what they call a bad wife or a bad mother.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So you did leave. You went somewhere. Started with college, you didn't study theatre-

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MARLO THOMAS:
No.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Why was that?

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MARLO THOMAS:
My father insisted that all of us have a piece of paper that said we were qualified to do something in the world. And he said, "If you get a degree in drama, it doesn't get you a job. So you have to do something that will get you

a job." So I graduated as an English teacher. And I actually liked teaching. I did my student teaching, I never taught professionally. 'Cause teaching is a lot like storytelling. It's a lot like acting.

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In fact, I wrote my thesis in my senior year, comparing acting to teaching, and saying that a teacher was like an actor, and the lesson plan was like a play and that you had to get the children's attention in the first five minutes, just like you did with an act or with a play. And I kind of, sort of, walked it all through and ran the parallels as to why teaching and acting was the same. And I got an A on my paper, and I'll never forget, in red, the teacher wrote, "I think you really want to be an actor." And I did. She was right.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So that was it, you left college and you started right away.

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yes. I came to New York and studied acting and then- That was Sandy Meisner. And then I started auditioning like a maniac. You just audition 100 times and you finally get one part. And I did that and I just- I was an actress.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Was that process easy or difficult for you?

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MARLO THOMAS:

I wasn't used to rejection. I lived in a very loving home so I wasn't used to anybody telling me I wasn't good enough. Ccause my mother and father always said I was the prettiest girl in the world and I was the smartest girl in the world, so I had no idea that people were going to turn me down. So that was a big awakening, that I would audition for something and then expect to get a phone call. And then I didn't, and I didn't, and I didn't. And so I had to toughen up a little bit. Because at first I would just cry when they didn't give me the job.

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Like I couldn't believe it, and I'm not good enough. People say, "Don't take it personally," but how do you not take it personally? It's your person. It's you they don't want, not your Fuller brush. You're not selling brushes. So that was hard for me. Well, it's still hard.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Just want to talk about how you came up with the show *That Girl*.

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MARLO THOMAS:

I was sure. I wasn't so sure of me, but I was sure that the girls in America were like me. That everybody did not want to just end up in a cookie cutter way. And I knew that I did not want to play an appendage. Don't forget I'm the little girl who heard, "Where's she gonna go?" So I was definitely wanting to carry that flag forward. As we talked about the show, and what she would do, I said,-

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-"I want her to be a girl like me, who's got a college education, who wants to be an actress, who wants to be independent, who doesn't want to get married, who wants to find out who she is. That's what I want to play." And everybody said, "Okay. That's where we're going to go. We're going to go for that." And that's when Bill Persky and Sam Denoff created that pilot. I had called her Ms. Independence, was the name I gave the show. And they called it *That Girl*, which is a way better name.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
And what was the reaction?

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MARLO THOMAS:
I got a lot of mail from young women. 16 years old, saying things like, "I'm 16 and I'm pregnant and I can't tell my father. Where can I go?" "I'm 22 years old and I don't have a job, I'm married, I have two kids and my husband beats me.

Where can I go?" And I couldn't have been more flabbergasted. I thought I was doing a comedy show. I had no… Why would they be talking to me? And I realized I was the only young girl on television.

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There was Loretta Young. There was *Bewitched* but she was a witch. I was a regular, normal girl. And so they figured I would listen. And I started to check out where somebody in Des Moines would go or somebody in Phoenix would go. And there weren't any places. And that really politicized me. That created in me a very strong kind of synergy between what I had grown up with, which was already in there, and then coming toward me, this outpouring of women who needed things. I was born to be a feminist. I just…

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
That was your click moment?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yeah, it was my click moment.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Can you talk to us for a minute about the power of television and its influence on American culture?

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MARLO THOMAS:

I think television is a big influence for the very reason that we're in the home, and so that already feels safe. You don't even have to leave your house . And it's there. It doesn't get very censored. Nobody says it's an R, or it's a G, it's a PG, it's a whatever. So you have the opportunity—and especially by the repetition of the fact that you're there every Thursday night—that you start to feel like a friend. And I think television changes minds. I mean I know it does.

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I know from the fact that to this day, women stop me on the street and say, "I would've never come to New York if it hadn't been for you." That's an amazing thing for somebody to say to me. "I would never have gone to the big city. I would never have thought that I could- When I saw that apartment, I wanted an apartment just like yours. I wanted- And I said to my father-" I've had people say to me- "And I would say to my father exactly the things to my father and it worked." And I remember I had a line in the show one time where the father was really pressing me to- kind of trying to control me in one of these scenes.

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And I said to him, "Daddy, you and mother have done a great job of bringing me up, but now I'm up." It was a wonderful line, and so many young women wrote to me and said, "I say that to my dad now. You did a great job of

bringing me up, but now I'm up." And that- When you can do that for people and you help them figure out their own path, you really get under their skin and you become a friend.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
I did want to ask you a question about the big conflict for the last episode.

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yes.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What was the conflict?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, the big conflict for the last show was that the network and the sponsors and everybody, even my writing staff, wanted there to be a wedding. They wanted Ann Marie and Donald to have a wedding at the last show. And a lot of shows did that, where there was a wedding at the end. And I just couldn't do it. I mean, I tried to think about it openly and I said, "I just can't. I have the feeling that there's these millions of girls who've been hanging on Ann

Marie's every word and following her journey. And if she gets married at the end, it means that's the only happy ending."

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And so they started to, "No, it doesn't mean that. It means that's a choice." I said, "No. I just- I've just got- I can't do it. We have to be the one show that doesn't end up with a wedding." So in the last show, I took Donald to women's lib meeting, which made everybody mad. But I thought it's the perfect end, that she's going to continue to try to change him and bring him into her way of thinking. But I'm so glad. I'm so glad we didn't have the wedding, because I think I would feel bad about it till this day.

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And I got a lot of mail about that. People actually… It's not that they knew there was this controversy or this conflict, but they were so surprised and thrilled that Ann and Donald did not get married at the end of the show. They loved it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What was the next catalyst for your next project for children?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Free to Be happened because my sister had a little girl named Dionne, who was around five years old, and I adored her. I still do. And I was reading to her

and I was just shocked that all the books and the stories were the same old stories. The same old prince with the same old glass slipper and the same old happy ending. And I said to my sister Terre, I said, "We really have to find other stuff for her to read. I mean, it doesn't happen. The frog doesn't turn into a prince and the prince doesn't save you at the last minute. So none of this happens."

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So she said, "Well, you go find something. I can't find it." So I went to the bookstore and I was shocked because the books were even worse than I imagined. There was this one book—in fact I put into my book *Growing Up Laughing*, I put the actual pages because I wanted people to see that I wasn't making this up—and the book was called, *I'm Glad I'm a Boy, I'm Glad I'm a Girl*. And on one side of the page was the boy thing, and the girl thing was on the other side. So it said, "Boys are doctors. Girls are nurses. Boys are pilots. Girls are stewardesses." But the one that really got me was, "Boys invent things. Girls use the things boys invent."

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Well, I almost had a heart attack right there in the children's book section. I mean, can you imagine? I thought, "Oh my God. This is worse than it was when I was growing up." So I thought, I'm going to do something. I'm going to make a little record for Dionne and we'll give it to friends and stuff. I was not thinking that I was going to do this gigantic project. In fact, when I took it to the record company, Arista Records at the time, and they said, "Look. A

record like this only sells about 15,000 copies. But we're happy to do it. it will sell 15,000 copies."

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And I wasn't asking for any money. I just wanted to do it, to create a project that was non-sexist and non-racist, and show children that there was really no way you had to be. You didn't have to fit into anything. Whatever you look like, whatever color you were, whatever gender you were, if you wore glasses or whatever you looked like and were, that was good and you were free to be whoever you wanted to be. And then we created the record, and I started asking other friends of mine to be in it and it turned into this production and then it became a gold and platinum record. And it was shocking to me as well as everybody else.

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I just hadn't expected it. But it hit a nerve. And it still there. The album is still in the Top 100 albums. It still sells, the book still sells. And the TV special won an Emmy and a Peabody. And it really said something to adults. And teachers took it into their schools. 35 states adopted it in the school curriculum. And even wherever I go, people will say to me, "Oh, my kindergarten teacher always played this," or, "My fourth grade teacher…"

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And till this day, I'll be in a town making a speech or something for St. Jude, and there will always be a letter at my hotel. "We're doing a Free to Be performance this weekend. Would you be able to come?" So it just lives on and on and on. It's amazing.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Were there any difficulties doing the TV special?

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MARLO THOMAS:
There were a lot of difficulties doing the TV special because- Well, when I presented it, I went off and made the special, and then I turned it in to the network and they told me that they didn't want me to use *William Wants a Doll*. Because *William Wants a Doll*, they felt "would make every boy in America a sissy," was their words. I said, "Oh. That's ridiculous. Every boy has a doll. What's the difference between a doll and a bear? I mean, it's the same thing. You hug it. You cuddle it." And they really wanted it out.

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And they weren't very happy with *It's Alright to Cry*, 'cause it was sung by Rosey Grier, who's this big football player. That was the whole point. I mean, it wasn't going to be sung by a little thing like me. I wanted a big bruiser to sing it, to say to little boys, it's okay to cry. So they said, "Okay. We'll leave in *It's Alright to Cry*, but *William Wants a Doll* has to go." And I said, "No. Absolutely not. If you don't want it, I'll go to CBS." Because ABC was my network at the time. And so they let it go, but the interesting thing is, even though it did really well and won all these prizes, there were a couple of reviewers around the country-

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The New York Times loved it. All the progressive places loved it. But the Boston Globe, the critic for the Boston Globe wrote, "Keep your children away from the set tonight." So there were men who wrote about this, that felt that this was just too dangerous for children to hear this kind of propaganda. And it was propaganda. I mean, saying that everybody's the same sometimes irks other people. I don't know why, but equality is threatening to the status quo.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Were you surprised at the impact?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yes, I was surprised at the impact of- I expected kind of an impact with *That Girl*, I didn't realize- I didn't think *Free to Be… You and Me* was going to be a large project. I was thinking it was going to be a project for my niece, but by the time we did the special, I knew what we had. Because everyone had written about it, and it had sold so many albums and the book had sold- the book got to be number one on The New York Times Best Seller List. So I knew what we had then, and I was so excited to do it on television and to bring that into the homes of children and to have it so that schools could show it.

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And we did a school version. We did a clip version for classes. We did lesson plans around it. We were very ambitious. We were going to change the world, one five year old at a time. That was our mission.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
And you decided you wanted the proceeds to do what?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, it was obvious we were going to make some money with this, and so I thought it would be great if- again, life is so cumulative. It's like a spider web. Everything you do sort of connects to the next thing. And I was thinking about those women who were unsafe at home with their children, women who were being abused, and so I thought it'd be great to take the money from this project that's for children and put it into a pot to help women and children.

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And so I called Gloria Steinem, and I said, “I'm going to be making some money from this project and I'd love to do some good for women and children.” And she said, "We're just starting to talk about a foundation from Ms. Magazine, the Ms. Foundation for Women. If you want to come in with us, we'll include children, and let's sit down and create and design what this

foundation could be." And so we were the only foundation for women in the country for like thirty years. The only one that was just about women.

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And we did a lot of good because we were able to give out seed money. We didn't have big money like The Ford Foundation or something, but we could give $15,000 or $20,000 to a small group of women who were just getting started. This got them an assistant, a phone, a few things to get going. That seed money then allows the to show who they are and what they can be, and then they can go to the Ford Foundation to get the big money. And so that we were very, very important in helping startups, and that was exciting to do 'cause you could see it.

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We could almost see the map of how we were influencing women all over the country. And we purposefully went to different parts of the country and made sure that we were getting the American Indian, Hispanic Women, the lettuce growers, the- everybody, so that everybody was getting a chance at helping their community.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
There was one initiative in the 90s I think, the "Bring Your Daughters To Work…"

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MARLO THOMAS:
Oh, yeah.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yeah, right. Around this time- Well, I think it was the '90s. We were all at the Ms. Foundation and we read about this Harvard study that Carol Gilligan had done, that said that girls, when they're around eleven, stop raising their hand at school and kind of went underground. And it had a lot to do with puberty. It had a lot to do with the lack of confidence now that they were noticing boys and boys were noticing them, and all the things were happening to their bodies. They were getting a little less confident.

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And sometimes they didn't come out until they were 50. Fifty. Not fifteen. 5-0. I mean, it was frightening to read this. So we all thought, "My God. We got to do something about this." So we all got together, and little by little with consultants and so forth, we said, "Let's do a program that says you should take your daughter to work with you." So that children- so girls can start to see that the workplace isn't a scary place, that the workplace wants them, that it's a friendly place. And it was the way I grew up. I went to work with my

dad and took the mystery out of everything. When I go to a sound stage, I'm at home. I know what the lights are and the cameras are and all of that.

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So we decided to do that and we were going to call it- We called it "Take Our Daughters To Work," so that you didn't have to be a mom. If you were somebody's auntie or somebody's next-door neighbor, you could just take any- Any girl was all of our daughters. And so that first year was very exciting because it really- It was one of those ideas that everybody knew it was the truth. Everybody who had a daughter knew that girls didn't get a fair shake, that girls were not motivated the way boys were motivated 'cause nobody was pushing a girl to have a career. Nobody said to a girl, "What do you wanna be when you grow up?"

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Because most girls were going to be mommies, so there wasn't the same pressure. It's a lot of pressure for a child, for a boy child anyway. But, it also lowers expectation, and what we were trying to do was raise expectation. That there's a place outside of the home for you, there's a place outside of the schoolroom for you, there's a place where there's a future. And so… they were everywhere. There were girls on the front page of The New York Times, at the printing press at The Times, there were girls on tugboats, girls on behind the scenes at a theater, and on the front pages of all the newspapers.

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It was a thrill. Honestly, I just cried to see these little girls. It was just such a thrill. And we felt… And I've met so many women that said to me, "I went to the Take Our Daughters To Work Program." And that means so much.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So as a young woman, what were your attitudes about marriage and commitment? And as a young woman, you didn't want to get married, and what were your attitudes…

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MARLO THOMAS:
Well, my attitude about marriage always was that marriage is an institution for one and a half persons. And mostly the one whole person was the man, where everybody put all their dreams into his pot—the wife, the kids, whoever—and he was the breadwinner, and he had to be cared for, and the rest was sort of a Greek chorus that accompanied him. And that's the way I grew up with my dad and my mom and my aunt and my uncles—all the marriages that I saw.

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My father was one of ten children. My mother was one of five. So I saw all these marriages—male dominated, women gave up their work. So I just felt that marriage was just an unfair place for a woman. And the only marriages that I saw where the woman was the one whole person and the man was the

half person, was when a woman was like an opera singer and her husband was the manager or something. But I didn't really want that either. I didn't want to live with a half person. So I thought this is just not the institution for me.

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I want to be involved in something where there's two whole persons and I'm one of the whole persons. So I had written off marriage as an option for me. It just wasn't going to be. And I had boyfriends and I did very well in my romantic life. I was happy. And I don't think I would've ever married had I not met Phil. And I know that sounds very romantic, but it's the truth. He felt like family to me. He felt very familiar from the moment I met him. And I trusted him. He was a feminist. That didn't hurt.

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So he'd already gone through whatever he had to get rid of by being raised in the '40s and '50s. He also said when he was growing up he wanted to marry a woman, just like dear old dad, who was in the kitchen like his mom and all that. But he got over it. And Gloria Steinem and a lot of women that went on his show helped him see that you really didn't have a marriage and a love affair with someone who is just caring for you and giving up their dreams.

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And I said to him one time- we were having an argument because I lived in LA and he lived in Chicago, and so we were going back and forth a great deal. And he was raising four boys by himself so he had big responsibilities that I didn't have. Anyway, I couldn't always get there when he wanted me to get

there. Like on a Thursday, and I couldn't get there till Friday night because I was working. And so he said to me one time, "Well, you never come. You don't come for long enough." All that. The kind of battles that you have if you're a commuter couple.

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So I said to him, "You know how hard you've worked to get where you are. I mean ,you started in Dayton, Ohio, with one show. You now have 225 shows. A marriage was eaten up by this. You've got kids that you've had to raise. The ambition that you've had to stick with it, to get your dream. All that you've put into it." He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, put a skirt on it and it's me. I'm the same person. I want what you want. I want to have my dream. And if we can't make that, if we can't design something roomy enough for both of us, then I can't do it."

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Because it took a lot. And not just in my time, but in women today. The culture is still there. "Are you a good wife? Are you a good mother? Oh, you weren't home? You went out of town for a week?" People make women feel very guilty. A lot of women say that people make them feel guilty for staying at home. And that's true, some women do. I don't. I think it's a choice. But you shouldn't be made to feel guilty for following your dream. And it's not a good example for girls, and boys. They should see a marriage in which there are two whole people.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
I want to talk about the movement. It seemed like it started for you when you read *The Feminie Mystique*.

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MARLO THOMAS:
Yes.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Did you have an aha moment when you read that book?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Reading that book let me know that there were masses of women who felt differently and that…It was stunning, and comforting. And then I would start to read things like Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, and Gloria Steinem was going underground as a Playboy Bunny. And this was all happening in different parts of the country, and nobody knew each other but it was happening.

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It was bubbling up from underneath the earth. And it was coming up. And I mean, I realize that that was- that I was a woman of my time. I mean, instead of feeling like I was from another planet.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
And what was it like meeting Betty, and Bella, and Gloria, and having all of these women in your close circle?

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MARLO THOMAS:
Meeting all of these women, and going to see our conscious raising groups, and meeting in D.C. before marches and things, and to hear their passion, and to see the heat they had taken. Betty Friedan and Bella Abzug took a lot of heat because they were angry. Gloria and I were softer so we got away with more. We were just as radical, just as revolutionary, but because we didn't scream and yell, and we were thin and pretty, and we got away with it.

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But I always thought it was so unfair, the kind of treatment that those women got, 'cause they were the ones that were there first and they were very angry. And that anger turned a lot of people off. We were just as angry, we just didn't put it out that way. We just said it in a different way, maybe in a more "feminine" way. Something that was a little bit more acceptable. But they were the ones that really- They were throwing the hand grenade in the bunker. And they were the mothers of the movement for sure.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

But you were out there in the trenches with the ERA-

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MARLO THOMAS:
Oh, I was there. I was.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Tell me about that.

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MARLO THOMAS:
I loved being a part of that because… Well, first of all, I didn't realize growing up and reading about the constitution and the bill of rights, I had no idea that when the founding fathers wrote the words, "All men are created equal," that it didn't include me. I didn't know that it only was about White men that owned property. I thought- I actually bought into the fact that all men are created equal, and men was like mankind. I didn't realize it actually meant men, White men.

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So that really flabbergasted me, and that was also great motivation to say, "We have to rewrite this constitution. I mean, this is completely wrong. The Bill of Rights are wrong. We have to…" And so of course we did with amendments. We had the 14th Amendment and we had the 19th

Amendment, which was that women could have the vote. But women couldn't vote. I mean, when you start to learn all of this, it's enough to make you very angry. And so, to get an Equal Rights Amendment seemed to me the only way to ensure that in every single state in this country, women would have the same equal chance.

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Because it's true, in different states, it's different. Even to this day, women are not as free in each state. They do not have the same kinds of rights. So that's even true with abortion. So those became rights that were very important—the Equal Rights Amendment and the Choice Amendment, neither of which do we get. Roe versus Wade happened but…

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Do young women have any clue as to what it was like? Why don't they understand what your group of women went through?

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MARLO THOMAS:
I don't know why young women don't know about the struggle. I think that… Black Americans know the struggle that they've gone through, their families went through, that there were actually slaves in this country, uneducated people that were not allowed to be educated, not allowed to have own property and so forth. I don't know that there's enough women's studies.

There was a young woman who came to a speech I gave the other night, and she said, "We don't have any women's studies at my school."

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She was about 19 years old. I said, "Really? Not in high school either?" I thought women's studies were everywhere. It's important that you know what your heritage is. It's important that you know the struggle of your part of the species, because there is no such thing as rights forever. Democracy has to be protected. Democracy has to be constantly fed or else it will be taken from us. Our rights are all taken from us. We're always fighting for our rights, our privacy rights, our rights to carry arms or not, all of the rights.

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These are… They're won but it's not over. Anybody can threaten it at any time, and it's true about American citizens and it's true about women's rights. So this is not something that's done and we can just move on to another issue. It's still an issue. And I worry that if young women don't realize that these are not rights forever, then they will go away. And that would be very sad.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
In terms of women's leadership, where are we right now?

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MARLO THOMAS:

It's a tragedy. It's a waste of half of the resources of our country and the world that women aren't running more things. I sometimes take comfort in the fact that well, there are more women anchoring the news. I mean, you turn on any television set and the news, you'll see women not just being weather women. In fact, now guys do the weather. But you see women holding down an anchor desk. I never say that when I was growing up. There aren't enough women in the Senate. There aren't enough women in the Congress.

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There aren't enough women running Fortune 500s. What is it… I think is it eight women now out of 500, are actually the CEO's. So we just have to keep on keeping on. I mean, we have to keep on encouraging women to have those jobs. And when a women gets that job, to bring other women up through that job. A lot of women CEOs that I know, say that they try to always have behind them a woman who could take their place. But it doesn't always happen. Some women don't want to have that much responsibility.

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So I think that- I don't know the answer to why there aren't more women leaders, because there's certainly a lot of talent. It's just whether or not the expectation is there. Do women grow up believing that they can be leaders? Do women grow up believing that the people around them want to be leaders? I mean, how do we raise our girls? It always happens when you're a child. Are your parents telling you that you can lead? Are your parents inspiring you with what your career can be? Or is your mother just buying

you a doll set? I mean what are you getting? What are you messages? I think it has a lot to do with attitude.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What is the most meaningful piece of advice you've received from anyone?

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MARLO THOMAS:
The most meaningful advice I ever received from anyone was from my father and I wrote a book about it called *The Right Words At The Right Time*. Because I think that there are points in our lives where we're right at a turning point and somebody says something to us, or we read it, or it's a lyric in a song, but something is your moment where you say, "Yes that's just what I needed right now." And when I was around 18, I was appearing in *Gigi*, in a Summer Stock production. And I was so excited.

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I auditioned for the part. I got the part. What a thrill. And all the reviews and all the interviews were comparing me to my famous father, Danny Thomas. "Will she be as good as Danny Thomas? Will she last as long? Is she as funny?" And I thought, "This is impossible." I was terrified by that comparison. So I went to my father and I said, "Daddy, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I have to tell you something. I want to change my name. I

don't want to be a Thomas. I want to pick another last name because I just didn't expect…

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I thought that as a kid, that I was going to have this white piece of paper that I could write my own story on, but I find that my piece of paper has your name all over it. I have to get another white piece of paper." So my father looked at me and he said, "I raised you to be thoroughbred. And thoroughbreds run their own races. They don't look at any of the other horses. They just wear their blinders and they run and that's what you have to do. Don't look at me, or anybody else. You just run your own race."

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And then a few nights later at the theater, this big white box arrived, and inside of it was a pair of old horse blinders and a little note that said, "Run your own race, baby." And that's the best advice I ever got.

END TC: 00:38:18:00