ROBIN MORGAN INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Robin Morgan
Author & Activist
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Interviewed by Betsy West
Total Running Time: 40 minutes

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:
The following video contains mentions of sexual assault and self-harm.
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ON SCREEN TEXT:
Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

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BETSY WEST:
Can you tell me about your upbringing?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Well, for years, I didn't talk about it, as a political being and as a writer, because it sort of took over and then people would get all aflutter about it. But finally, when I wrote the memoir, *Saturday's Child*, I came out of the closet that I had been a working kid actor… which is not something you decide to be when you're sort of—I don't know—two months old, sitting up- "I want to be in the…" But I'd been put to work as a child model, and then had my own radio program when I was four on WOR.

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But I knew from the time I was about four, that I wanted to scribble, I wanted to write. And so getting out of the business was a thing that I grappled with my mother and my aunt with for years, and finally managed to, with the jaws of life, extract myself from the business when I was a late teenager, about 16, 17 years old.

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BETSY WEST:
Was there anything about it that was fun?

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ROBIN MORGAN:

Oh, well, in retrospect, yes. Well, at the time, I had fun because children don't know what is normal or not. Their life is their normal. I knew that some things made me very irritated and cranky because I was not allowed to learn how to ride a bike or play much with other kids, because you could fall and hurt yourself or scar your face and the family would starve. So this creates a sense of responsibility in a very young person that is not totally healthy, but it also creates a sense of discipline that you come in later years to be quite grateful for.

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I mean, we did a live half-hour show once a week, and the learning of lines and the learning of places, and the being responsible and part of an ensemble—I've realized that I've tapped into in the rest of my life as a speaker, as a reader of my own poetry, as a- I mean, there's just a familiarity with media that I had and came to politics with that most other people didn't have. And in retrospect, I'm grateful for that. But I could have done without some of the other aspects of it.

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BETSY WEST:

What was your mother's motivation, or your family's motivation?

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ROBIN MORGAN:

Well, my mother had had me with a refugee from the Holocaust, and he was previously pledged to another woman, which he did not tell her. And so, they married briefly to legitimize this child and then divorced immediately, and she raised me basically on her own. Her sister had wanted very much to be in the theater, had wanted to be an opera singer and had a beautiful voice. But their parents were very old fashioned, European, Jewish, traditional people who felt that that was a step toward prostitution, and had denied that to her.

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And then along came this little golden baby girl who was very precocious, apparently never stopped talking. It sounds familiar. And all of those ambitions, mostly my aunt's, but in time, my mother's came to be channeled through that child. And, there were aspects to that that interestingly enough, certainly my later years as a writer, had to examine and engage. But my years as a feminist threw a retroactive light on.

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Because these were women—my mother and my aunt—who were highly intelligent but minimally educated, and had been constrained by the traditions in their own families. They were first generation Americans, they were immigrant families. And in my mother's case, she'd fallen in love with this handsome doctor-refugee and had been basically abandoned by him. And they had no outlet for their rage, for their talent, for their energy, for their intelligence.

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So my many bloodied battles of my childhood and my adolescence, in retrospect, gave me a compassion for women in those situations. There was no women's movement for them. There was no group to tell them you're not crazy, or that you don't- you can still maybe go back to school. They couldn't. They had no route other than this child, or so they thought.

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BETSY WEST:
You became their outlet.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
I was their outlet. That's right. And the problem with that from the child's point of view is that you have all of the responsibility but none of the power. And that's a bad combination. It's not a good combination.

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BETSY WEST:
Did you remember at the time of your childhood, thinking it was a good or bad thing to be a girl?

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ROBIN MORGAN:

I remember that in school—I went to a private school and then later had tutors—I felt the difference and it irritated me because I did not see why… I mean, you've got to be kidding, I'm just a person. But it wasn't until I was in my teenage years and beginning to try my wings as a young writer, a young poet particularly, that I encountered—and it shocked the hell out of me—that I encountered out-on-out discrimination.

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I was sending around poems to literary magazines, and I always put "Ms." because that's what we did at that point. "Ms. Robin Morgan." And of course, Robin is a genderless name, and in Britain, it's mostly a male name, but here, it can be either one. And the poems kept coming back, which I just always assumed was that I wasn't really good enough yet and I would work more. And then one day, by sheer chance, it came back to me with an acceptance, the poems that I'd sent out to a major-

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I think it was Sewanee Review, or was one of the major literary reviews. And it came back to Mr. Robin Morgan, and I had forgotten- left off the "Ms.," and they had assumed I was a man- And I remember doing an internal double take on that, and thinking, "What…" And I never put the "Ms." on again, and I began to be published more and more.

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BETSY WEST:

Tell me about that feeling when you were four years old, that you wanted to be a writer. I mean, that's very- What was that sense?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
It was a sense of an internal world. I mean, I was a fairly solitary child because I had to be an A student in school, and I had to be working, and I had singing lessons and dancing lessons and accent lessons, and it was a full schedule—and rehearsals—and so there wasn't a whole lot of time for other children. And… that meant that books moved into the center of my universe.

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At first, Lamb's *Tales From Shakespeare* and *Junior Classics,* but then moving- I was reading Kafka by the time I was 11, and I thought he was hilariously funny. I still do. I never see why people think he's spooky. And beginning to read poetry, and it was just so transformative. For one thing, it was so beautiful, and it was such fun. And it was like a fantasy world, but you could create it. And don't forget that I was already pretending to be other characters.

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I mean, I was an actor. And so the idea of a permeable membrane between realities, or between what was taken as the normal reality and the one that seemed much more vivid… began to be my norm.

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BETSY WEST:
And tell me then about your move toward activism.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
I became more involved in my early twenties. Very much, the Vietnam War was really heating up more and more, civil rights was heating up. And I became involved with CORE, Congress on Racial Equality, and SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and voter registration and antiwar activism. And very rapidly became involved with women's groups within which we sometimes call Ladies Auxiliaries—Joking, but it wasn't a joke because that's really what we were doing.

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We were making the coffee and not the policy. But these first, "Hey, wait a minute, brothers, we're here too," did not meet with the automatic, "Oh, of course, you are. We're sorry that we expected from our revolutionary comrades because this was a brave new world." It was met with, in public, rocks and tomatoes being thrown; in private, with accusations. Your bourgeois, your counter-revolutionary, your… If you don't want to be involved with group sex, you're a prude. If you don't want to- I mean, whatever it was, it was the woman's fault.

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And of course, most of all, this was not important. This wasn't political. Political was the draft. Political was Vietnam. Political was racism, because it

also affected men as well as women, and therefore, it must be serious. But anything that had an impact, a deleterious impact or a positive one or any impact, on female human beings alone was not political, and therefore irrelevant. So it was a radicalizing experience.

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So it was a time when you really could think that you were going crazy, because these were men you respected and your lives were on the line along with theirs. And it was so hurtful to find that while you were fighting for justice and humanity and for equal rights, that you were not considered really human. And I think a lot of the rage that came out of that was healthy rage.

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I wrote a piece that became—depending on your perspective—either notorious or famous, called *Goodbye to all that*, which was published in the very first issue of Rat. Rat was an underground paper that had mostly been a cross-cultural leftist paper and had been known for its sexism. And a group of women seized it and took it over, and for the first issue, I wrote *Goodbye to all that*, and named men and named circumstances, which was something you just did not do.

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BETSY WEST:
And by *Goodbye to all that*, you meant…

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ROBIN MORGAN:

The sexism and the hypocrisy of pretending that we were welcome- that women were welcome in the left, that we were the real left, and that they didn't seem to realize it and that we were not going to take this crap anymore. That was already at a point when Weathermen was a going concern, and Weathermen had required for its security that a new woman coming into the group had to sleep with every man in the group. Now you may well ask, as I did and many other women did,-

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"What? Excuse me. How does this… How does this guarantee security?" Well, because… Nobody could really answer that. I presume, "We have something on her then. Or if you sleep with somebody, then you must be such a marvelous… It ensures her silence." I have no idea. It's crazy. It was a lie. It had nothing to do with reality, certainly not women's reality. But many women went for that. And the weather-people, excuse me, were very, very riddled with this, which later on weather-women came out and said, "Oh, yes, we were wrong to support this kind of…"

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But at the time, they exerted tremendous power and there was a real Keeping Up with the Joneses in the left where you tried to out radicalize somebody else. So the worst thing that you could be called was bourgeois or counter-revolutionary, and feminists were being termed precisely those two things because we were saying, "Just a minute."

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BETSY WEST:
So let's talk about some of the activities that you did. You founded an organization, and I know there was a lot of anger, but you had a lot of exuberance, a lot of fun in a way.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
We did.

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BETSY WEST:
Tell me about that.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
We did, we did. I mean, one of the things that I must say when I talk to younger women and they say, “Well, what one element-” There's not ever one element that you can advise somebody on, but if I have to boil it down, I'll go with audacity. But a lot of it also came from the sheer exuberance that we were feeling at the time because we were doing our own thing. The Miss America pageant certainly was among the first to them.

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And I will cop to the plea that, yes, I was the main organizer, although it was a whole group of women that did it together in New York, radical women. And it had a certain flair, that although I've come to regret aspects of it later, I still smile at.

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BETSY WEST:
I want to ask a little more about Miss America. What did it represent and why was it the target?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
It had an enormous propagandistic effect on a whole generation, or more than one generation, of young women. And also, there had never been a black Miss America. There had been one Jewish Miss America.There had never been an Asian Miss America… I mean, what does that tell us about what the image—to all young women, to all little girls, Black, Asian, Hispanic… what message did they get? In addition, Miss. America was always sent to entertain the troops wherever the troops were Korea, Vietnam, there she would go off and wave the flag.

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So there was a whole patriotic military thing going. And her main purpose was to show products, which happens apparently to this day. I mean, she sent around- The sponsors of the pageant, whatever they are, she has to appear in

their showrooms and win their conferences and make nice to their buyers. And so that's her main job, a commercial spokeswoman. So the basic message of the pageant was objectification, selling yourself for-

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If you want to be successful—because this was success for you, you'd be rich and famous for a moment—these were the things you had to do. You had to be White, you had to be a certain kind of attractive, you had to be a certain weight, you had to be patriotic. All of those things. And those messages were very entrenched at the time, so to challenge them, which now seems, "Duh, yeah," was a profoundly radical gesture at the time.

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BETSY WEST:
And what about the famous myth? How did that happen? Why do we think that you burned-

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Oh, the burning of the bras that never burned. Yes, well… I had given an interview to Lindsy van Gelder, who was a reporter at the New York Post. In the upcoming weeks, I had been trying to conduct media classes- And so interesting to now be a founder of the Women's Media Center, because I've been trying to do classes to share my media skills with my sisters, with the women in my group, and the organizers with me at the pageant. Because

understandably, they were scared to death of a camera and a mic and a whatever and a press question, and I wasn't.

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But no virtue of mine, I'd grown up playing hopscotch over cables. So, we had our media workshops. But then they choked when there was an actual interview. So I had done an interview with Lindsy van Gelder about the upcoming pageant and the upcoming demonstration. And she wrote an interesting piece, and then she decided—thanks a lot—that to make it a sexy piece and appeal to her editor at the City Room, that it should have a lead that said something about,-

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"Men burned draft cards, now what's next? Women will burn bras." We never burned bras. We never intended to burn bras. What we did- And we had a huge trash can that we had festooned and decorated saying "freedom trash can," and into it we threw—and we encouraged women who attended to throw… symbols of women's oppression—super high heels, which unfortunately are back now. A lot of broken ankles, you can't run, can't kick.

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Merry Widows, which fortunately has gone the way of history, but they were tight waist cinchers that you couldn't quite breathe on when they were around your butt, and dish rags and diapers and mops, and whatever one thought of as symbols of it. We were going to throw those into the trash can, which in fact, happened. But we never burned anything. But wow, that line took off. And to this day, it's out there as a myth.

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Finally, I think about 5 to 10 years later, a group of women in Chicago finally made an honest man sick of the media and burned a bra on the shores of Lake Michigan just to make the myth real. But no, we had better taste than that. Burning rubber smells dreadful. We never did that. We did have women inside the pageant who disrupted the pageant on live television. It was live at that point. And we had a whole little squad of them, some of them went on to become weather-women.

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But they went inside and they dressed very nicely, they had little white gloves. And they had a huge multi sheet sign that read “Women's Liberation” that they had furled under their coat, various coats, and they snapped it together when they got in the balcony and hung it over the edge of the balcony and it was on live television, thus freezing Bert Parks' glistening smile. He was the host for all time. And from that point on, the pageant was always taped.

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Some people have unfairly, but I must say to my secret delight, called that the real birth of the contemporary women's movement, simply because it had such coverage and women all over knew about it and sort of, it modeled rebellion for women.

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BETSY WEST:

Yeah, talk about the reaction. I mean, what was your feeling about the reaction, that you'd been planning it and what happened-

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ROBIN MORGAN:

I was just high on revolution. I was so… First of all, I don't think I had slept for five days. I had lived on coffee and cigarettes, I was a smoker. But we all had- And I hadn't washed my hair and I hadn't- I mean, it just- And I wasn't a mother yet, so I mean, I was in a state of ecstasy because we'd done this kind of thing before, for years. Got permits, planned the reservations on the buses, booked the buses, did all of this prep stuff, but we've done it under the direction of the guys.

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And when the time came for the speakers, or to write the leaflets, or to define what it was about, it was always the guys. And this time, we were using all these skills and we were doing it for ourselves. It was so heady, you could just get drunk on it. I mean, we were, at 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the morning, making the signs with magic markers, or finishing the leaflets, or- I mean, it didn't matter because the energy was absolutely buzzing. It was vibrant.

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BETSY WEST:

And then to have it-

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ROBIN MORGAN:

And to have it take off the way it did was quite wonderful. There were some members of New York Radical Women who were not amused. They were more of an organizing school that felt you have to go very, very slow, and you have to have all of your politics and all of your strategies decided ahead of time, which you will then… deliver to the masses. Well, that didn't cut very well with some of us.

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And I always felt that the more women were involved, the more the politics would emerge. I mean, because after all, we were a group of young, White, educated women in New York City, and there was a lot of folks out there who were not like us. But they were also pissed off, and we should hear from them. So as far as I was concerned, the more people who knew, the merrier. But they were a little upset because they had kind of a… what I would now call "Central Committee" attitude. And central committees did not sit well with most of the group.

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So we split, and those of us who were more, what they called anarchical, formed a group called WITCH, which depending on which anagram you were using, was Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. Who says we didn't have a sense of humor? You couldn't get away these days with that anagram. But this was the late 60s. But it also got taken up by women- Because it had a certain panache, and was fun as well as was rebellious-

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There was a group called Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment, they staged a wildcat strike against Mabel. At that point, it was… a consortium of telephone companies all owned by one. I don't know, there were 16 or 17 different WITCH groups calling themselves different things, depending on how they broke down the anagram. But all of them had in common guerrilla theater, and sometimes guerrilla actions.

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So WITCH New York, our original coven, hexed the New York Stock Exchange, for example, for sexist, racist policies around the world, and in this country as well, and big business, and blah, blah, blah… Although we were very, very pleased when the hex seemed to work, because when the press arrived as they were called for about 9 o'clock in the morning when the doors usually open, the doors would not open.

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At that point, there were these great, brass, huge doors that had locks, and amazingly enough, the hex worked because the doors wouldn't open. The press, of course, did not know that at 3 o'clock that morning, some of us had gone with Krazy Glue. And oozed Krazy Glue into the locks, where it then, of course, froze so the doors didn't open. So we were very practical, which is- We believed in… praise the goddess and pass the ammunition, or pass the petition, or pass whatever you got. And WITCH became quite a- We caught on again with the imagination of young women around the country.

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BETSY WEST:

You did get a lot of press at that time.

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ROBIN MORGAN:

We did. And it was necessary and helpful because there were relatively few of us. When there's only a small group of you, you have to be, what we were mostly called, shrill. What would male supremacists do without the word shrill? So we were called shrill, and divisive by the left, and all of those things. But you have to be a squeaky wheel, because otherwise, nobody even notices you. And when people say that the movement's become less radical now, I don't agree.

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What I think they're overlooking is now the movement is vast. It is sophisticated. It has already made enormous demographic and life changes in this country. And it's global, and it's networked. So that means that particularly, considering that women are not a minority, not in this country and not globally, we have at our… discretion, a wider repertoire of tactics and strategies than, basically, any other oppressed group because we're everywhere.

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There's problems with that because it's so huge, and there's problems for people who want everyone to march in a cookie pattern way. But that's not

the way women are ever going to march, and that's not a real revolution anyway.

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BETSY WEST:
Robin, you've talked a little bit about some of the women who disagreed with your tactics. I mean, there was a lot of in-fighting in the movement.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Oh, yes.

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BETSY WEST:
Talk about what impact that had on you.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Makes you cranky. You try really hard not to become bitter. And… over time—and it does take time—you realize that all oppressed peoples go through this. I mean, the late Flo Kennedy used to call it horizontal hostility, because it's easier to attack each other. If you attack the real adversary, you could get fired, you could get beat up, you could get killed, you could get

divorced, whatever. And so, we, in time, came to see that that horizontal hostility was not necessarily a good thing and to-

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BETSY WEST:
Explain what that means.

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Well… in the South, it's called crabs in a bucket, where like, if one crab tries to crawl out of the bucket, the other crabs drag it down. So, for example, when I first did *Sisterhood is Powerful* because I had skills as a writer, there were some women who criticized me, "It must be a star trip," even though I took no money from it, I set up the first foundation for women in the women's movement. I mean, everybody had copyright in her own piece. I mean, it didn't matter.

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Later on, they came to see that it was a valuable contribution to the women's movement, sort of a "from each, to each" front. These were my skills. This is the best I have to offer. But there was an ultra-egalitarianism that felt no one should publish under her own name. No one should publish well, no one should write well. The lowest common denominator whenever possible, and I disagree with that. And I think over time the movement has come to

appreciate skill, and excellence and differing kinds of excellence, and different kinds of leadership.

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And that's our great strength. And also, it's less important to say, “I'm more radical than you,” which was an inheritance, I think, from the male left. Or, “I'm more…” It was another version of, “I'm more popular than you in high school,” or something. It has no real lasting relevance, because this is the big one, this is the oldest oppression going. The first thing they say when a baby is born is, “Is it a boy or girl?” And we've already seen a Black president. We will eventually see a gay president, he will probably be male.

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We will see a Hispanic president, he will probably be male. And we will see an Asian president—American—and he will probably be male. And finally, then we might get a woman. I mean, the older I get, the funnier I think it was that I thought, “Oh, well, we'll have won this by the time I turned 35.” That is the sentiment of a very young and very idealistic woman. But we all thought that. We thought we would win it or we'd be dead, so it didn't matter. We did not envision the harder route, which was you're going to live, and you're going to have to support yourself and your child and your life, and sustain the visio, and sustain the activism.

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Easy enough to fund things- Actually, it's not easy to found things at all, but you can get an organization started. Sustaining activism is where the rubber meets the road, and that's where the despair settles in, and that's where the

criticism from other women settles in. But you don't have to like somebody in order to work with her. You don't have to… We've sometimes confused friendships with collegiality. We confused tactics with strategy. We confused…

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We knew that the personal was political. We had said that, and that was an amazing insight. Because men were saying, "Oh, rape is not political."

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BETSY WEST:
Was that your insight?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
It was. It came out of a group meeting and I was the one that finally framed it.

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BETSY WEST:
And how did you frame it…

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ROBIN MORGAN:
There was a group of us who were talking about this and outraged that the men were saying, "This is not political. And doing the dishes is not political.

Sharing the childcare is not…" And a number of women said, "How dare they say that? I mean, it's political to me." "And just because it's personal-" Somebody else said, and the sentence was forming collectively. And then I said, "It's that the personal is political." And then we knew we'd had it.

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BETSY WEST:
Can women use their sexuality as a kind of empowerment?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Sure. It just depends on knowing the context. For example, if you see a nude photo of a woman and it is in a museum catalog, that's one context. If you see it in the pages of *Hustler*, that's a whole other context. I sometimes think that there is not as much sensitivity to context as I personally would like. For example, sure, we used to call this post-revolutionary consciousness in a pre-revolutionary time.

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It meant that if you said, "I'm going to take a walk through Central Park at 3 in the morning and everybody be damned," and wound up chopped into little pieces, that was not so smart. Because you were being rebellious, but consider the context. So I think that the affirmation of female sexuality is healthy, wonderful, terrific, couldn't be better. I think where it gets confused by the culture with sexual revolution-

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Don't forget there are still people who say the sexual revolution occurred in the 70's—it never occurred for women. It was a male defined sexual revolution. And to this day, women are not as able to be as free sexually as men are. On their own terms, not just more available to men. That's not sexual revolution.

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BETSY WEST:
Do you think that young women, though, understand what happened?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
You mean in the 60s and 70s- Not much, but again, it's not their fault. We suffer an education system that does not teach history much, and we suffer a media that doesn't communicate the full picture of the other half of reality. And also this country itself is very a-historical. It's not just the women's movement, the same is true of the Black movement. Young African Americans know far too little about the civil rights movement.

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So these things disappear, and there tends to be… what history does, at least in this country. It's a trend that says if something exists as a right, it wasn't one, it was given. "They gave women the vote." The hell they did. It was 100 years. "They gave civil rights to Black people." Huh? So consequently, as an

activist and an organizer, because we don't claim these things, particularly women don't—men are very good at this, they give each other medals, they march around—but women don't stand up and say,-

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-"We gave you childcare centers. We gave you equal pay for equal work. We gave you lesbian custody rights. We did. We, we, we! The women's movement did these things." And because we don't, only the failures feel real sometimes. The triumphs feel that they were automatic and they get absorbed into norm. When I first married, I could not keep my driver's license in my own name. I could not have a separate savings account. I could not have a separate checking account. I could not take out a loan.

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And I was already a writer. And I already used my own name for everything. I didn't want to be Mrs. Pitchford. I didn't- That is all gone now. But it was my reality, and it's important for younger people, male and female, to understand that reality in terms of ethnicity, in terms of gender, in terms of class, all of those things. Because this country did not come full blown out of the brain of Zeus. It has been constructed with blood and sweat and tears from the framers, straightforward.

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One of my books was called *Fighting Words*, and it just simply quotes the framers in terms of separation of church and state. Take that right wing. So the radicalism that is, to me, at the spine, the heart and the guts and the spirit of this country, and that I find most endearing and most profoundly capable

of deep change in the way people live their private lives—not just in the public realm—what happens in the bedroom and in the kitchen at 3AM, as well as what happens in the legislatures, that's been brought to you by the women's movement.

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And I'm very proud that I haven't had a chance to wash my hair in 40 years, although I want to write more books now which will be… Even though there'll be poetry and fiction, as well as nonfiction, there's no way to escape the consciousness, nor would I ever want to.

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BETSY WEST:
Let's talk just a little bit about the work-family challenge since you've gone there. Your expectations, and… What were you brought up, what did you think was going to happen? And then, obviously, an unconventional situation…

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ROBIN MORGAN:
You think?

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BETSY WEST:
Yeah, maybe?

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ROBIN MORGAN:

Well, first of all, I thought, "Oh, well, I can do this. I mean, I'll just take the baby in a backpack to all these meetings, and I'll just- I mean, it's not going to crimp my style. I'll just-" And then, of course, this person arrives, and not only are they 20 inches long, but they are an invalid because they need you to do everything for them. And you keep thinking things will return to normal and they never will. This is a totally new normal. So that was a comeuppance. And… I will say this for Kenneth. He was a fine poet and he was a great father, particularly in Blake's early years.

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And I was doing a lot of speaking. So I would come and go and… But he was a real co-parent. It wasn't, "I will help her with it." That changed as time went on, but Blake had the benefit of that, and also of a group of friends. Men who were in Kenneth's gay group, women who were in my women's group. Whenever a commune—thank the goddess… But there were people around who cared for him and who were varying types of people.

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All of it, very good input. You're guilty no matter what you do. You're born a woman, okay? So basically, you wake up and if you're… I have got a three part guilt going for me, and that's before I even touch base with the fact that I'm Jewish even though I'm an atheist, but ethnically, I'm Jewish. So that's another guilt. But basically, so if you're not with the child all the time, you're feeling

guilty, you're feeling worried, even though intellectually, you know that this is in fact better for the child and better for you.

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If you're not with the movement all the time, you're feeling guilty and you're feeling worried. And if you're not at your desk writing, you're feeling guilty and you're feeling worried. So wherever you are, at the barricades, at the desk, or with the child, or sometimes all three, you're feeling worried-

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BETSY WEST:
Meaning you are feeling-

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ROBIN MORGAN:
I am feeling very worried and feeling guilty. And I did it anyway. I do it nonetheless. I think women should… It would be a good thing, I think, if women stopped feeling guilty about feeling guilty, if you know what I mean. I mean, these are all responsibilities that we have. In the meanwhile, we're working to create a society where there are options and backup and support—hello—for families, which does not exist now.

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The only reason childcare- Feminists have been accused of being anti-children. This, again, is pure… Fill in the blank. Beep. Because the only reason childcare is on the national agenda is because the women's movement

put it there. So this is ridiculous. But men still—a little bit more—but still don't really co-parent. If you look at the hour breakdown, still women are doing the double job or the triple job or the quadruple job burden.

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So who wouldn't feel guilty? And we're made to feel guilty. But at the very least, we should stop feeling guilty that we're feeling guilty. And the propaganda that comes at women all the time about being perfect, perfect, perfect, which used to be- I remember there was a woman named Marabel Morgan. I remember her because our last names happened to be the same. And she was… You do all of this, and do perfect housework, and then wrap yourself in saran wrap so you're sexy when your husband comes home. Oh my God. Who has the time, or the saran wrap?

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Today we have a Martha Stewart kind of perfectionism. I mean, there's always somebody who is telling women, "You can do this better and you can be more perfect." And perfection, a) doesn't exist, and b) is boring. Martha Graham once said, "Beware the pointed foot." And she also pointed out that the Navajo weavers, in their blankets, always made a flaw to let the soul free. So perfection is-

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Nobody can do it. Why try? You do the best you can and you try to do it in a way that doesn't debilitate you and make you crazy. I was lucky in the early years because Kenneth was a very good co-parent. I was lucky because Blake,

my son, has an amazing resilience and has always been a person of high intelligence and real pluck.

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And he became very politically active very early on—probably had no choice, poor kid—but he's turned into a man with a sense of justice and a sense of humor.

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BETSY WEST:
What's the piece of advice you would want to give to a young woman about career, work, life, relationships, children, pursuing your dreams? I mean, you pick it. Do you have some advice you'd like to hand out?

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ROBIN MORGAN:
Well, I think, first of all, audacity. And it would be my version of Joseph Campbell's Follow Your Bliss, which is a little granola for me. But I would say follow your passion… because that will sustain you. I mean, work without passion is labor, and whether it's work, or whether it's politics, or whether it's child raising, or whatever… The worst thing is fear.

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So you're going to make it. You're going to screw up a lot. You're going to make a lot of mistakes. God knows I have. And they are as valuable- maybe more so, than the mistakes you didn't make. And don't be afraid to be loving

because we live in a world where that is made to be sentimental. And I hate sentimentality. There's a real difference between sentiment and sentimentality.

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What passes for loving? You know all the jokes about, "I love her, therefore I hit her." These are in almost every language in the world. That's not what I mean. I don't mean a mawkish, Disney kind of lying love. I mean… a fierce love that requires change in oneself and whatever one sees going wrong around oneself. And most important, probably, laughter. Laughter is just- It's the most healing thing. It's the most…

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It's the thing that gives you the most perspective. It's the thing that keeps you from being deathly pompous. It's the thing that requires… the most sanity you can manage to muster in a world like this, where every morning is filled with news of grief. And to laugh in the face of that and not be callous, but still be loving and be audacious, is not an easy task. You can do it. You can do it. All of it. And you'll be very tired and very cranky and you won't be able to wash your hair for 40 years, but what the hell? It's better than the other options.

END TC: 00:40:00:00