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Wenxian Zhang, Alia Alli, Jennifer Ritter & Maureen Maensivu

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AA: I'm going to do a brief introduction, and then we'll start with the questions.

MF: Okay.

AA: Good afternoon, today is November 4, 2010. My name is Alia Alli, and with us today is Wenxian Zhang, Head of Archives; Jennifer Ritter, and Maureen Maensivu. Today we will be interviewing Ms. Muriel Fox, a Rollins alumni and co-founder for NOW. Starting off, can you please tell us about your background – where you grew up, what your family was like when you were younger?

MF: Okay. Well, I grew up in Newark, New Jersey, went to the high school of Philip Roth Weequahic High School, and then my brother had dramatic fever, and so my family moved to Miami Beach and I was fortunate enough to get a full scholarship to Rollins. In those especially, I think the scholarship students were very serious at Rollins and we had wonderful teachers – wonderful opportunities really – of people who came to the campus and just the interaction among us. So it was a wonderful experience for me. And then when I went out – I wanted to be a newspaper reporter, and I was for a while, but then the newspapers were really disappearing, especially in New York, and so I got a job in a public relations agency where I had been told, "I'm sorry, we don't hire women writers." But I came back through another door and got a job at Carl Byoir and Associates, which was the largest public relations agency in the world. And many years later, and thanks also to the woman's movement, I was executive vice president of Carl Byoirs – thirty-four years later I might say. At the same time, in 1966, I was again privileged to be a co-founder of NOW with Betty Friedan, who was *the* founder of NOW, and a group of wonderful women and men – because it's a national organization *for* women, not *of* women. We had marvelous men in the organization, including my husband, who was the first chair of the board of New York NOW and he was a doctor. People would say, "Shep, what are you doing in the women's movement?" And he'd say, "I want my wife to make more money." (laughter)

AA: Now going back a little bit, you mentioned that you came to Rollins. Do you mind sharing with us some of the stories that you have of this campus?

MF: Well, it was a wonderful time for me. I was really a poor, little, badly dressed, inexperienced, unsophisticated girl from Newark, New Jersey. I used to work in my family's grocery store after school, and coming down to Rollins, which was frankly very glamorous as well as very stimulating, was a good educational experience for me. Although I mentioned at that time the sororities – I couldn't get into a sorority because I was Jewish, but the independents at Rollins were very bright, very active, interesting people. So I had a wonderful experience here, made very good friends.

AA: I was looking at some of your yearbook pictures, and it seems like you were very involved as well. Can you share with us?

MF: Yes, well I was on the *Sandspur*. We had a committee here, we had a special – could be called an honors course – *Prexy*. Hamilton Holt was our president at the time, and he created a conference on the atom bomb and world government. And he established a group of honors students; there were probably ten of us. We worked on preparing a paper about the atom bomb and world government for a whole semester and worked on that – again a great experience with marvelous professors helping us with that.

AA: Who were some of the other professors that you had while you were here.

MF: Well, I've been asking around and nobody remembers (laughs) any of them – but Professor Nathan Starr, a great professor of English, brilliant man. Rollins, I think, always attracted wonderful professors because of the climate as well as the intellectual climate. And so Dr. Starr was a fascinating man. And then Professor Royal France was my professor of Economics – very progressive, interesting man, lovely human being. And they are the two I remember. I remember others also, but it was a very stimulating time and I was very grateful to Rollins; we had small classes, which encouraged me to speak out. It really brought me out as a person.

AA: Now, you've mentioned that you took a lot of classes, what was your favorite class while you were here?

MF: Well, I think the two I mentioned with Dr. Starr and Dr. France were the two.

AA: How has the climate changed – the Rollins climate – I know you've walked around campus. I'm not sure if you had a lot of time –

MF: Well, I was privileged to mention to Dr. Duncan that the character of Rollins physically has not changed. It's just as beautiful and has the same Spanish character, and just more buildings – bigger buildings – and I'm sure better equipped buildings, but in a sense, anyone who was at Rollins when I was there, from '44 to '46 would recognize it immediately and feel very much at home here. It has not changed.

AA: Surprising –

MF: Well that's quite different from other universities. Usually they add another building and for one reason or another, it doesn't fit in with the architecture. Everything here is of one piece, and it's a beautiful piece and of course it melds very beautifully with nature – with the beautiful trees, with the Spanish moss, and the Cyprus and the lake. So it remains a beautiful atmosphere.

WZ: Our records indicate that you won the John Martin Essay Contest. Do you remember that?

MF: (laughs) Oh, right! I don't remember the subject of my essay, (laughs) but I know I'd won it. At Rollins at that time, it was interesting because there was a small group of scholarship students as I said; we'd sort of won all the prizes and had all the interesting courses. And then

frankly, there was another group of students at Rollins who were wealthy, beautiful, beautifully dressed, and they weren't just interesting in the same things we were interested in. They played very good tennis; I never did learn to play tennis at Rollins, but now I love my tennis.

WZ: So you were also a correspondent for the United Press.

MF: I was very fortunate. During the conference of the atom bomb and world government, which had outstanding people participating – I.I. Robbie, one of the great nuclear scientists, and William Laurence, the science editor of the *New York Times*, William Douglas, the supreme court justice, and Corliss Lamont, of the *World Federalist*, and James Carey, head of the United Electrical Union, and other really important people were at that conference. The United Press reporter, for some reason, had to go back home, and I guess I was recommended, so I took over as the stringer for the United Press. And here I was, probably seventeen years old at the time, and it was certainly a great honor, and great experience and I think I did a good job. And they used all the stories I filed, and that was a start. And then I got to be a stringer for the United Press in Miami Beach doing other stories also. So that was the start of my journalistic career. But then when I came back to New York, there weren't any newspaper jobs, so that's when I went into public relations.

AA: After you left Rollins, you mentioned that you went to different college.

MF: Right, I graduated from Barnard College in New York City. I wanted the New York City experience. And to be really honest, I used up all the good courses. It was two years worth of wonderful courses. I think Rollins was a much smaller school at that time, so that was another incentive for moving on. But I've always been grateful to Rollins. It did a great deal for me and really prepared me for the world that followed.

AA: Now what kind of jobs did you get into after you graduated?

MF: Well, I got to be a copy writer for Sears Roebuck, and then I moved down to Miami because my mother was ill. And I worked in publish relations, helped elect the mayor in Miami. And I'm very proud that I handled the Dade County reelection campaign for Senator Claude Pepper. Now he lost that to George Smathers, but he carried Dade County, thanks to the Unions mostly. And the privilege of working for Claude Pepper, one of the great men of congress congressional history.

AA: What influenced you to become associated with NOW?

MF: Like every career woman, I had experiences which made me understand all of the discrimination against women. The ads – a lot of the young women don't believe that the help wanted ads said, "help wanted male, help wanted female," and those of us who wanted good jobs looked under "help wanted male." And then when I applied to work at Carl Byoirs, where I eventually became executive vice president, I was told they didn't hire women writers. And everywhere – and I remember when I was at Buyer, I remember I had a client and an associated press reporter with me, and my secretary – made an appointment at the Oak Room for us to have

lunch in. We got there, and we're told sorry, we don't allow women in the Oak Room at the Plaza hotel. I mean this happens to us day after day–

AA: What goes through your head when they tell you that?

MF: Well, we've got to change things – that's what went through my head. So when Betty Friedan wrote the *Feminine Mystique,* in 1961, and it was published in '63, I arranged for her to speak to American women in radio and television and before she spoke, you know, I said, "We've got to have an organization that's going to enforce civil rights, like the rising civil rights movement in the racial field." And she said, "You mean an NAACP for women," "Yep." And she said, "Well, I'm not an organization person." And I said, "Well, it's important." But anyway, she made a wonderful speech, and I sent her a thank you letter and said if ever you have such an organization, I'll help with the public relations. So in 1966 – in the summer of '66 – when a small group started this new organization called NOW, which Betty Friedan named, I was on her Rolodex, and I was one I'm sure of hundreds of people who got a form letter telling me about the new organization. And I wrote her back and said send me two hundred applications, and I'll send them to all of my friends in radio and television. And then she invited me to her apartment at the Dakota hotel in New York, and said, "Will you do the publicity?" And I said, "Well, I'm busy, I've got a full time job, I've got two children, but you know, I'll do what I can." And like everybody else, we ended up running the mimeograph machine and everything else. So that was the start. We founded – we had our founding conference of NOW October 29th and 30th of 1966 in Washington D.C. There were about thirty of us in the room – women and men – and we knew we were making history, we had no doubt about that, but I think we really didn't realize that we would change the world so fast. You know after thousands of years where women were really the chattel of men. In our lifetime, in your lifetime, we've seen these tremendous changes. There's still a lot more to be done that's going to be up to the young people of Rollins – women and men. And Betty Friedan always emphasized, this is the National Organization *for* Women, not *of* Women, because we had men as well as women in it, and that was always very important. And that we were doing this work not just for our daughters, but for our sons, because they were all victims of the social inequities that exist.

AA: One of the things that you did with NOW was that you did like a meeting with the *Sesame Street* executives.

MF: Oh my (laughs).

AA: Do you remember that?

MF: Yes I do (laughs). Where'd you find that at? (laughs)

AA: It's all online (laughter)

MF: Yes, I had actually helped Joan Ganz Cooney, who was the founder of *Sesame Street* – help her get her job in educational television on Channel 13 in New York. And then a couple of years later, Joan Ganz Cooney, who again was one of our most important, brilliant innovators, created

Sesame Street. And our agency, Carl Byoir and Associates, became the public relations agency for *Sesame Street.* In fact I wrote the presentation which spelled out what the program would be. And then a few years later, I would – work out the dates, I'm not quite sure – but let's say at about 1972 probably, NOW officers were saying we've got to something about *Sesame Street.* It doesn't have any women role models. The only woman in it is a housewife in an apron, and all the role models are men – almost all the puppets are men. So I arranged for a meeting between Joan Ganz Cooney, and the other leaders of *Sesame Street* with the leaders of NOW and helped them arrive at some understandings that would lead to more inspiring roles for women. One of the reasons that Joan Ganz Cooney had to be persuaded was she was very much involved in the Black civil rights movement, where they felt that they needed to have role models for strong men, and she felt the Black community needed these strong men. So NOW said well that's true, but the black community also needs strong women. So she worked with us on it very cooperatively.

AA: What has been your biggest challenge in your career?

MF: Well, there's been so many (laughs). The biggest challenge I would say is sex discrimination every step of the way. I remember once the president of our agency said to me, "Well Muriel, you're wonderful, we love you." As a matter of fact, I had been made vice-president. I was the youngest vice-president at Buyer. But he said, "You know, you've gone as far as you can go, because senior management of these giant corporations we've worked with – senior management can't relate to a woman. So it really took NOW to change the whole climate – the business climate as well as the social climate – to make it possible for the senior management to relate to women. And so, I certainly did that. As a matter of fact, I was president of a Buyer subsidiary, which trained senior management for interviews and speeches. So I trained all these CEO's. In fact some of them in later years reminded me of that. You know, it was fine. There was no problem. If you knew what you were doing, they could take orders and suggestions and advice from women. There really wasn't a problem. A lot of these problems that people thought would happen – like what would happen in the Oak Room if women if there were women there? Well when we finally walked in – when they allowed us in the Oak Room, and I remember having lunch with my brother – nothing happened. And I mean there was no problem at all and the same thing I think was true with all forms of integration – racial integration also, people working side by side, no problem and it's the same thing – men working with women. Their expectations with problems, in many cases really didn't exist. But certainly, I was always aware of what we called the glass ceiling, which still exists, where white men are more comfortable with men who are just like them. And so they tend to mentor other white men, and they tend to promote other white men. So this is a problem that women have. And same thing with salaries, and every other thing along the way. Also, you know, you can't make mistakes. I always felt that a woman doesn't dare to lose her temper or to make mistakes, or they'll say oh well, we had a woman and she didn't work out. We had to watch our step, but you know, we did. (laughs)

AA: Are you still involved with NOW?

MF: Oh sure, I'm still very much with NOW. And the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, which now has changed its name to Legal Momentum, and another organization called

Veteran Feminists of America, which I'm chair of board, with are some of the people who made the second wave. We still have work to do, but I'm very proud. The officers and the board of NOW are marvelous professionals. The president is a lawyer, and they are all very committed, and all very serious, and there's a lot to do, and they're getting things done.

AA: You also received so many awards for all the stuff that you've done. They even named an award after you – the Muriel Fox award.

MF: Right!

AA: Among all the awards that you received, what has been the most memorable?

MF: I don't really know, there were so many (laughs). That Muriel Fox award – the Foxy they call it – it still exists, and they give it to a communications leader every year. And I'm very proud of that one.

WZ: You're on this – while you were at Rollins – on this interracial committee. Can you tell us about that?

MF: I'm going to be honest about you. I don't remember anything about that committee. I don't remember – we probably had one or two meetings, I don't think much was accomplished. In those days Rollins was of course, entirely white and Florida was very full of racial discrimination, so to be really honest, I don't think we got anything accomplished.

WZ: Later on, Fred Rogers was chair of that committee at Rollins.

MF: Well, wonderful. And I look at the people who were there in that committee. They were wonderful progressive people. I noticed – of course, they were mostly all women, and that was during the war and there really were almost no men on campus. But yeah, some of my good friends were in that committee, but I don't think we got anything done. There was no climate for getting anything done interracially in those days.

WZ: Tell us about Rollins during the World War II era. How was life?

MF: Well there were no men around (laughs). But actually, there was an air force base nearby and I know my roommate ended up marrying a liniment from the air force base, and actually I dated a conscientious objector from the nearby conscientious objector camp. And they were mostly Quakers, and they were digging privies in the area as their war service.

WZ: I am intrigued by these photos (referring to photographs on table). Could you tell us more about these?

MF: Yes, well of course, we all worked very hard for the equal rights amendment, which still has not been passed, so that is something for you young women and men to work on. It just seems to make sense that women should have equal rights in the constitution of the United States. And we almost had it, and then a very skillful, well financed, sophisticated opposition

arose, telling a lot of lies. And we didn't quite get the number of states we needed to ratify the ERA. We came very close. We came very close so - we marched in Washington to extend the deadline for ratifying the ERA. And this picture – I was wearing my – we were all wearing white because the suffragists wore white – and I was wearing my daughter's white graduation dress, which was very pretty. And I was ahead of the line, and I grabbed this young girl, which I think was seven years old, the daughter of Lynn Chaffin, a very important lawyer in the women's movement, and I said, "Come on Brooke, let's head the parade." As a matter of fact, this medallion was made from that march, and it shows a woman in white dress – me – and Brooke– the little girl – leading the parade. So, I'm proud to wear that. And so we got the extension, but we still needed three more states. And we thought Illinois should be a state that we should defiantly get, so we went to Illinois in 1980 on mother's day and marched for the ERA, and again I lead the parade. And so here I am leading the parade on Mother's Day 1980. And my mother had died that week, and so when I spoke at the ERA meeting during the march, I said, "I'm dedicating this march to my mother." The truth is that my mother is a housewife. She hated it, very unhappy woman, her life was really wasted. And the idea that half of the human race would all be fit into one job of housewife obviously meant trouble for everybody. And so one of the reasons I joined the woman's movement is I certainly didn't end up an unhappy woman like my mother.

WZ: Now looking back, how do you view your career?

MF: Well, I'm very proud of – Im very proud of my work in the women's movement. I mean, out of all the people who worked on it, and incidentally, the Veteran's Feminists of America published a book, which I recommend for your library, called *Feminists Who Changed America*, and these are the biographies of twenty two hundred women and men. Everyone was a leader, not just a member or a marcher, but a leader who made an important change in their society or their labor union or their college, or their profession. And I'm very proud that we shared that experience. So I'm very satisfied with my life. Also, in the public relations field, I was – *Business Week Magazine* called me the number one woman in public relations, and I was very proud of that. And frankly, that was also satisfying financially eventually. And I was on two cooperate boards, in addition to non-profit board. So that was satisfying. And there were pictures of me, of course, surrounded only by men, who were the other directors of the cooperation. So I've had a good life, and fortunately, I also had a happy marriage. My husband and I were married forty-eight years before he died and we supported each other. I said he was a doctor, had two wonderful children, who are both feminists – a son and a daughter, both psychologists now, and three grandchildren. So I feel very fortunate.

AA: Who has been your biggest influence in your life?

MF: Who?

AA: Yes –

MF: I don't know. There were so many. I mean Betty Friedan was of course an important influence. But there were many others. I have a picture here of Mary Eastwood, who nobody ever heard of her, but I would say next to Betty Friedan, she was the second most important

figure in founding NOW. I would say maybe I was the third most important, but Mary Eastwood was the second. And she was a lawyer working in the justice department. Couldn't be public, but she really set up all our first organization, all our lawsuits, she persuaded Betty Friedan to head NOW. Mary Eastwood worked with another wonderful woman, an African American woman named Pauli Murray, who was also a lawyer, a poet, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, later became an Episcopalian minister. So we did have African Americans from the very beginning in NOW. Our second president was Aileen Hernandez, who was African American, so there were many people really, women and men, who were influenced.

WZ: Forty-years after founding NOW. So what is your view of women's movement and what would be your advice to young women like Jennifer and Alia, when they are going to start their career?

MF: Well first of all, I would have to say we have to continue the movement. There's a lot of work to be done, and it's very satisfying when you get results, when you get something done. Don't think the work has already been done. Many of the doors has already been open, but there are still a lot of closed doors and its very exiting if you can help other women through those doors and as I did, I ended up, helping myself. So, it really – it works that way so that I would certainly say get involved in the women's movement. And, also, don't think that you can't have it all. You know people say oh well you can't have a family if you want a career. That's not true. You know I had a family, and a career, and the satisfaction with working with NOW. I didn't get much sleep, and I didn't have any optional time to say well what do I want to do? I think my one brief moment of leisure would be every Sunday I'd read *The New York Times* and that was about it. The rest of the time just run, run, run. But it was very satisfying, I wouldn't change it. So don't think you have to sacrifice one thing for the other. I would also say though, work for childcare. That has to be the major thrust of the woman's movement is I think – America is so far behind the rest of the developed world in providing quality childcare and it's a detriment not only for women, but for the children, and for the men. We've got to have society providing quality childcare for our children, just as every other developed country does.

AA: Anything else? Alright thank you so much taking the time out your day to help us.

MF: Pleasure

AA: You've helped us preserve the history of Rollins.

WZ: Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

MF: No, I'm happy to be back at Rollins, and I congratulate Rollins on its 125th anniversary, and I wish all of you great success in the future.

AA: Thank you so much.