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Oral history interview with Barbara Hammer,
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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Barbara Hammer on March 15 and 17, 2018. The interview took place in New York, and was conducted by Svetlana Kitto for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Barbara Hammer and Svetlana Kitto have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto, interviewing Barbara Hammer at her partner's home in the West Village in New York, NY, on March 15, 2018, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. So if you could just start by telling me where and when you were born and a little bit about your early life.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yes. My name is Barbara Jean Hammer. I was born May 15, 1939. I think I was nine pounds, eight ounces, so a very large baby. I was born in Hollywood Hospital. And even though my family moved after three months from Hollywood to Inglewood, CA, I like to say I was born in Hollywood. Furthermore, my grandmother, who was born in Ukraine and was a fantastic cook, was a cook for movie stars in Hollywood. And she was a cook for Lillian Gish.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And that makes me also want to mention that I was born in Hollywood. My grandmother had a great influence on me. Not only did she introduce, along with my mother, myself at about five years old to Lillian Gish and D.W. Griffith—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —but she also was a folk artist and an artist untrained in her own right. And she was a role model for me. She used to live with my father and mother, much to my father's discontent. But she would paint at the kitchen table with oil paints and she would use Styrofoam packaging for meat as her canvas. [00:02:00] She was very creative. She would make things out of ceramics and paint them and do her own firing.

At one point, she decided that she would like to weave silk, so she bought silkworms and she had to get a mulberry tree or buy the leaves, because I don't think they grew in L.A. I forget. And she would feed the silkworms and gather their cocoons and try to unthread the cocoons to make silk thread. Years later, in 2000, when I was in Japan working on my film, *Ogawa*—it was called *Devotion*, the story of Ogawa Productions. The town that Ogawa had moved to from Tokyo was called Makino Village and one of the things they and nearby villages were famous for were silkworms. And I brought back a huge silkworm drying rack which you can see when you leave, hanging on the wall over here.

So my grandmother was stubborn, also influenced me. We had physical fights. She wouldn't let me go out and play when I wanted to. So one time, I socked her in the arm, not expecting that as an adult she would sock me back. I was probably between seven and nine, but she did and it really hurt.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: As a youth, I don't know. I think I wet my bed for a long time, but finally—oh, yeah. My mother humiliated me because I used to have to wear diapers at a late age. [00:04:02] And she made me wear my diapers outside my pedal pushers, and this was really embarrassing because she would be going—

[side conversation regarding pet] Don't pet her or she'll pester you the whole time. Dandy, go. Go away.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Time to go to bed. Time to go to bed.

She would go visit neighbors, invite me to go along, but I wouldn't go because there I was with the diapers. Another thing she—okay—humiliated me with and I have a lot of wonderful things to say about my mother, was I picked flowers from the neighbors' gardens, but, you know, I didn't ask permission. So she made me wear a sign saying, "Beware. I am a flower thief." So these were the two forms of humiliation during my youth.

My mother born of both parents of Ukrainian descent, who immigrated through Ellis Island with, I know my grandmother scarcely but maybe a third-grade education. My grandmother used to tend geese on the family's property. My grandfather never met my grandmother until they met in New York, but they were born in villages five kilometers apart.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: He became a window washer in Peoria, Illinois. Was very successful but was extremely conservative with his money and kept it. [00:06:01] So, then when he died, he had frayed collars on his white shirts. When I went to visit, the ceiling paint was falling down and yet he would give me a gold watch for graduation.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: He was very conservative. I went around the world after I came out—well, I went to Africa after I came out with my first woman lover. And I stopped at his apartment in Peoria on the way back. I don't think she was with me. I don't remember that. But I had my guitar strapped on to the back of my BMW.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And I took it inside the house to play.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And he wanted to stamp on that guitar and break it. He didn't believe in art or music. It was all about making it in America. My grandmother and mother—well, she divorced my grandfather. Actually, I don't know what—how old they were, but I'm going to assume they were in high school. My mother had a sibling, a boy—a brother younger than she. My grandmother would—they had no running toilet in the house.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: They had a backyard—back outhouse. My grandmother, just to show how poor they were, baked pies—I mean, she was such a good cook—for the neighbors. And would go around and sell them house to house. When my father finally met my mother at the University of Illinois, because my mother was very smart. She went through a four-year college in three years with mortarboard which was exemplary and, I think, unheard of, maybe the first time at the University of Illinois in Champagne. [00:08:00] He bought my mother a toilet and had it installed in my grandmother's house. To finish the story just of the sibling, when my grandmother was old and in her 80s, living in Oakland—I'm the only relative, close relative around; my mother's deceased by now. The son tries to steal money from his own mother, my grandmother, and tries to set up a coffee company to import. He worked for Caterpillar. His name was William Kusz. At one point, the social—whoever investigates the Social Security, maybe the FBI?—called me on the phone and said, "Has your uncle, you know, done anything strange?" And I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't blow the whistle on him. I said, "No," but in fact, he stole my grandmother's money—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —which my sister and I would have inherited. It wasn't a great amount but you know, I don't know—10[000], 20,000. But that's kind of the family story there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Neither of the grandparents ever became—they always [spoke] with phonetic English. You know, I look at my grandmother's recipes and you know they're written in kind of an old-world script that is sounded out. The English is sounded out.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It's not correct English. [00:10:00] I don't know how much my grandfather knew, I mean, went to school. His father was in charge of a—he was the grounds man, the forest man on a large estate in Ukraine. In 2000, I went back to Ukraine, the first one in my family, because perestroika came in 1994.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: My mother's wish had always been to go back, and she'd kept a family tree which is in my archive, and so I had names of my grandmother's maiden name. And I heard—I hired a Ukrainian director who I'd met in Berlin. We were both showing films there. I loved her film very much. Nelia Pasichnyk. And she and her boyfriend? Husband? Put ads—mainly she because I was paying her for working with me—ads in the Ukrainian

newspapers around Ternopil. Ternopil is in the middle of the country, the exact middle. "Does anybody know Barbara Hammer is here from the U.S., searching her Ukrainian relatives? Does anybody know Buchacks?" And we had about seven responses.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so one day we went out to interview all these people.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I knew that one relative, Stephan, had died in Crimea, I believe. Or Siberia, I think it was, of, like, pneumonia or something. So I had a list of the relatives. I knew nobody had gone to Canada; so many Ukrainians had—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —back then. Both parents, grandparents came over in 1917, I should add. [00:12:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: And they're not Jewish, right?

BARBARA HAMMER: No, they weren't Jewish.

SVETLANA KITTO: No. Yeah, okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: And that's another story. Because I wanted to be Jewish—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —and I asked my grandmother. You know, I had heard that there are these marks on your arms, like in here, those wrinkles, that say you're Jewish if you have them. And so I went to her and I said, "Look it. Aren't I Jewish? Are you sure you're not hiding?"

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: She was anti-Semitic.

SVETLANA KITTO: Of course. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: They both were, I think.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I don't really say that about my grandfather, because I don't know. But my grandmother was and—but here, she was working for Jews in Hollywood. And she could cook gefilte fish, and all the Jewish recipes—

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —that they loved, so—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —maybe she got over it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But was just adamant that I wasn't.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Because she was Roman Catholic.

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: She didn't observe except I would say Easter, but she made Easter cooking—paska. You know, we always celebrated with the sausages, the horseradish, papushkas, just wonderful foods that still mean a lot to me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: On my trip to Ukraine, I met, like, seven people. The first woman, beautiful, looked a lot like my mother but wasn't related but was helpful. Offered to help go along with me. And it turned out that one of my grandmother's half-brothers was an artist too.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And he painted the churches in this little town called Zbarazh. That was my grandfather's town. [. . . Stryivka -BH] was my grandmother's town; I'm not remembering. It was five kilometers from Zbarazh. [00:14:00] And there was a church there. And he had painted the murals. I was so excited to see them.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It had burned five years before I got there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my gosh.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I got to see the geese in the field. I got to see that none of the roads were paved. That there were some houses with windows. Some of them were broken. That it was a poor village.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Finally, after meeting six people who didn't come through, there was—you could see this in the film I made called *My Babushka*:—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —[*Searching -BH*] *Ukrainian Identities*. In 2000, it was released, so I must have been there in '99; 2000, maybe I edited as soon as I got back. So, we went to this one house late in the day, the last we were to visit. An old woman was bedridden. The place reeked of urine. We made our way to her bed. It was like a built-in wooden bed in the wall. And she thought—she started crying. She thought I had come, I think, from her son who's in Canada, who—as an emissary from him.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And a very touching scene. She's holding my hand and I'm saying, "No. I'm sorry, I'm Barbara. I'm from the United States not from Canada. But I'm sure your son wishes you well." So she wasn't the right person but neighbors had come in. It looked like a Bosch painting—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —people with illnesses that hadn't been corrected, crossed-eyes, working people with their T-shirts and dirty hands. [00:16:02] And they all said, "Don't go yet. There's somebody else. She's out with her sons, Peter and Paul, tilling the fields." So she had gone home to take a shower and put on a new dress and a new white babushka, a scarf. And she came in very late. We'd almost left. Spitting image of my grandmother.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: My grandmother was, like, 5'2". This woman was, like, 5'0".

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And I held—I'd been carrying my grandmother's picture everywhere. You'll see it in the video. And I held it up next to her. Same large nose, same squinty eyes, large cheekbones. It was my—it was a relation.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It was. And, I'm not very good with relationships. It's in the film. But I think this is the way it went. My grandmother's mother had a sister and this was, I think, the youngest sister of my grandmother's mother's sister.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, my grandmother was smuggled out of Ukraine because the family was too large. I don't know why I would think 13; I don't know where I get that number. In any case, she was going to go with her childhood friend and maybe that family, the last minute they declined. They sent her alone in a sleigh drawn by a horse, hidden under straw, all the way to the Black Sea, where she was put on a freighter to Ellis Island.

That woman finally [my grandmother -BH], years later in Oakland, CA, when she was hit by a car and in a hospital, the doctor told me she had an abandonment complex. [00:18:10] Well, no kidding. You know, so she was never told us her age. So I think she came in under 16 which I think was the legal age at the time. So I've bought bricks for both of them at Ellis Island; it's something you can do—

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to commemorate your family and a goose. And a Buchack goose, an Anton goose. It's a long story on grandparents.

SVETLANA KITTO: It's good. That's very good. Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Okay.

SVETLANA KITTO: Do you want to tell me more about your mom?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, my mom. She wanted the most for me. I was the firstborn. I have a sibling, a sister three years younger. She showed—I mean, both my sister and I. My sister has a lot of animosity towards her, because my mom seemed to like me best. I don't know how much I knew that as a kid but as an adult looking back, I think she did. She wanted a lot from me. I was to succeed in America—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —in a way that she was still the child of immigrants. I was—my father, we haven't talked about, but he wasn't an immigrant. So, there was a chance for Barbara and she thought Barbie Jean had a lot of talent and she gave me all these lessons. So I—and they didn't have money. My father, even though they were both college graduates—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —they graduated during the Depression, University of Illinois. And they moved to California, you know, the golden apples on the tree, oranges on the tree. [00:20:00] But my father, talented as he was, worked in a gas station most of my childhood life, and became alcoholic. My mother really stayed home until, in my high school years when she started being a secretary at Northrup, and then worked in Hollywood for some screenwriters.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, the ambition was for me to succeed. So, I had tap dance, elocution, ballet, acrobatics, horseback riding, you know, swimming, a lot of the usual. But there was kind of a—I always felt like a lot of my work had to do with pleasing my mother. And maybe is partly behind my ambition. I mean, she's been dead since '74—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —and, no. Earlier than that, because my first film came out in '72. Sixteen millimeter.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, she is—but still, one of the early influences. You know? So I always wanted to make Hammer a name. That was big. My father gave me a big basketball. I think maybe he wanted a boy. So it was like a leather basketball. I couldn't even pick it up. I was, you know, like, probably between five and six, maybe seven. And there was always a hoop in our driveway. But I couldn't even make it up there so, who knows?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: That's supposition.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: My mother was very smart, and she was also cultured in a way. [00:22:00] Like, my father would play poker, my mother preferred bridge. My mother took me to art museums in L.A.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. She always wanted me to look at the old work, but I always went to contemporary. And in our house, we had a piano, so I had piano lessons. She played the piano. We had some art books, and

they had pictures like the famous Impressionists, Monet. And these early paintings influenced me, because the way the paintings were put on the paper in the book, they weren't glued on and they weren't printed on. They were loose, like taped on so that the paper was floating on the page itself which gave me the sense of paintings being moving—full of air, fluid. And it was especially Monet and the *Water Lilies* that I'm thinking of. Many years later, I made a film in 1988 called *Pond and Waterfall*, a silent film. And I think it goes back to—and then there's more about my painting in my life.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, one time my mother, when I'm in high school, decides that Marci and I—my sister, Marcia Lou, who takes the name Marci now—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —thought that our vocabulary should improve. So each of us had to pick out of the *L.A. Times* one of the—what do you call it? What do you call it?

SVETLANA KITTO: Articles? [00:24:00]

BARBARA HAMMER: The ones that are written on the opinion page.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, the Op-Ed?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. We each had to choose an Op-Ed for that evening and we had to read it at the dinner table after dinner, and we had to be able to pronounce the words that we didn't know in it. Which we didn't do very well, but we had to know what they meant, too. So, talk about ambition—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —for your kids. This went on, I don't know, six months to a year.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: So. My mother was very interested and influenced me, not only in art, in literature. She went back to school and studied *Beowulf*, when—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —maybe when I was in college. And I—and Shakespeare. She would take night classes.

SVETLANA KITTO: Like a master's?

BARBARA HAMMER: She wasn't working towards a degree—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, she just wanted to take them.

BARBARA HAMMER: —for her own education.

SVETLANA KITTO: I see. Oh, wow. Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: And they were big, thick books—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —I used to carry them around for a long time. And she would be reading them in bed at night before my father came to bed, her hair bundled up in curlers with a kerchief on it. And I'd go in to say goodnight and she'd be reading Shakespeare or *Beowulf*, and that was so wonderful.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And the art museums—

SVETLANA KITTO: Which ones? I'm from L.A. too.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, are you? The L.A. County.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Oh, okay. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, by La Brea Park.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, of course.

BARBARA HAMMER: The tar pits—

SVETLANA KITTO: I used to live right there.

BARBARA HAMMER: —where I ran away one night.

SVETLANA KITTO: To the tar pits?

BARBARA HAMMER: I slept in the tar pits one night.

SVETLANA KITTO: I love the tar pits. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So that's another story. We're going to go beyond 24 hours to do this, but you can—

SVETLANA KITTO: That's, that's fine with me.

BARBARA HAMMER: —get early history anyway.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Because a lot of the later history, especially around my work, has been recorded a lot. [00:26:04] But, mother nature.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Big. I love nature. If I have spirituality, I mean, I do. I'm waiting to die until it's summer, because I want to go through the spring.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, I'm doing palliative radiation. I'll start in another week. I get measured tomorrow for it. And I was in the hospital, near death, last week where I couldn't breathe. I did have emergency treatment. They hollowed out my bronchus that—there's a tumor—a large one—in my lower left lung that has grown up into the airway of the top. You know, the lung is divided into four places. And it blocked the air. It's already taken over that one. So, it's blocking the air to my upper lung. And we had to call the ambulance and it was very painful. And because I am so assertive, I got the attention I needed. We went in to a—is it okay to just skip ahead like this?

SVETLANA KITTO: Sure, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: We went in to the—well, there's a whole story here about fire department comes to get me. They want to take me to a local hospital. I have been at one hospital for 12 years, living with ovarian cancer. I'm not fighting ovarian cancer and I have a whole thing I'd like to say at some point against the use of war terminology to describe diseases and people living with them. It's not a battle—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Fight. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —with cancer. It's not a war. We have wars in Syria. We have wars in Afghanistan. [00:28:01] This is living with a disease, you know. Eventually I will die, but I will be living until I die. So that was the premise of a performance I gave in October 2016 at Microscope Gallery in Brooklyn, called *Evidentiary Bodies*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: That piece has now become a film called the same name. Three screens that I took to Berlin. From there, it has now become a three-screen installation which includes an X-ray screens, five of them that are about four feet wide, go down to the floor that the person enters a black box.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: On those screens are projections of my CAT scan, double CAT scan, in colors. You enter the space. You may put on white booties beforehand as people did at the performance. You enter the space. You sit on a small bench and the three screens surround you. The three screens are taken—shot by Angel Favorite who was my cinematographer probably 2015 going into '16, a difficult year with chemo for me. I mean, even in some

of the shots you see I have a bloody nose that I didn't even—wasn't aware of.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: No hair, very thin. And I perform living with cancer. There's CAT scans projected on my head. The final scene—it's only a 10-minute piece. I shouldn't say only; it's packed. I walk through a strip of film through all three screens with sprocket holes above and below. [00:30:06] I'm nude. That piece of film, as so much of my film, has been painted with acid, with acrylic colors, with crystals of salt. It actually exists as a 20-foot scroll and was in my retrospective at the Leslie-Lohman. But I walk through that as a nude body. Some point, I just started dancing and then went to the floor. And the film ends then, as I fade out my end goes down into the film. Because my life has been lived in film.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I feel very strongly about this piece and I hope it gets to be exhibited as an installation. It worked well in Berlin in HD because their screens were so huge. Like, our last screening, we had four screenings, and my composer, Norman Scott Johnson, often goes with me. Well, I mean, he went with me to Berlin. And he plays live an accompaniment on the stage to the film that already has his music on it that I have composed into the track.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So it's quite an event.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And the Karl Marx screen is the—it's either the largest—

SVETLANA KITTO: Ah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —screen in Germany or I think they said Europe. It's in the former GDR [German Democratic Republic] and it was—I don't know, must be an audience of 5,000 there. The screen went on forever and there was my film, filling the whole thing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It was great.

SVETLANA KITTO: Amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: So—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Berlin took a lot out of me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [00:32:00]

BARBARA HAMMER: Only five days back and I was in the hospital.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So. It was worth it.

[They laugh.]

So—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I've digressed from mom and nature and spirituality.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: We used to go to Botanical Gardens a lot.

SVETLANA KITTO: In L.A.?

BARBARA HAMMER: In L.A.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I'm sure you know, like, the Huffington [sic]?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It's got the museum in the—

SVETLANA KITTO: The Huntington, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —garden. Huntington. Thanks.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Got the museum and the garden.

SVETLANA KITTO: And Pasadena, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Pasadena.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I used to grow things in the backyard. I grew peanuts and we started—when we had family gatherings with my cousin. There was Ronnie Hammer.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, come on, girl.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: R-O-N-N-I-E. I haven't seen him since he's a kid. We started growing mock oranges. It's a flower bush. And that became our mock orange club. And we were curious that peanuts grew in the ground.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, that was really kind of a neat thing. And all my life, I've had—when I married a man and we lived in a pet hospital—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —in the back. There was a bunch of trash. I cleared away boards and made a garden. So, if I've ever been around earth, I make a garden. It's one of the things—I won't have this spring except through neighbors—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —that I won't be seeing that often upstate. But my—we would go to—my mother would pay attention to different plants. She—my father wasn't so interested; he was just going along.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Maybe he enjoyed being outdoors too, but it was really her initiative. And often, the old folks—my parents—would put out a blanket, lie down by a creek if we were in a more wilderness area. [00:34:04] And Marci and I would play along the stream, throwing rocks, picking them up, finding bugs underneath. That love for nature continues to give me resilience in a way nothing else does. And, of course, I love the change of seasons here that I never had in L.A.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And—what was I going to say? It was a sidetrack to nature. But, you know, one of my favorite activities is riding horses.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: I used to have a horse when I was married to a man—

SVETLANA KITTO: Ah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —that I trained and then even bred and got her foal. But then I divorced and the foal actually went to somebody else.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I never really got to train it but I had it till it was about a year old.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, when you were growing up, did you—I think I read that your mom—

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh.

SVETLANA KITTO: —she wanted to make you a star, right? [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Well—

SVETLANA KITTO: She wanted to get you an agent or something?

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That story. So—and then I was going to go into politics in high school—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, great.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because I was very active—

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. Perfect.

BARBARA HAMMER: —in college. Well, and even—and even some things about grammar school.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, good.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. My mom, after she met D.W. Griffith and Lillian Gish—anyway, just, she thought I was cute—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —freckles, braids, bangs. You know, little plaid pleated skirt—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —little white blouse with that kind of a neck, collar. [00:36:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] A butterfly? Is that it?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, Mary—something like that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Mary Jane shoes—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —with the little white socks—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Like Shirley Temple.

BARBARA HAMMER: —you know. Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Well, that's the point. In 1939, I've told this story many times, when Shirley Temple was born, she was—when I was born—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —in 1939. Not Shirley Temple. She was making more money than any woman in the United States.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: My mother thought I could be a Shirley Temple. So, that was—it was a financial as well as "ah-ha."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: She wasn't into—like, you read about some screen mothers—she didn't go that far. Mainly we didn't have money. My father's working in the gas station. He's managing it. He doesn't own it, I don't think. It was the Flying Red Horse.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Write it down. That's important to me, that Flying Red Horse.

SVETLANA KITTO: The Mobil station.

BARBARA HAMMER: The Mobil.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But at that point—because I used to wash car windows and make a quarter there. We didn't have money for professional lessons. So she did take me to an agent—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and he said, "Yeah, you know, she's got talent."

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm sure he sees a lot of it. "She needs professional training." So that was the end of the career except for mother gave me the neighborhood trainings—the acrobatics that I mentioned—the elocution—

SVETLANA KITTO: The tap.

BARBARA HAMMER: —tap dance. I used to tap dance *Tommy the Cat*—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —and then, you know, I would have costumes for Halloween. My mother and my grandmother and my father—there was a lot of tension in the home.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Fathers don't like a mother-in-law to come in. You know, she gets—takes up a lot of space. My grandmother was very stubborn and had her own ways. [00:38:01] And went out and bought her house when she didn't have money. My mother was always bailing her out—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —all her life. But my grandmother was there when my mother went into a coma, so. They had some tight relationship that was frustrating probably as well. My uncle wasn't paying any attention, the brother, to my grandmother at all. So, my mother—grammar school.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I think my love of animals also—I don't know if it came from my mom with the nature.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Well, we always had a dog. We used to have pet ducks. My dad raised chickens and rabbits because Inglewood wasn't incorporated yet—so it was really fun for me. I could make—I used to do early performance work as a child in our garage because I would make spook houses for Halloween—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and charge kids to go in. And then I would crawl in—after they'd gone in through a number of tires, they had to crawl through cobwebs. Then I'd go in and put ketchup on, you know, my hands and smear their face or do something live—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —inside. And it was always, like, this large backyard, places to explore, places to hide toys, bury them with my sister and wonder if we could remember where they were. So in grammar school, I had in sixth grade a wonderful teacher called Mrs. Basher. And Mrs. Basher would take those of us who were interested to the De Anza Desert at night in the Mojave—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and all those deserts out of L.A. [00:40:10]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And we would catch snakes on the road and tarantulas—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my gosh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and I wasn't afraid. So I kind of got known for being—

SVETLANA KITTO: You're very unafraid.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Well, I've been afraid of being—like, being a woman on the street at night, alone. I've had those experiences. Not that anything—things have happened but not necessarily at night. But, you know, so I would collect those snakes and she would identify them. We would bring them back and feed them flies and things. Maybe we released them later. And I would be in charge of the white rats in the classroom.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And then, my father, through his gas station, somebody gave him chinchillas that ate their own fur—they weren't worth anything. So, I used to raise these chinchillas. Not that I bred them, but sometime I got sorry for them and we took them—by then, I must have been in high school and known kids with a car, or had my own license which I got at 16. And we went in to the Hollywood Hills and released the chinchillas.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: But, you know, all their life, they'd been—I'm sure they were eaten by an owl right away or a coyote.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: We didn't think of that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: Junior high was rough. Boys didn't like me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Where'd you go to school?

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, I went to Osage Avenue for an elementary school—

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —which, by now, I think, we moved to Westchester in the sixth grade, so it was Osage Avenue. [00:42:00] Oh, before that, what was the name of the school that I went to? Osage Avenue, I'm trying to think if that was in Westchester. Because we moved from Inglewood; our family bought a plot of land and had a house built on it. 5238 Glasgow Way.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —in Los Angeles but an area near La Tierra, three miles from the airport.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I went to Westchester High.

SVETLANA KITTO: La Tierra and my grammar school was Osage Avenue. I'm wondering if there was another one before that.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, Westchester, it was a junior high, too?

BARBARA HAMMER: Westchester. It could have been—

SVETLANA KITTO: I'm just wondering. It doesn't really matter.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but I kind of—I know my—I was in the—I think Westchester High was a brand new high school because I was in the first graduating class—

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and there were—was it 300 or 3,000 of us? Maybe.

SVETLANA KITTO: Probably 3,000. I don't know.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm not sure.

SVETLANA KITTO: My high school was huge in L.A. It was 3,000. But that was—

BARBARA HAMMER: But we were just starting, yeah—

SVETLANA KITTO: —that wasn't a new school though.

BARBARA HAMMER: —out by Playa Del Rey.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I know where it is.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, I know you do. That's very fun.

[They laugh.]

And I felt like I knew everybody in the school just about.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That's why it's kind of—well, maybe it was just my class, senior class, was 300. But, I was—going from junior high into politics.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And how I entered politics. So, junior high, I wasn't popular. And I did have girlfriends, but the boys didn't like me. And I was very juvenile, I guess. I remember we would have food fights and I would eat crackers and spit them out. I mean, I'm picking the bad things—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —you know. And that was just to be bad. [00:44:00] And I don't remember that much of seventh and eighth grade. But by ninth grade, I had matured. I was interested in boys. I went to Westchester High. I became well-known. I became a—I went into politics, so I represented the ninth grade. By the time I was a senior, I had already been in—I ran for vice president of the student body.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, I was vice president; I won it. But it's interesting. Bill Steigerwalt—William Steigerwalt, was the president of the class and, you know, we were friends. It's curious that I didn't think about running for president because as a little girl, I told people I wanted to be president of the United States when I grew up. That had been an ambition. So, I was a cheerleader and wore red and white skirts. We had a routine—

SVETLANA KITTO: Because you were good at acrobatics?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I was good at sports.

SVETLANA KITTO: Sports, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: We didn't really do flips or anything then. But we were—I have a lot of energy and I think the energy is what the crowds relate to.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I wonder if I can't remember Bonnie's last name, but she was another very energetic cheerleader.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And then Shirley. Shirley, I do know her last name because she became an AOP in college—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —same sorority—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —I was in.

SVETLANA KITTO: It's okay. It's probably in your book.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm not sure—

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm sure it was an AOP. [00:46:00]

[Phone dings.]

SVETLANA KITTO: It's okay. You don't have to—oh, your phone.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. I won't know everything.

SVETLANA KITTO: No. It's fine.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm recalling all I recall tonight. [Side conversation.] Uh-oh—DHL Express. Scheduled for delivery today.

SVETLANA KITTO: Do you need me to pause?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

[Tape stops. Restarts.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I was also in the Honor's Society at Westchester High School. And when we graduated, I decided to go to UCLA. I don't really remember why. I didn't visit other colleges. It was close, I suppose. I decided to rush for sorority of all things. My God. I was pretty naïve. I didn't know about sexism and racism, classism, physical ability issues. I got dressed by my mom in my little heels and my suits and went through rush. And there were some sororities that had a star by their name and I couldn't go to those. And I said, "Why not?" "Those are Jewish." "Well, why can't I rush a Jewish sorority?" "You're not Jewish." This was, like, shocking. It was a big eye-opener. To go from my, for the most part, homogenous—white, middle-class suburb, to this, you know, more universal school. All we had was one Asian woman, Patti Yee—P-A-T-T-I, Y-E-E—who was my friend, who was very popular at our school. [00:48:10] She was the only sign of difference that I remember. So, I could not go to those sororities, and my mother had been an AOP so I was a legacy.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: Little did I know that meant they were going to court me more. AOP at the UCLA campus at that time wasn't "DJ;" I'm trying to think of what's—it wasn't one of the top sororities. It's so weird. I hate saying

this stuff today. I so don't believe in this. It was a middle sorority.

But I pledged AOP as a legacy. And then there are all these rules and—that I fought against for three years until I left. I disrupted as much as I could the sorority system by fermenting my own alcohol under bedsheets in my bed. By writing messages around the sorority on different people's typewriters calling myself "the house mouse," talking about the gossip in the house, the things that were never said.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And nobody ever found me.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Nobody ever found out who the house mouse was.

SVETLANA KITTO: You were like *Gossip Girl*. Do you know that show?

BARBARA HAMMER: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: But they did try to de-pledge me. Well, they didn't go that far, but I guess at sorority meetings, I had a loud mouth and I would speak up. [00:50:02] And they would try to put a Band-Aid on me. There would be a card on my door with a Band-Aid across the mouth of a person. They tried to silence me. Finally, we were going through our own pledge drive. I was probably in my junior year. I was president of Spurs. I was—which is the Honor's Society for [. . . sophomores -BH] on campus. I was a cheerleader again at UCLA. And I was on the student council. So, I was, like, a celebrity on campus a bit, even though I didn't have close friends. That's another story. But finally there was this woman I really liked during pledge and the sorority wouldn't pledge her because she was half-Hawaiian.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I'd had it. I left.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That was it for me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I moved to the dorms.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: My senior year—luckily, I got hired there to be a dorm mother which saved my family. I got free room and board.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Also, I was dating a man I married who was working-class. He had no money. He hadn't been to college yet. So, I could feed him and have him join me at dinner. And, you know, just get extra food. And so, the sorority was not a happy time, but I enjoyed breaking the rules. And on weekends, they would lock the kitchen, but some of my other sorority sisters and I, we liked to do things. We liked to be the badasses, and we could break in to the kitchen and get food for the weekend.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But—

SVETLANA KITTO: What was your major in college?

BARBARA HAMMER: I studied very hard in college. [00:52:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I got my BA in psychology.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: I really wanted to understand—my goal in life and even with my last film, which I almost called *Empathy* rather than *Evidentiary Bodies* is to be able to know you from the inside out. Why can't we have a way of, I don't know, becoming the other person, where, I don't know, it could be seconds, it could be an hour—but to really see the world through someone else's eyes? And nothing is more important than today, during Trump days, that we learn to do this. Because of the division of the nation. That we don't understand each other.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And we don't talk to each other with any kind of empathy. We don't know how to listen or care. So, that was why I went in to psychology. I loved abnormal psychology. I did poorly in statistics, but I kept up a B+ average. And so, I graduated in 1963, I believe. And the weird thing is I was such a girl of the time, instead of leaving for Europe—you know, so many young women do something. They work for a year, they go to Europe, they do something independently.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I was free one day and got married the second day out of college.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my gosh.

BARBARA HAMMER: In my—I got married in a small glass church in Westchester.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It was a Methodist Church even though I wasn't religious, I was moved. Well, I had a desire. I was attracted to the pastor's wife who sang in the choir. The pastor himself, I think he was Korean, was pretty interesting. [00:54:03] I didn't go very regularly.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was a place to get married in a beautiful church. And that's in a film I made called, *Home*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I believe it's recently restored by the Academy of Motion Pictures. My grandmother and my father narrate my childhood on the soundtrack. And it's shot in infrared. So, then, all the vegetation, for instance, is red. And it ends with my marriage there. So, I married the working-class guy.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. What—

BARBARA HAMMER: His name is Clayton—

SVETLANA KITTO: Clayton.

BARBARA HAMMER: Henry Ward.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And put him through school so that he finally got his teaching degree.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: But he introduced me to a lot of things. He went to South America my junior year, so I must have known him—I knew his brother too. And dated his—no, no. That wasn't his brother; that was somebody else. I knew him my senior year when he had gone on his own, this working-class guy, to South America for an entire year, taught himself Spanish, had no money, hitchhiked, wrote me 10-page letters in tiny little script about the way the Indians terraced their fields and grew corn. You know, and so there'd be all this cultural information, and then at the very end there would be something about, "looking forward to seeing you when I get back."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I would always go there first.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And when he came back, he had this—I was in the sorority—big red beard and smelly armpits. And—

[They laugh.] [00:56:00]

And he was, like—

SVETLANA KITTO: And it wasn't quite hippie time yet.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was before hippie.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: He was a pre-hippie.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: He introduced me to world travel. When he asked me to marry him, I said, "I will, if you will go around the world with me on a Lambretta." So, two years after our marriage, I said, "Hey, guy. We haven't done it." So we did, and we were gone for a year.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: We went through Afghanistan. We had a flat tire on the Khyber Pass.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: We were guarded by the Soviets in a road camp that they were building. Guarded with militia, with rifles outside the tent that they allowed us to sleep in. We were driving on gravel roads. We couldn't go through Iran. We had to put the bike—a scooter—there's a long story on this and in my archive, there's a journal I wrote tracing this trip to Milan up through Canada and the Hudson Bay on one of those boats. What were they called? [Freighters -BH] Those days you could get a boat to Europe and ride with a crew. It wasn't a tourist boat, and it didn't cost so much money. And we landed in England and hitchhiked to Milan—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —where we had ordered our 250 cc Lambretta motor scooter. Then I got hepatitis—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: —from a tent that we bought in Florence, Italy, because of the aluminum poles which can carry, like silverware, hepatitis B.

SVETLANA KITTO: B. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So by the time I'm in Turkey, I'm pretty sick. And we're driving through Turkey. By then it's December and the snow. [00:58:00] On and on, kept at the border at Syria, because Kennedy had been shot—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [negative]

BARBARA HAMMER: —in '73. While we were in Greece. Do you want all these stories?

SVETLANA KITTO: I do. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you want to tell them?

BARBARA HAMMER: We'll never finish, I'll tell you that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Well, we can get—

BARBARA HAMMER: We can just make it an abbreviated childhood.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Clayton Henry Ward, the man I married, influenced me in a lot of ways. Besides my mother and my grandmother influenced me. He taught me—I think I married him to escape a middle-class life, a bourgeois life. I was just—I've never been interested in making money and it's kind of ironic now that I end up with some. But ordinary paths open for a young woman at that time—there was nothing very exciting. But this man had traveled on his own. He came, he's working class, that was totally new to me. He also introduced me—well, he traveled on his own through South America so there was the promise of travel. He introduced me to public radio and to movies. He introduced me to Ingmar Bergman. The Surf Theater in—you know San Francisco at all?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So we went to the Surf.

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And I saw films with subtitles. *Pather Panchali*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Like, blew my mind. I had never knew there were movies like this and, you know, immediately that was my attraction until later when I saw avant-garde film which became most important to me. But I used to—the two of us used to listen to public radio lying on the floor with our little radio set between us. [01:00:05] So, he was a man who had come up really hard. His mother's schizophrenic, his father an alcoholic. He'd raised his brothers since he was, like, 14, 15. And I don't want to go in to his family too much, because there's a lot there too.

But he had grit and determination. He'd taken a class in high school on architecture; how to build a house, how to draw the plans for a house. And we—after we got married—we took our honeymoon [driving from LA to San Francisco. -BH] We got married in that glass church. We had the reception in the back yard with daisies at 5238 Glasgow Way, and then we got into this old 1937 Dodge—you know, that everybody had marked up. And we were going to drive to San Francisco and camp along the way. We did. And one of the beaches that we camped in—maybe it was around Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo—we shot a turkey. He showed me. He taught me how to shoot a rifle, a shotgun. And we roasted the turkey on the beach. We made it to San Francisco and enrolled in San Francisco State; me for my master's in English Literature—I have two MAs.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: And he for his bachelor's, I believe, in history. And we had no money. Where were we going to live?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So throughout our years in college there, a couple of them, we lived either in pet hospitals where we got free room in exchange for cleaning the hospital. [01:02:06]

[END OF hammer18_sd1of1_track01]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, on Saturday, for a while we would both clean the hospital. And then after a while, it seemed like only he was doing it. And then, we became caretakers on ranches, out on Lucas Turnpike, Lucas Valley Road. It goes from 101 to Nicasio. And we worked. Our last place there, we had several—we had three different ranches that we worked at. Mainly, it was, like, cleaning out the swimming pool. But I often got access to the horses that the people owned. And the last one was Frank Soares' ranch. S-O-A-R-E-S. Because he sold that ranch to Industrial Light & Magic. And that's the huge Steven Spielberg sound-mixing lab and studio that's there now.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I used to ride those hills on a horse called "Blackie" that I trained for Frank. Because the horse didn't know how to—and I'd never taught a horse, I just read how to do it—rein tie, or ground tie. You just drop the reins and the horse won't move. I also taught it how to open a gate. So, it wasn't a very well-trained ranch horse. But I would go riding with a neighbor who was much older than me. And her husband was an architect and had—I think he had helped build the Marin County Civic Center. Do you know those red buildings that are shaped like beehives? They're round. That's where the shootout took place of the Black Panthers.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: [00:02:00] In any case, Clayton taught me a lot, but he also was conservative by nature. And the home meant more to him than to me. We bought land in Sonoma County for \$1,000 an acre. We had 6,000—six acres with a creek, a live creek, going through it for \$6,000. We drew our own plans. We had them approved by the county. We dug out our own basement, and we built a two-story house there, large.

While doing this, we built ourselves a shower out of a redwood tree that we would put in a metal water container and heat with a wood fire so we could have hot water. We dug our own well. We were radical. I wanted

him to blow up the Bank of America. The hippies were active at the time. They were confronting a bourgeois America in kind of the same way that the one percent movement did, which I support, but there was more violence attached.

SVETLANA KITTO: To the past? Which one?

BARBARA HAMMER: In the past.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. I—why didn't I want to do it? I don't know. You know, I'm always having the man act out for me. But I kind of—he talked more radical than he did. You know, to me it was like, if you feel this way, go do it. Look what I was saying, you know? Be an accomplice and be in jail the rest of my life. But, you know, people like—

SVETLANA KITTO: Well, it's just the time. That's what it was like.

BARBARA HAMMER: Well, not the time—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but a lot of people got in trouble—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Bernadette Peters. People are still in jail, you know, from—Judy —what's her name? She's still in jail from her activities and then I have to look back. [00:04:04] They bombed Berkeley or held up an armored truck and somebody was killed. Would you hand me that pillow?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I should know all this. Anyway, so, here we built this fabulous house. And I built a corral and got a horse, and I dug the fencepost myself, a fencepost there. Of course, they had my garden. The bottom part of the house was art studios. The top part was living. And I used to paint there and he did ceramics. But I also worked with a saw, table saw. And I would make articles out of leftover wood from our house, especially the plywood because it had so many interesting layers in it. And some of these were non-utilitarian sculptures. And I would just—maybe I'll just take an example of a three-sided piece of wood that would just get smaller, and smaller, and smaller. But then you would look down and you would see all these different patterns from the plywood. And maybe I would paint part of it. And I made on of the things that would exists was I made boxes and then I would paint the boxes. My sister still has a jewelry box I made. And the box was painted with lobsters and crabs on the outside. And maybe I would put sparkles on them and jewels for the eyes. The inside was painted. I was trying my hand at a variety of art forms. Just never thinking about being an artist yet. No, maybe I was a craftswoman. But I was also doing—I have a slide of this piece. [00:06:01] I was doing things like painting large planks of wood blue, stacking them kind of helter-skelter in the backyard, and then throwing electrical wiring around them like an installation. And it would be much like, well, not like, but you can refer to the work of Cady Noland.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: C-A-D-Y, N-O-L-A-N-D.

SVETLANA KITTO: But were you looking at art at that time?

BARBARA HAMMER: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: No?

BARBARA HAMMER: No. I hadn't looked at art yet. What I was doing was reading biographies, because suddenly I had become a bit trapped as a housewife. Our house wasn't finished. Most houses don't get finished that the builders build. But we were living in it. And people would come over, interesting neighbors, poets, different artists, other interesting people. And the men would congregate, and I would serve the coffee. I was getting stuck in a housewife role. And even if the women came over, I wasn't a feminist yet. I would prefer to hang out with the guys, because they might be talking physics, something more interesting than what the women were talking about. I didn't really give them much of a chance. So, that's the way that was going. And then we got into an argument one night. I was having affairs with men that were not—this was during a period of open marriage. This was a book people were reading. And I was having affairs with poets—well, and a neighbor. [00:08:00] A poet and a neighbor and a construction worker. The three I remember. All people who Clayton knew

that he never knew about. It wasn't often, but it happened. And—where do I want to go from there? The argument. Oh, the conservative nature of Clayton. I started—the hippies moved in. They moved out of Haight-Ashbury into neighbors around us. Morningstar Ranch was born, where a lot of the famous hippies went. And closer to us in Sonoma County, where we were, was Bill Walker's ranch. Bill was a painter and rich. I mean, he lived like a hippie with his wife, but they opened their land to anybody. And so, there'd be big school buses on there and dilapidated trucks parked. And I used to hang out there. And I met a group of men who were studying Gurdjieff.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And—G-U-R-D-I-E-G-F-F—something like that. It was very esoteric philosophy. And we would sit in a tent, and I would mainly listen. And one time, these guys came to our house. And Clayton had a fit and really wanted them off the property and told me not to invite them back again. I started going there and teaching school to the kids because their parents were on LSD, and there wasn't any kind of structure.

SVETLANA KITTO: The communes?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: The commune.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But it didn't last long. I just did it a few times. But I was dropping acid.

SVETLANA KITTO: You were. [00:10:00]?

BARBARA HAMMER: I was taking—what's the other—psilocybin. I was having experiences of one time on that ranch, looking for a kid, his name was Moses, looking for Moses. I can remember walking through a creek when I was stoned, you know, and feeling myself special. But back before we built the house, I'd taken LSD. And that was the first time in one of those rentals where you're taking care of a place or had cheap rental. And I remember hugging a tree and really feeling like it was my mother, cradling it, and then seeing all the colors that we know about and how they, you know, like this whole pattern would change on this rug.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Have you ever had acid?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, but I didn't like the feeling of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, it's awful.

BARBARA HAMMER: The chemical stuff coming off of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, it wasn't a favorite thing that I did. I can't say I did it more than 10 times.

SVETLANA KITTO: But your mother was still alive then, right?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. She and my dad came out after we built the house. And she told me they were divorcing. And I said, "Why'd you take so long?" "We wanted to see you happily married." "Mother, I was so miserable during the times that you and father were fighting."

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: "Don't know why you waited so long." Because I used to crawl in the hallway to the door that was shut from the bedroom area to the living room and listen to their fights. My dad was often drinking. And my mother pouring beer down the kitchen sink. [00:12:01] One time, they tried a trial separation.

We cried a lot, the family—my mom, my sister, and I. But he went to Nevada, sent me a postcard. They got back together.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, but then they did divorce after I got married.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. And got the house.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. And then, Clayton and I lived there nine years. I was married nine years. And then, we had this big argument. I was—have had a problem with jealousy. Not just with my lesbian lovers and with Clayton. But, I think I'm over it. Back then, I got jealous over some woman that was a friend, a neighbor friend. We had campfires at night.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: His attention to her. I can't remember if there was more to it, but I decided I was leaving. So, the next morning, I got up and I got—I had a film show that night. I'd been making Super 8 film.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Not in classes. Just, as far as I know, my own—it was a Super 8 film festival and I was going to go to it. And I took the VW and I took our reel to reel Akai four-track tape recorder. And I took this dress I was wearing with a ratty, old fur around my neck. And I went to this film festival probably at Sonoma State. It was. And I won an honorable mention with my first Super 8 film that I had shown called *Schizy*. And went home with Walt [ph]—what's his last name? Who won first prize. So, I just traded men. He lived in Berkeley.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh. [00:14:00]

BARBARA HAMMER: That's how I separated from my husband. So, earlier than then, I had talked about wanting to be an artist. I was reading the books of biographies when I was married of Van Gogh and Gauguin who lived nontraditional lives. And I told Clayton, "It's too much for me to be stuck here in the woods being a housewife without any art community around." And I had even taken off for Mexico on my own—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —on a motorcycle and had an affair there, too, which wasn't very good. But also, some positive experiences, but—and shot a film, 1975. But I got divorced earlier, so that must have been another trip. Anyway, he had said, "Go get an apartment in San Francisco. Go live by yourself there. Don't divorce." But I didn't do that, didn't go that way. I don't know why. Maybe it was that argument. In any case, I moved in with Walt. And Walt was living with a guy. They had a very close relationship. I don't think they were sexual. And Ed was his name, E-D. And I lived in the attic. And I used to send out—I started doing artwork—crazy artwork. I would send out—I got a helium tank, and it's in *Tender Fictions*—

where I'm blowing up balloons and making Walt act like he's having sex on top of me while I'm smoking a cigarette, wearing a hat, blowing up the balloons, and letting them go to the ceiling. I also let a lot go out the window with my phone number in them. Nobody ever called. [00:16:00] So, I didn't last long there. But I did do a few—hitchhiked around Berkeley. Up and down University and Shattuck Boulevard tape recording people and shooting them in film.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: But I don't have any of that. That's missing from my archive. [The Berkeley Film is restored now. -BH] I just remember as an artwork I did. And some of the stuff I did in the back of the house with Walt, he filmed. And it's in *Tender Fictions* where I'm stabbing a clothesline. It's actually my sister's house. You know, fighting childhood. I mean, fighting—

SVETLANA KITTO: Domesticity.

BARBARA HAMMER: Domesticity.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And taking those rags, running behind the truck that's cleaning the street to clean them.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm.

BARBARA HAMMER: So funny what I would do—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —just anything wild. So, I left Clayton and then I came out in August at Sonoma State. I

mean, I got a job. I had no money. I hadn't thought about getting money from him. I was such a middle-class girl. So used to not having to work in life—things being easier. Whew. So, I got a job teaching English 1A during summer school at Santa Rosa Junior Community College. I lived right across the street from it. And there, one of my classes, I would try—I would kind of be doing dope on weekends, marijuana, anyway. And then during class time, I had the students paint an old abandoned house as a project. And I would go out and paint windmills throughout Sonoma County. They used to still be there, but I think the last one is gone. And I painted the side by Bodega, maybe when I was still married. [00:18:04] Must have been. I painted the side of a building, so like, a shack on the hillside, but you could see it from the road. And I decided that I should be nude. So, I painted myself nude, a picture of me painting the shack nude. But then the owner called the police. So, as they were coming up the hill, I got dressed. Nothing happened. But that was the place where I made, *Barbara Ward Will Never Die*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Bodega, which was right by Joy Woods, where our house was, on Joy Woods. And there's a road there called Joy Woods Road. Leads off from Bodega, which is a small town. And that's where I went to the cemetery and kicked over all the Catholic graves and put my own name on one of the crosses, *Barbara Ward Will Never Die*. So, that became my second Super 8 film.

SVETLANA KITTO: You changed your name?

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, I haven't even come to the divorce papers yet.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, then by August, I'm getting served. I've come out, because I haven't told that story yet.

SVETLANA KITTO: No, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: To finish with Clayton, I get served divorce papers and my mom says—and all I want is my maiden name. I don't want any money, I don't want the house, anything. I want the car and the tape recorder that I took, but that's it. And my mother says, "Barbara." But I'm so—I can't listen to her. I'm so antagonistic to her. She never—she cried when I got engaged to him. He's a working-class guy.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: No, he wasn't even going to be, you know, a schoolteacher or a lawyer or a doctor. [00:20:00] And he had a very bad mental history past of his family. It was very sketchy. I think I can understand her crying today. Let's put it that way.

SVETLANA KITTO: But she was trying to tell you to get something—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, get my property rights.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Get half my—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, what a different life it would have been. But who knows? Maybe these struggles made my life what it is.

So, I divorced Clayton with just my maiden name. And also, I believe on the back of the—on the back of the divorce papers, it was something that said I should get \$10,000 if I—if he ever sold our place in Joy Woods. Because I had sold my diamond ring to get us the money to build the house. That's how much I put in. We built the house ourselves. No labor.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, anyway, that's how much I had put in by then. I don't think I ever got that, or it's not

there, or something. Anyway, he sold the house for \$500,000 after we divorced to two lesbians. But for a long time, he lived there before he remarried. And I went back once, and I found—I went back to get a rifle he'd given me with a hand-carved—what do you call it?

SVETLANA KITTO: Gasket? No.

BARBARA HAMMER: No, butte?

SVETLANA KITTO: I don't know.

BARBARA HAMMER: Butt. Butt.

SVETLANA KITTO: Butt. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was a beautiful rifle, a .22. And I went back to get it. And I went back with my first lover, Walt. [Marie] A. Shaw who, by then, was my sidekick as well as my partner and lover for two and a half years. [00:22:02] And we went into the living room. Nobody was there. There was my wedding picture with knives in it. He had used it for target practice.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, my God.

BARBARA HAMMER: Whoa. I didn't want the gun.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I didn't want anything. I wanted out of there. But I think at that point's when I tried to get my papers from Sonoma County and see if, really, it was written that I should get \$10,000.

BARBARA HAMMER: I can't remember the end of that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I think I didn't get anything. So—

SVETLANA KITTO: So, before that, though, you were with—living with Walt and then you said you came—

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, I left Walt because I got the job at Santa Rosa—

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: —Junior College.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, let's say I left him, Clayton, in April. Let's say school started in June. So, I moved in across the street from the junior college. Walt was some—he had this phobia about leaving home. So, he really didn't come to visit much. And I met my first lesbian—sociology teacher. And I also created my first non-feminist act that she called me on—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —which was, like, breaking a date with her for a guy.

SVETLANA KITTO: Whoa.

BARBARA HAMMER: And, so—

SVETLANA KITTO: Like, a date?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. We had a date to talk or do something. But this other guy, who's a poet, wanted me to go to the river and listen to his poetry.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I thought, "Oh, she'll understand." No, way. "Barbara, do you know what you did?" You know, I mean, I went with him and then she called me out on it because I had broke the date like that. Not much notice. And then I kind of, like, had an awakening. I had an earlier awakening when I was married. I heard the first KPFA announcement on—which was public radio. [00:24:03]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: On a critique of the Miss America contest. That's when I became a feminist. I was still married. Clayton came back to the property with Ralph Bruinsslot, who lived across the—who'd built a geodesic dome. Clayton wanted all his friends in the woods. You know, in a way, he wanted his own commune, which didn't quite happen. They want me to fill out this report on—oh, no that was just a mistake by this guy. And I told them—they both came back in a pickup truck. I said, "Guess what? I'm a feminist."

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And Ralph gave me a big hug and Clayton was furious. He was upset.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I got two reactions from men right away. I'd forgotten to tell you—important, I tried to leave Clayton a year earlier. This was after the argument around jealousy. That's not when I left.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I left for the film show with a more decided view. A year before, I had tried to leave in, like, an argument stage. He dragged me by the hair into the house. So, this is a real abusive—one could call it a form of domestic violence. I also threw a saltshaker at him, a glass saltshaker. So, that was violent, too. That's about it as far as—but I don't know if he slapped me. I think he did. To get my hair—one reason I don't have long hair anymore. But mainly, it's a dyke signifier.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Certainly was when I came out. So, we can go into the coming, I gave everything away. [00:26:03] I had to make myself in the world. I was really living as an independent woman meeting lesbians for the first time in Santa Rosa. And we'll take that up on Saturday.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: Good.

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SVETLANA KITTO: This is Svetlana Kitto, interviewing Barbara Hammer for the second time at her partner's house in the West Village, New York, New York, on March 17, 2018, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. So, when we left off we were talking a little bit about the '70s and the emergence of your lesbian identity, the emergence of you as a filmmaker in the world.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yes. Yes, it's fascinating and curious and fortunate for me that I came out at a time when a lot of women were coming out.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was the same time I was coming out as an artist, and I had decided to be a filmmaker rather than a painter—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because the classes that were offered in the M.A. program had much more philosophy and global politics besides—courses in it—besides aesthetics whereas painting offered, color mixing, composition. I could do that, really, in film. So, I came out with a woman, not knowing I was a lesbian but being part of a woman's circle and making the trip to San Francisco from Santa Rosa, where I was teaching, and sitting next to her while we are watching Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Her leg touched my own, and I felt this incredible rush, erotic rush, just through our knees, and I thought, "Oh, my God, I've never felt this for a woman before." I—or even that much for a man as I can remember. [00:02:00] And I decided right then I can act on this or ignore it. I decided to act on it. And so, Marie A. Shaw and I went back to my place in Santa Rosa and spent the night and were still up to see the dawn. I became a lesbian. At that moment or that night, my whole sense of touch increased. I began to be more away of the follicles of hair on

my body, the way they told me what space I was moving through, the way I was reinforced by touching a body similar to my own. So, this reinforced my own outline of the body and became the mode of my lesbian aesthetic, so that in my films I want the viewer to feel in their bodies what they see on the screen.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I was studying Jung—maybe a few years later but very close to this time—when I realized he identified four areas of intelligence: intuitive, the intellect, emotional, and sensational. Well, sensational—he didn't mean like a Broadway play. He meant the way sensation can be the leading form of intelligence to a person's own being. Each person has all those forms in them, but each one has a dominant one. Mine was sensation. That means that when I look at something in the world, I feel it in my body.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: I wouldn't be surprised if Liz Collins had this same kind of parameter. [00:04:00] But in this case, it was touching a woman, looking at a woman's skin, and seeing a hand caress it. I can feel it in the audience in my own body.

A more abstract situation might be—and I speak about this with audiences often, describing the sensational—in driving in a car, looking out, and seeing a plowed field, a farmer's field, nothing growing in it, I can feel that earth and those furrows in my body. I can look at a puff of cotton and feel it, the sharp edges around it. It's very visceral for me. And so, I wanted to bring a haptic cinema to the audience. And this was really before anyone was talking about it, and I developed my words really a priori to making the films, and then I saw what I was doing. Especially after *Dyketactics*, which I guess it's been called a groundbreaking film—probably the first lesbian experimental film of lovemaking and certainly something that hadn't been seen in Western cinema since the beginning. And I'd gone to the country. I was at San—I was a student at San Francisco State. I made 13 films in two years. They weren't for classes; they were for myself. But I had free equipment. My mother died and left me \$10,000. I lived in a basement without any running water, without electricity, of a gay man's house, of friends of mine. And I lived there at least for one—the first semester, maybe a year. And so, I could put all my money into film, buying the product. [00:06:00]

We went to the country, about, I don't know, 13 friends of mine, to witches' land in Napa Valley, and we performed these rituals in nature that I directed. I had sync sound crew, wonderful crew—Bolex sync sound cameras. But I was recording, like, women's walking through leaves barefoot. There was no talking. All of it could be recreated in the studio; I was young and naïve. When I got back, I had one hour of footage. My idea was to make a feature, thinking I could cut an hour to an hour or something, I guess.

Well, I locked myself, sort of, in an editing room and stayed for a night, and I was so bored with these rituals I fell asleep, so to speak. Spiritually, I fell asleep. And I got wild, and I cut that 60 minutes to four minutes. Well, I cut it to two and a half minutes, or two. And I overlaid the images in four different rolls of film by looking—putting them together and looking at them on a movie scope, so I could get a sense of what the print might look like. Nobody could see the final outcome until it was made.

And I combined that by cutting to the sense of the action, which is kind of what they taught you at San Francisco State. And afterwards I saw that all that action had touch in it. So, intuitively, sensorially, I had not shown anything without a foot going through water, a woman touching the tree, the foot in the grass, women embracing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It was remarkable. And then, I thought, "Well, I've got to have lovemaking." . [00:08:00] This is what brought me out as a lesbian. It wasn't an intellectual idea.

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.] Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was the physicality of it. So, So I asked Chris Saxton, who was a cinematographer and a lesbian in the film department, to come over to my partner, my lover, my lover's house at the time, and that was Poe Asher. And we made love under—you know, I was directing, so we were giggling between every take. And all the times I've shot lovemaking, which have been quite a few since then—it's never a documentary; it's always directing, especially if you have an intimate camera. And I ask Chris to stroke us as if she were part of this haptic event that was going on with the Bolex. And then, the greatest shot of all was—I wanted to show the interiority of sensuality and sensation, and so I had her wind up the Bolex and put it down by our knees while we were lying stomach to stomach along the floor or bed, wherever we were—I think it was on the floor—and let the Bolex shoot itself as we brought our hands up our bodies. So, there's this beautiful interior cave shot that the hands are outlining, and at the end of that, then I thought, "We have *Dyketactics*," so the first part is women celebrating nudity, their bodies in nature, each other. The second part is two women making love. [00:10:00]

The first soundtrack was with Lavender Jane and Alix—what's Alix's last name? Dobkin, folk singer. And I didn't know that you got permission from musicians to put on your films, and I just made a film with Lavender Jane and women loving women, or two songs from her album. And then I asked her, and she said—and it worked beautifully together—and she said, "Do you have—do you know that no men will ever see my film?" I said, "No, I can't promise you that." And she said, "Well, you can't use my work then." She was a separatist. So, I had to make another track. So, I went to Mills College, where there was a Moog synthesizer—

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and David Heinz, who had taught me how to use the optical printer and given me access there—he was great—also, I believe, showed me the Moog, and then left me alone for the day, and I created the soundtrack there, just by turning dials and recording. It was a lot of fun. It's kind of the way I work with music and release the second track. Years, years later—we're in the '90s now—well, we might even be probably around 1999—I was living in Woodstock part-time, with a cabin up there, as well as my New York residence—Florrie [Burke] and I were. And Alix lived in Woodstock, and I ran into her, and she had two little boy grandchildren. And I said, "Alix, I'm—you know, might be re-releasing this film. Would you give me permission now?" And she said yes, and "I've got, you know, boys in my family"—boy children." [00:12:03] And so, I made a new film that hardly anybody's seen called *Dyketactics X 2*. And I only have one print of it, but I could make more. So, it has both soundtracks on it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And hers comes second, because it—mine is more abstract. Mine can go anywhere. And hers signifies the meaning, because of the soundtrack of different shots, and it's a lot of fun. And I got the idea because of Shirley Clarke, whose work is in the Museum of Modern Art collection. And her film *Bridges Go Round* in the 1950s—I think it was 1953—she does optical printing or double printing, probably similar to what I was doing with four rolls of film with *Dyketactics*.

I think she used two rolls, maybe more, of the bridges of New York in different, kind of color filters. It's beautiful. And her first—and she marries that film exactly as film image alike two times. The first track she puts on, I believe, is classical; the second is jazz. So, you see the same film with two different soundtracks, and you can't believe you're looking at the same film. So, I credit her with that.

SVETLANA KITTO: When did you become aware of her? Shirley Clarke.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, good question. That's a good question. People ask me, you know, in another—I was going to say something else here. Recently, I gave the Barbara Hammer Experimental Lesbian Film Award at IFC Center here in New York. [00:14:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And we invited women whose films had influenced me, none of whom were lesbians; I didn't know any.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And Carolee Schneeman's *Fuses* was one of the films that I found extremely erotic and powerful, and not an experimental—and not shying away from sexual expression at all. But the—Vanessa Artusian, who directs—who works for QUEER ART Foundation and was directing the award, was really pressuring me on stage to say if I had seen this film before I made *Dyketactics*. I ended up saying yes, but I'm sure I didn't. I hadn't seen much of anything, certainly in terms of women's experimental—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —film. So, I think I saw that maybe late '70s or early '80s. So—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: When did I see Shirley Clarke? You know, I don't know.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But I used to go to Anthology archive when it was on Wooster Street. And they had the black boxes that you sat in, so you couldn't be disturbed by anybody. I particularly went for Marie Minkin. She influenced me a lot and Shirley Clarke's experimental film. And eventually, I met Shirley and drove her around San Francisco on my BMW motorcycle when she made a trip there and went to her kind of retrospective of sorts at the Whitney, when it was uptown—the Breuer, when she had already had dementia—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but supported her by being there in the audience and saying a few things. [00:16:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I used to see Stan Brakhage's work. I'll be getting the Visionary Award by the University of Colorado-Boulder that has his archive, and the Denver Film Society, in November 2018. And you know I made my graduate thesis film—my M.A. film was on Jane Brakhage, his wife.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, that film came out in '75—so that means I was going to the cinema tech in San Francisco probably weekly to see whatever they had, because experimental film spoke to me in a way documentary and narrative did not. And his influence was profound at the time; he wore a camera with him at all times. That influenced me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: He had huge audiences, overflowing crowds. He spoke with mastery about his aesthetics, and seeing this masterpiece, *Dog Star Man*, changed my life, because, like seeing—did I talk about Maya Deren

SVETLANA KITTO: Not much.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and seeing her work in film—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —class? So, how that changed my life.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That precedes, I think—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —Stan.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, that's the first popular—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: —influence, right?

BARBARA HAMMER: But after I saw *Dog Star Man*, this epic about a man—a personal film about a man—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —cutting down a tree on a mountain, and all the visions that he had, and the way he saw the world on the way up. When I left the theater, I saw the world differently. [00:18:00] The first thing I saw was the street lamp, just making—illuminating the tree plot below it with the grasses and the little motes of dust in the air. And it was more like looking at film than looking at real life, some kind of strange combination. And then, I really felt committed, that film had changed my life; my film could change other people's lives.

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Indeed, it did. When *Dyketactics* played at a regular theater in San Francisco, at the Larkin

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: You might remember the Larkin.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And Tea Corinne—no, who was it that was in the audience? No, it was Rhiannon, the singer. Not the famous singer; there was a woman singer, part of women's music way before the famous Rhiannon.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: And she was sitting either—she was sitting in front of me. And Tea Corinne was my lover at the time—T-E-A, Corinne—and Rhiannon started crying after she saw this film, and Tea and I got up and walked out to the lobby with her. And it all was about she thought she was a lesbian. So, the film brought somebody out.

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs] Yeah, that's amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I was so glad that I could be there—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to comfort her. And so, I think then, in my own way, that film has changed the world, little by little. [00:20:00] So, I began to—and finished all these films on lesbian sexuality, comedy, *Menses*—

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs] Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —*Superdyke*, and very personal psychodramas, like *I Was/I Am*, and *X* and *Psychosynthesis*. They're kind of wonderful films—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —that were recently—there are two of them—collected by the Julia Stoschek Collection in Dusseldorf and Berlin. It's made through my gallery in Berlin, the KOW Gallery. And this—K-O-W, they say, not "cow"—and to be recognized this late in life with work that I did in the '70s that's more popular than my current work—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —was something I never expected. I never thought galleries—until the '90s, when, suddenly, the U.S. system was starting to show avant-garde work—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —at galleries. And then I thought, "Why not? My work should be there, too, especially experimental work." And so, I was very excited when in the 2000s I was curated by KOW—K-O-W—to join their gallery, and then later, much later, by Company, which doesn't show moving image so much.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But one of the great filmmakers of the '90s was Jeremy Blake, and I forget which gallery he had in Chelsea, but they only—you had to go there to see his work according to a schedule they had. [00:22:00] It would only be shown once. It was really for collectors. So, his edition was never released to the public, which I didn't want for my work. But his work—he suicided. He walked into San—no, I mean, New York Harbor—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and drowned. He was brilliant, and he used digital files and overlays—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and created dense visual stories with slight narratives. To me, they were always about experimental use of color and washes more than the stories. I'm sorry he's gone.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Just—never met him. So, the '70s I showed—I just showed in women's coffeehouses—

SVETLANA KITTO: In San Francisco?

BARBARA HAMMER: —in San Francisco in a woman's apartment. But at that time, I didn't have any really lesbian films. They were all heterosexual films from when I was married—

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —and all the women left, because it was like a lesbian gathering.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And only two women stayed, and they told me it's because they didn't like the men in my films again. These two women had twins, a girl and a boy, and they became my friends; Nancy and Brett. And they became my first friends in Berkeley, and I had some early photographs from their house. So, then, you know, all the lesbian films were quite popular, and one day I had gotten a studio in Oakland on Martin Luther King Boulevard, which wasn't called that at the time. [00:24:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It was called Grove [. . . Street, 4536 Grove Street. -BH] And it was in an African-American, mixed neighborhood, with black churches across the street. It was an old storefront, but I had tons of places to have a loft in the back, right next to the freeway. And I could have a loft in the front, and—I knew the woman who—the artist who built it. Had waited 10 years for it, and said, "Let me be the first to get it."

And I created a lot of work there, all the '70s work, and going into the '80s, too. One day—oh, Michael Lumpkin was sitting on my doorstep. He started the Frameline Film Festival, which I think is still the oldest gay and lesbian, and by now LGBTQi, film festival in the world. He was sitting on my doorstep and said, "We want to show your films at Frameline." So, this was probably, like, the second Frameline Festival.

So, from then on, I showed there all the time, and then eventually got the Frameline award years later and premiered films, and also got grants from them for finishing funds. So, they're very instrumental as an institution. Then, one day, around '75, I got a phone call from Los Angeles, from Terry Cannon.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Who—a guy who started the Pasadena Film Forum. And he asked me to come with my films to L.A. [00:26:00] And I got my first check there; I had my first mixed audience, and they loved my work. And I saw then there's no reason that lesbian cinema needs to be shown only to lesbians, that the work was avant-garde. Of course, much of it was personal and not about sexual representation. *Psychosynthesis* is about the sub-personalities that I have in a—

SVETLANA KITTO: What was the other film you said before—

BARBARA HAMMER: *Psychosynthesis*?

SVETLANA KITTO: Before that. Menachev [ph] something—Menacheva [ph]?

BARBARA HAMMER: Menacheva?

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you just say that?

BARBARA HAMMER: No.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay. Sorry.

BARBARA HAMMER: I probably said something, though.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, the person I was telling you about, the—

SVETLANA KITTO: Take it again.

BARBARA HAMMER: —personal documentaries that don't necessarily have lesbian content in them. Those three films, the *Psychosynthesis* trilogy: *I Was/I Am, X*—

SVETLANA KITTO: *X*.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and *Psychosynthesis*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: They're all short, six and a half minutes to maybe nine minutes, 16-millimeter films that have just been preserved and are now available to be seen because of the Academy Film Archive and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, \$50,000 to restore about a dozen or more of my films.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, after that, I became aware that filmmakers toured, Terry showed me—at that time,

there was a little catalog you could get, handmade, of what avant-garde filmmakers were touring, what universities they were going to. [00:28:00] Well, it was called something like—this isn't right—*The Filmmakers' Co-op* or something tour book. And you could say, "I have a show in L.A.," and if anybody else wanted to bring you—like Chick Strand at Occidental College might say, "Barbara, come on over while you're in L.A., show your work." This is the way we got money. I mean, I remember my check was \$100 you know, but now it'd be \$500 to \$1,500 or more, depending on where I am. And I have a picture of me holding it up, because the world was unfolding to me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And even though I knew Maya Deren had set up lecture circuits throughout the United States in her tremendous work and gift to the avant-garde community, it wasn't something I knew I could practice and be part of. But then, I started listing in there if I had shows out of town—where I'd be. And you know, by—we didn't have email then, so I called my film company, so to speak, Goddess Films. There was about three years I was infatuated with the matriarchal rendition of god and goddess. A lot of us were. Merlin Stone had published *When God Was a Woman*, and there's a very famous book on goddesses, a very thick one, quite definitive, by a woman with an Eastern European last name. I think it starts with G. Not so helpful.

But we were looking at those books, and I was going to museums and seeing small figures of women that looked like lesbians. [00:30:00] There'd be two of them together—cast out of homemade clay, maybe from Syria, maybe from 800 B.C., and they were called sisters or something, never lesbian. And we were kind of re-identifying a basis of lesbian culture in world—global history.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That's what we thought. But not being part of any formal religion myself, and not wanting to be, I found it a dead end in terms of my research. So, I made, I think, three films that reflect this period. One of them is quite powerful and was restored by the Museum of Modern Art when I had my retrospective there in 2010, and that's called *Moon Goddess*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And that was made with a powerful woman 11 years my senior, Gloria Churchman, who changed her name. She was married at the time to a well-known physicist, Churchman, so she used on the film "Gloria Churchwoman." She's deceased now. I tried to find her when I had the retrospective, and all her artwork was thrown away by the family, as we've read about back in Willa Cather's case. Family does not want their matriarch known to be a lesbian. She stayed married even though we were lovers, significant lovers, lived together, traveled together. But she and her husband also had a house in Mill Valley.

In any case, *Moon Goddess* is a beautiful film, and even though I say, "made with her," I mean, she surely should be a co-director on it, I think, although she didn't know the camera at all. [00:32:00] But we created the scenes; we went to Death Valley. And she was always the mentor to me, so you see me blindfolded, walking through a pygmy forest in Mendocino County, where we also shot—where she had built a house, tiny, little house, to fit the size of the trees. And she was leading me. Her hands lead me, her feet lead me into the cabin, where I turn on water. The water has light coming through it; I zoom in on that, and I'm—I become light, the light that I film then in my films. We showed that film on an inflated weather balloon. So, the work then really got known as changing the face of film, changing the shape of film that I did in 2000 at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin and later at my Tate retrospective in the Turbine Hall, a major event, showing work on an inflatable as well as available space around the architectural surroundings. That film was '79, but *Moon Goddess* was '75, I believe, and I would show it or *Bent Time* in—on the balloon.

And Gloria and I had people sitting around the balloon, underneath it, with candles, kind of ritualized it. Then, later, I took away the candles, so they're—they're in L.A. in a performance I did at the Women's Building called *The Great Goddess*. [00:34:00] But later I have, like, at the Hamburger Bahnhof and at the Tate, people lying under the balloon, walking around it. I used double projectors that aren't synced but are showing the same film, so it's slightly offset, so you can get a 360 view.

And the film *Bent Time*, which I made much later in the '80s—1988—works beautifully there with Pauline Oliveras' soundtrack that I purchased from her for a pre-published DVD called *Rattlesnake Mountain*. And so, that period ended for me, and I was beginning to get criticism from New York and from the East Coast about my work. It was being called "essentialist." And I didn't even know what the word meant, but when I read about it, it meant that—let's say my work, the nude women's bodies, that the filmmaker was identifying them with nature, and that women were biological constructs. That's all, nothing more. And this was a time when cultural feminism and—what I want to say—socialist feminism were fighting each other intellectually. And then—I never saw myself as an essentialist. I appreciated women's bodies. I had never had any kind of—you know, raised without a religion, I had no prohibition against nudity. You know, I was nude when I was a hippie and heterosexual. It's just

never been—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I've never covered up. [00:36:00] And, you know, so when I do *Menses*, the women have to be nude—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to show the menstruation—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —you know, and make this comedy of the hard-boiled eggs coming out of their bodies. But it wasn't that they weren't brilliant also. And even to make *Menses* in 1973—I think I had a slumber party where we researched the fears of menstruation, going back to Pliny and Greek mythology, when he said if a menstruating woman touches a pregnant horse, her milk will go sour. You know, and all the scrubbing. And *Menses* is going to be shown the 20th here—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —at the Fashion Institute of—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, cool.

BARBARA HAMMER: You should go. It's a good, short program of wild women films.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I've seen it. I've seen *Menses*—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: —but not on the big screen. Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. And Jane Harris has curated a nice program there. I'll go if I'm up to it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So far, I haven't been out at night, so I don't know. So—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —from the very beginning—oh, and the scrubbing—

SVETLANA KITTO: The scrubbing.

BARBARA HAMMER: —goes back to Lady Macbeth trying to get the blood off of her hands. Well, in this case, the blood off a vagina and the thighs. So, everything goes back somewhere.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It's not—

SVETLANA KITTO: So, the work had an intellectual basis, is what you're saying?

BARBARA HAMMER: That's what I'm saying.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, I thought the only way to confront this nomenclature—and I could see how people could put that label on the work without going—meeting me, maybe, or going further into it. I decided to move to New York. [00:38:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: That's an interesting reaction. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It's terrific. [Laughs.]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. It's like—

BARBARA HAMMER: And—

SVETLANA KITTO: It actually makes a good argument for criticism. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —it does. I wanted to take the critics on their own turf and I wanted to learn from them. It wasn't like "I'm right and what I'm doing doesn't need to be challenged." I also wanted to go—I wanted to be part of a cultural scene, an art scene. I wanted to go into galleries and look at any kind of work. I didn't—I used to [go to John] Gibson Gallery that had a lot of scientific work, [land art and conceptual art, on Broadway, -BH] and find work that I didn't understand. And that's what I was looking for. So, I'd always get the press release and go home and think about it some more.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And if I could—I mean, you probably do that now. Go online, do a little bit more research. And I still do that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That has become my kind of modus of living, of being an artist in New York. And I made the film then—I made some breakthrough films. One was like a transition film. That was *Bent Time*, where the filmmaker's behind the camera. There's no human image in the camera, unlike my other work, right?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And the conceit is that I walk across the United States, filming in high-energy locations, one frame at a time. I start out in San Francisco—well, Stanford, at the Linear Accelerator Lab—so I got permission to go around this one-mile lab with my camera. Incredible. So, a lot of my work has required going into forbidden places and getting permission.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: [00:40:00] Also, I went to Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, and got permission to film the kivas, the Anasazi structures that show the solstice light coming through the sacred windows on the 21st of June and the 21st of December. And, along with Carl Sagan, I was the only person allowed up into Fajada Butte—F-A-J-A-D-A—to film the three plinths at the very top that had been laid out by the Anasazi so that the cave inside, which has a nine-circle—concentric circles, was split on June 21st by the sun. These are rocks that cannot be moved by one or two people. On either side are four other small concentric circles that on December 21st are split. So, the great anthropologist/astronomer Carl Sagan went up one day and I went up. We had to go through rattlesnakes to get there. The mountain was guarded—

SVETLANA KITTO: Snakes again. [laughs], right?

BARBARA HAMMER: The mountain was guarded by them. But I shot that film single-frame in 21 minutes, the amount of time that it took to slice. That opens and closes in time. Within those 21 minutes, I traversed many other high-energy locations, including the snake mound in Ohio built by Indians. We don't know why. By indigenous peoples, I should say. [00:42:00]

As well as 34th Street in Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge. And I lit these locations through flashes of light so that the world becomes a circle. And the impetus of the film was the scientific idea that I had read that time bends at the edge of the universe.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: I couldn't imagine it. So, I got a nine-millimeter lens that warps the image and bends it, and that was the idea that within this time of a solstice, that I would experience the edge of the universe by making this film. Well, it became a significant film, then, later in life, when it's shown on the balloon. MoMA purchased it. During my retrospective, it was shown at MoMA, shown constantly downstairs for—

SVETLANA KITTO: Was it shown in the round in some sort of way? No?

BARBARA HAMMER: No. No, I didn't do a performance there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: That was before they had hired Stuart Comer, who did curate in a remarkable way the best

retrospective out of probably—maybe the eight I've had—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —at the Tate Modern two years after. So, it was 2012, two years after—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —MoMA. He and I had met for two years, and we talked. I mean, I'd be in London, he'd be here, and it was really—I wanted to have my artwork in it as well, in more performance and things. But it got solidified to performative lectures that I gave, bringing in other people and showing their work who I had influenced, Skyping with Bill Jones. [00:44:00] Not Bill T. Jones, but Bill Jones—in L.A., whose erotic archival work with gay male sexuality I hadn't been familiar with.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, he saw my work, I saw his, and we talked. And then, with—and this went on for a month. I was living in London. A medical anthropologist who's in my Leslie Lohman book, who sat with me, intimately, on the stage after we had shown *A Horse is Not a Metaphor* about—and *Vital Signs*, other films that I've made about mortality—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —*Sanctus*—and has this illuminating personal talk about my health living with cancer, his larger scope of medical philosophy—and we've become friends, even though we've only seen each other one other time since then. And we had this talk. He wanted to meet beforehand; I said no, because, like with you as an oral interviewer—and some of my films have interviews in them—I know that it's the first time that you get the interview. The second time you're talking out of history—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and remembering what's been said.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So—and there's the shock of the new.

SVETLANA KITTO: The shock of the new is important.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I love being surprised. It's—I don't care if I don't know how to answer the question. So, that was a thrill, that whole retrospective. Anyway, there—and we did project in the Turbine Hall.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: [00:46:00] And I projected a piece called *Changing the Shape of Film*, and that was taking the film off the screen and showing it on a 16-millimeter projector that sits upon a table that has a rotary topped to it that the Tate built for me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: I had had one in '75 or '79, but I'd lost it, so they recreated it for me. And I could run through the crowd and make them run after the image—so I activated the audience. My whole idea is to get blood running through the veins by emotional, sensational connection with the screen, physically, so that the blood is in their brains. And they'll think more when they leave cinema—kind of in the way I thought more abstractly when I left the Brakhage and saw cinema can change me. So, I projected around the space nine different places. The image is a woman trying to break out of the frame. That was me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'd shot myself on a trip to Nevada after I had the dream that I should go there to Pyramid Lake. Oh, my God. What wonderful energy I had and belief in myself—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to follow a dream—

SVETLANA KITTO: Amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and almost take off very shortly afterwards with a cable release of 30 feet to allowed me to shoot myself within a limited frame. I'd been in a relationship, very important but was too restrictive. So, my personal life was always influencing what I was making. [00:48:00] And my 30 years with Florrie Burke have really allowed me to go into documentaries that have taken research, time away from her, a commitment to finishing and following longer works that I couldn't have done with short-term relationships I was having in my—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —what I call, "dyke adolescence"—

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs]

BARBARA HAMMER: —which was my 30s.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I met her, really—we both met when we were 48.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, my dyke adolescence followed me from San Francisco, when I was known—"Don't go out with her; she'll break your heart"—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to New York, where nobody knew me, so I could start breaking hearts again. [laughs]

SVETLANA KITTO: What was it like? The differences.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, I loved having—

SVETLANA KITTO: It was so different, I'm sure.

BARBARA HAMMER: —loss. Oh, I loved being an artist here.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I was isolated in—there wasn't that much—there was an avant-garde film scene in San Francisco, which was great and a larger scene than there was in New York. But there weren't other cultural workers, as I called them. And I even have a jumpsuit saying "cultural worker" on it that I used to wear. But I would rent lofts—like, my first was at Babette Mangolte's—very famous cinematographer for Chantal Akerman, and also an artist in her own right; documented early performance work here. A brilliant cinematographer; studied in Paris.

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you know Chantal, too?

BARBARA HAMMER: Did I know her? I can't say I know her.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I might have met her.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: No, I didn't. I knew about her, and I know how she wouldn't put her films in a lesbian film festival, which I totally disagreed with, and even, I believe—maybe this needs to be checked out—[00:50:00] a women's film festival. So—and—

SVETLANA KITTO: So, the loft you got from Babette—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, I got Babette's loft.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: So, it's in Tribeca. Judy Pfaff had a loft above it. It was across from Park, where they now have the Stuyvesant School, and I used to teach filmmaking classes in that park. It's how I made money—was I would have women, about six to eight at a time, learn how to use my camera, and get some minimal fee. And we would make a film together. And I would walk around the streets of Tribeca and see other artists, because

during the day that's the only people that were out.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, we were going to Canal Street to find old lenses and pieces of plastic we could warp and chew through. And of course, Pearl Paint was a center place of interest. And then, I began meeting other artists, like—

SVETLANA KITTO: Like who?

BARBARA HAMMER: —Susan Kleckner. Not well known. K-L-E-C-K-N-E-R. But she shot Kate Millet's *Three Lives* and she also shot this goddess film that's never been finished that was shot on Kate's property in Poughkeepsie and where I made enemies with Z. Budapest. Z Budapest was a witch—and she's on Facebook—

SVETLANA KITTO: [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: —from Los Angeles. We were lovers for a short time. And she set up a circle at night, and I was one of the four corners of the circle.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I got so bored that I walked away, and she never spoke to me again [laughs].
[00:52:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, living in New York, and seeing work, I think I then—I had shot 10 rolls of Super 8 film of my grandmother. I had to put her in a nursing home; I was leaving Oakland, California.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: She was there and in a—my uncle had put her in the nursing home. I couldn't visit her anymore. And on one of the last trips there I shot Super 8, 10 rolls, pushing her through the door, which was traumatic.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And they wouldn't allow me to do it, so, again, I had a challenge; breaking into a place. I said, "I'm only going to shoot her. She's my grandmother."

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: "I have a right." They couldn't deny that. But I used a wide-angle lens. It was only, like, a 10-millimeter on a Super 8, which would gather her background and her environment and other people, because she wasn't there in isolation. And that film I brought with me to New York and got—and was running out of money then. So, in '85, fall of '84, I got my first fulltime teaching job, because I had applied many places, but I was known as a lesbian, and they wouldn't hire me. And I even have documentation of the hiring committee at San Francisco State who said my name was written on the blackboard, and next to it was written "radical lesbian feminist." And none of the other candidates had "Republican"—

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs] Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —or anything written by their names.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: She was another filmmaker. I'm always—she's still alive. I always said I wouldn't say her name, so I'm not going to. But that's how I know one time. [00:54:00] But other places I wouldn't get hired either.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And it's true, my work—I'm a great teacher, and I love it, but it's true, my work is most important in my life.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Maybe they sense that that's a way out for them. Anyway, Columbia College hired me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, I had to go to Chicago, and there I rented the apartment of Brenda Webb, who had started Chicago Filmmakers, and it was close to Ukrainian Town. And I got to have, you know, several rooms to myself, and I shot—

SVETLANA KITTO: Did you move there by yourself?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I had a relationship here in New York, so I would come back to see Mireille Haboucha, an Egyptian woman, Egyptian-Jewish woman. Well, she's Iraqi. Her family had moved to Egypt to escape Iraq and the discrimination they faced, and then they moved to Paris, and she came to New York when she was 16, I believe. So, we had off-on relationship for a couple years. But I moved there with an optical printer, and I set it up on the kitchen table, and after teaching and on weekends—because I didn't have a lot of friends in Chicago, just having moved there—I shot *Optic Nerve*, a film that put me on the national map.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And while I was shooting it, sometimes I would cry. And as with other films, like *Double Strength* that I made about my relationship with Terry Sendgraff and our work together as performance artists using suspended apparatuses in Berkeley. [00:56:00] And that film, *Double Strength*, is '78—I would cry, and I knew that I had a powerful work. And usually it was in the editing, but in this case, it was the—shooting the optical printer. And when I—when that happened—even with *Double Strength*, my menstruation stopped once. I knew, "Wow"—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —"something's going on here big." So, that film—I finished the film, and I sent it, just out of the blue, to John Hanhardt at the Whitney. I didn't know him. I wasn't thinking the biennial. It was just, "Who should look at this?" And he called me up on the phone and told me what a powerful film I'd made, and he loved it—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and he was putting it in the 1985 Whitney Biennial. And the president of Columbia College was so thrilled to hear this that she put up the travel money for me to come to New York and be here for the opening.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And, wow, that film then got to travel, because in the past—I don't know if all the films traveled from the biennial, but some of them did. And it went to Spain, you know. It went international, and that was a major breakthrough for me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And they also made a videotape of artists and filmmakers that were in that biennial. It was a VHS tape and so I got to be in in with my optical printer, talking about how I used it to work emotionally. [00:58:01] Not to—the way we use filters today, and Final Cut or Premiere or Avid.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It's not for effect's sake. The way I used something different or distort an image or double it—it's with meaning. It's for emotional meaning and never, ever for an effect. That's just anathema to me. And I—you know, I really dislike public—not public television, but commercial television.

SVETLANA KITTO: Commercial television, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because—and so many commercial films—because of their sensationalizing stories through special effects and commercials in particular. So, things that the avant-garde began, commercial people would go study to get ideas for their own creative work but it's often begun by the avant-garde. So, I didn't like living in Columbia—I mean, Chicago because I was separated from this art scene that I'd moved towards, and so I came back after one year. Also, Columbia required me to teach in a certain way, using a manual for 16-millimeter production, and that's not the way I believe in teaching, although I was able to create the second

semester a feminist film class, the first time they had ever had it. Way back in Germany, when I was teaching high school there in '72, I had done that at the high school.

So, back into New York, another sublet, and I'm in Tribeca making *Sanctus*. [01:00:00] I had been to a NAMAC conference—National Association of Media Arts Centers. Organizations? It was a group that administrators went to, for the most part, every year—it was a conference—and also some filmmakers. And they actually initiated this grant that went through Congress that got money to put underrepresented peoples on public television. That was, like, a two-year fight.

But during this conference, one of the things I would do is give a lecture on how avant-garde film should be taught in elementary school. And I would have samples of films that could be shown, and then I actually took those films in San Francisco to eight-year-olds and showed them, and then had that documented—why their questions and their enthusiasms. And, sure, they got it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know? And I was saying this genre will die unless we bring it into the educational system. It's neglected. It's only documentary and narrative they're shown and taught as a genre. So, I was on a tour of the George Eastman house, the large archive they have there, and I saw this can of film, and it said "Watson's X-rays" on it. It was, like, three or four inches and about two inches deep. And I thought, "What? X-rays as film, moving film?" So, I was a bad girl again. I let the tour go on, and I opened the can and took out the film and held it up to the light. [01:02:00] I didn't touch the film—

[END OF hammer18_sd1of1_track03]

BARBARA HAMMER: —just the edges, and I saw these were moving X-rays of the human body, the interior of the body. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. So, I put it back, and at the end of the tour, I talked to the director, Christopher—I have to look up these names [Jan-Chrisopher Horak -BH]—and he told me that Dr. James Sibley Watson, a very important name, who had made the first avant-garde films in America, unless we look at Tom Edison's work—Thomas Edison—he made *Fall of the House of Usher* in '28—he made the first gay film, called *Lot and Sodom*, which opened in Times Square in 1930, I think, or '33.

Anyway, I was not—I used those films later in *Nitrate Kisses* when I saw how vast his archive was. But he was deceased, so I went to his widow and said, "Can I reshoot the X-rays?" And she said yes. There were some possibly at the Rochester Hospital as well as at the archive. The hospital didn't have them, but they had an old book, but I couldn't put the numbers of the X-rays together with the names, so it wasn't helpful.

But there were three surviving colleagues of his that helped invent cineradiography in America and—no, they weren't all alive. One was alive, the Ukrainian. He's in the credits of a documentary I made, and on the credits of *Sanctus*, too. [00:02:00] So, I was able to interview them as well as, like, a lab technician about the way they worked. But when I got the X-rays, I didn't want to make a documentary; I wanted to look at the beauty of the interiority of the body. Oh, my God. And, of course, now, with cancer—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —I've seen a lot of it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know? And it's fascinating, and something that's steered away from in youth, never thinking I liked blood and—I mean, menstruation, okay, but—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —cadavers and—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —going into—but now I see what amazing system—you know, kind of like mechanical system of a car—the way it works and impinges one thing on another. I have a lot of admiration for medical science. And at that time, I was just interested in—do you want something behind you? Another pillow?

SVETLANA KITTO: I'm good, actually.

BARBARA HAMMER: The fluidity of the body that were mostly liquid. Things are floating around in there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, I'd already made *Pond and Waterfall*, which has, you know, a vernal pond that's only there in the spring, has mosses floating around in it—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —beautiful water lilies. Like, "Oh, and some of the passages through the stomach look similar" and when I rephotographed it, I wanted to bring in color. I mean, we are—we do see in color. The interior of the body's in color, too.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I wanted—I really don't believe in halos or—what do you call it that surround the body that people—

SVETLANA KITTO: Aura.

BARBARA HAMMER: Auras. I really don't believe in that, but in another way, I wanted to bring a sense of significance and spirituality to the imagery. [00:04:00] So, I offset it again and used a different color filter for three passes of the same image—so that, in the end, I do get auras. And I was very concerned that they not be primary colors, that they be the secondary colors of tangerine and turquoise, peach, and faint, pale yellows, faint lime-greens. Not a red/blue, you know, red, blue, and white, or red, blue, green color pattern.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, this was a major undertaking that I shot. When I work, I work 9:00 to 5:00, Monday through Friday. I am a disciplined maker. I never leave my project without knowing how I'll begin the next day so that I have no blank pages staring at me—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and no—

SVETLANA KITTO: The tyranny of the blank page. [Laughs.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. And I've never had writer's block, filmmaker's block, maybe partly because of that, partly because if I don't know where to begin, I'll just slash and burn, go in, and make a cut and put it anywhere.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And it can always get thrown out, as often the first part of my things do.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But it gets me going. So, this film moves a lot of people. One of my concerns was, should I let the public know how much radiation the person's getting who's being—images are being taken? This person is being killed by filmmaking. I was going to put a little timer down in the body to measure. [00:06:00] Down in the bottom of the frame—that showed how many rad guns [ph], the way radiation is measured—the person would be getting. And then, I decided that was too dogmatic. And so, I decided I'd let the viewer come to their own decision, and often, afterwards I'll ask an audience, and really 50 percent only feel the connection between death and beauty. The others just see a beautiful spectacle.

[They laugh.]

And—but it gives me the opportunity to talk about ambiguity and giving the audience power to become their own archeologist cinema. I don't want to tell them how to think.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It's the same in *Nitrate Kisses*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Which I love.

BARBARA HAMMER: Thank you.

SVETLANA KITTO: I love *Optic Nerve*, too. Those are my two favorite, I think.

BARBARA HAMMER: Are they?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: *Dyketactics*?

SVETLANA KITTO: I love *Dyketactics*, too.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's, like, the different eras, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, the different eras, yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I love *Dyketactics*, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know we can't deny it, I think.

[They laugh.]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I love the story of the woman coming out. It makes so much sense to me of the woman coming out after she saw that, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, that's great.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That's great. Of course, maybe that's the only one I know of.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But how many others, you know?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So—yeah. In *Artforum*—it's doing a major article, they tell me, on my work.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, great.

BARBARA HAMMER: April 1st.

SVETLANA KITTO: Amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: And the big photo they're using is *Multiple Orgasm*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, that's right.

BARBARA HAMMER: '76.

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs] That's amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: So—wow. I always wanted an article. Everything I always wanted—

SVETLANA KITTO: Is happening.

BARBARA HAMMER: —I'm getting.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It makes me want to cry. [00:08:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It's really—

SVETLANA KITTO: Well, what's amazing is—

BARBARA HAMMER: Who else gets this at end of life?

SVETLANA KITTO: —it makes so much sense, because it's the first that—you did it first, and you've influenced so many people that it's hard to remember that. Like, it's hard to understand that when you did it, you had

nothing behind you. That's why I was asking, like, who did—like, Shirley Clarke—like, who did you—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: —see, or what, you know—

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: —informed it? Just because it is so revolutionary.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. You know, I mean—and that was why I made it, because there was nothing there.

SVETLANA KITTO: There was nothing there.

BARBARA HAMMER: And, you know, my life was full of things that weren't there.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, exactly.

BARBARA HAMMER: Menstruation—

SVETLANA KITTO: It's not there.

BARBARA HAMMER: —menopause—

SVETLANA KITTO: The invisibility of it.

BARBARA HAMMER: —old ladies making love still by the time *Nitrate Kisses* comes around. 1992. We don't have any 60-year-olds onscreen making love.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, unfortunately, I wish I'd put in old men instead of the—

SVETLANA KITTO: Well—

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, I put in the—not bisexual, but biracial couple—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Anyway, can't get everything, right?

SVETLANA KITTO: No.

[They laugh.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, boy. Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, what hasn't been seen, you know? And even with *Evidentiary Bodies*—my last film, 2018, this year—it's really living with cancer. It's a poetic—it's way different than *A Horse Is Not a Metaphor*, which touches on the same subject. That's more about what it's like to go through chemotherapy. This is like the trials and the persistence of creativity through a medical treatment that takes you to your knees, [00:10:00] that leaves you in bed, that maybe one day out of a week you can go to the studio and direct your assistant—who's doing the cinematography about the idea that you had that week.

SVETLANA KITTO: [laughs] Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: "Let's put the CAT scan off the screen back on the head. Let's climb up a ladder and hold that shaky camera as best you can." "And then, we're—another camera to rephotograph."

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Angel Favorite did all that work as best she could with her Canon DLR over a period probably of nine months before then I could really shape the film with a grant from the Wexner. And after having shaped it, bring—fly in for the first time their editor. They've only had—in the past, I've been there maybe four times to finish films, *Lover Other* and others. I said, "I'm too ill." They flew Paul [Hill] here, and he lived in my loft for 10 days, and we worked 9:00 to 6:00, same old schedule. And I'd go over, and he would clean up digitally what I couldn't do with my three screens. And I was working three screens for the first time. And he could also then bring in ideas I had that I hadn't had time. I could go back and find the footage. And then I worked on the sound. Anyway, then he took it back and did the finishing back at the Wexner and sent me the files that could now be shown either in a three-channel installation, which I've now added a sculptural screen of movement of X-rays that are projected through with a CAT scan[00:12:04] into, like, a black box where the images surround you. Did I talk about that earlier?

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: It's called *Evidentiary Bodies*.

SVETLANA KITTO: You talked about it a little bit, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: The installation?

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, not the installation.

BARBARA HAMMER: Because now there's a performance, there's a film, and installation. All with the same name.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: Okay, so that's—

SVETLANA KITTO: One second.

BARBARA HAMMER: —one of the—

[Audio break.]

SVETLANA KITTO: So, you were going to talk a little bit about *Nitrate Kisses* and moving into longer-format film.

BARBARA HAMMER: I remember the name of the organization—I'm waiting for you to get quiet—

SVETLANA KITTO: I know. [laughs] I'm quiet.

BARBARA HAMMER: —that the NAMAC conference set up. It's called ITVS, Independent Television Service.

SVETLANA KITTO: Sorry.

BARBARA HAMMER: If you remember, I said that the NAMEC had worked on this for several years, and they finally got CPB [Corporation for Public Broadcasting] to give a huge amount of money for underrepresented people—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to be the images on public television. Unheard of before. Well, immediately, I thought, "I should have some of that money. That's what I do." So, I wrote a grant for *Nitrate Kisses*. The thing about it was that because I worked experimental film, my grant was only for \$60,000. People reading that told me later, "It should have, at minimum, been \$120,000, and that might have been one of the reasons why you didn't get it"—the grant. [00:14:05]

Well, for me, once I get an idea, it doesn't matter if I have the money for it or not. I'm going to make it anyway. So, I didn't know at the time I put in my grant, and I had a tour in Europe. I think I'd set it up for myself. But I had this idea in mind, so every city I went to I would borrow a Super 8 camera and buy black-and-white film and shoot missing areas of gay and lesbian history, transsexual history, transgender—anything that I could find in the city I was in, because *Nitrate Kisses* was going to be about how our history was in fragmentation, and how we didn't have a foundation to stand on. And I wanted to make that not only with those lesbian films that you've mentioned from the '70s but a whole culture of men and women who had nowhere to look. And—for reinforcement, because I know that culture isn't born out of nothing. I'm sure we could go back to cavemen

times, so to speak, and cavewomen times, and we would find transgendered lesbians and gay men. So, that was my mission.

And when I was in Berlin, I—well, when I was in Hamburg, the woman who I was—my host for that evening—I stayed at her house. [00:16:01] I didn't have money. This tour was all self-manufactured. She happened to be an expert on lesbians in concentration camps and that's where I did my interview with Johanna [Reutter]. Her name must be in the credits. They're hard to read. You have to pause, get them in better focus. And then, I would ask her to take me out to Ravensbruck or to the nearby camp, and I would film there. So, I both filmed and did interviews in Hamburg, Berlin, and Paris, where I was. And then, when I came back to the United States, I thought about our missing histories, and I tried to find women who were out before I came out, from the '50s, who frequented the bars here, or other kinds of culture. And I found that alcoholism was a main reason why people forgot, and we didn't have history.

And I also learned incredible histories of women working for Roosevelt and, you know, taking over the men's jobs during World War II, and how they were left out of Rosie the Riveter. There are no lesbians in Rosie the Riveter, which is all about women taking over men's jobs. Come on.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: What's-her-name who made it? Come on.

SVETLANA KITTO: I don't know. [laughs]

BARBARA HAMMER: Connie—look it up—

SVETLANA KITTO: I will.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because it's everywhere. Then I thought, "What do we as gay people—what do we censor? [00:18:02] I can't just blame society. We are a community, and we have our own censorship. So, a-ha! This is brilliant, because then I saw we censor old ladies. You never see old lesbians making love. We censor young dykes, radical, with tattoos and, you know, shaved heads and women of color. We censor relationships, cross-ethnicities. We censor sadomasochistic sex practices. So, those were the four couples I sought out and shot and interwove in the film, with the idea that, through interweaving and cutting, you can voyeur. That pornographic cinema was based on long shots and shots that overlap there on the screen long enough to create an arousal in the viewer. I've nothing against watching pornography and being aroused by it—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but I didn't want that for my cinema. I wanted an intellectual cinema that embraced sexual practice in *Nitrate Kisses*. I wanted people to think about our fragmentation and what's left, but how we can reconstruct, through these slices and pieces, a history that we can be proud of and that we can stand on—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and that we can recognize our own self-defects through our own personal self-criticism and censorship that we each have as individuals in the world. [00:20:05] So, I was very happy with the success of *Nitrate Kisses*. I was teaching again in Chicago, this time at the Chicago Art Institute—much more satisfactory for me—and Sharon Couzin had—Sharon—oh, have to look up her name; great filmmaker.

Sharon and Dennis [Couzin] had—Dennis was an optical printer master. She'd taken a leave of absence for a year as head of the film department, so I was teaching there, taking her place. And suddenly, the faxes came in from all over. What we had then were faxes for *Nitrate Kisses*, and for the first time, I was doing all this work to get it out. I thought, "I'm not getting anything from it being shown at festivals around the world." Then I saw you could charge money to show your film by the film festival.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Bingo! So, it became, like, \$300 for every time it was shown. Before that, it premiered at Sundance. Geoff, who started Sundance, famous—G-E-O-F—

SVETLANA KITTO: It's fine.

BARBARA HAMMER: —come on, Barbara—

SVETLANA KITTO: It doesn't matter.

BARBARA HAMMER: —saw my filmvat the—what was it called? We had some kind of event where people

pitched films, filmmakers pitched films, and experts came and gave advice, and they'd meet you and talk to you about your storyline and everything. He had seen *Nitrate Kisses*. He took me away to a corner, and he was shaking. [00:22:00] And he said, "I'm going to bring the film to Utah."

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: "I'm going to show it at Sundance."

SVETLANA KITTO: That's amazing.

BARBARA HAMMER: He took a very brave step—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and at that time, I was able to have a production—I mean, uh, Strand distribution company picked it up, and so they made the posters for it out of blue print, and I had these great screenings there, and then the festival circuit started—

SVETLANA KITTO: Opening up.

BARBARA HAMMER: —opening when I was at the—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —university until I came back. Because I only had that job one year again and came back to New York. And that was the same time I was with Florrie. Actually, I was with her before '88.

SVETLANA KITTO: That's when you met, right?

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, '88 or '89.

SVETLANA KITTO: She just said '88 to me.

BARBARA HAMMER: Oh, that's good. She's got it down.

SVETLANA KITTO: So—

BARBARA HAMMER: '88.

SVETLANA KITTO: —someone knows—

BARBARA HAMMER: Someone knows.

SVETLANA KITTO: —in this house. [laughs]

BARBARA HAMMER: Yay. So, relationships and film—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —I think I made so many short films for so long—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because I had short affairs.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. I love this idea. It's so interesting, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: They were three months.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I was regularly a three-month girl, because the romance was gone—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —after three months. You get the blush—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —you get the excitement of seeing, talking on the phone, "Oh, my God"—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —"what it's going to be like tonight or today." And that gave you so much energy to work—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —on your own creative work, but it wasn't sustained, because I never had the ambition to really get to know someone. I always was only getting to know a romantic, inflated mirage of who they were, and they were also participating in it. [00:24:04]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: They didn't get to know me either.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, after I met Florrie, I didn't feel compelled to—I mean, I never felt compelled about what length. I'm talking about this theoretically, after having made.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But thinking about it now, the first film that she's in that I made is called—in fact, she's not in very many films, because she doesn't want to be, which was another kind of a breakthrough and change in my work.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I like making relationship films. I was disappointed that I couldn't build our relationship through the years, especially that—a lot of—

SVETLANA KITTO: I'm just looking there.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah, I have a lot of medical interviews with her, because there's—medical issues have followed us from the beginning. We got together until now. But she's a human rights activist. She works for other people. She's not interested in being interpreted by an audience—I would suppose—by seeing her in some intimate way on the screen, even if it's just a relational way. I don't think that's good for her work.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm putting all this stuff—we never really had this conversation. That's what I think.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: But in *Still Point* I was living with her in a beautiful home that she owned in the Oakland Hills. I had lost my loft down on Martin Luther King, because a sub-letter had told on me that I was charging her more money than the landlord charged, so I was busted. [00:26:00]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I moved in with Florrie, and she gave me one of the bedrooms to work in as my studio. And I set up my optical printer, and I had all this Super 8 footage. I was very interested in stasis and motion, and with T.S. Eliot's poem—my first degree and master's degree in English literature—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —"at the still point of the turning world, that's where the dance is." So, these—always this—the ambiguity of things—the things that you can't quite understand.

SVETLANA KITTO: The complexity, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —are what grabbed me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, I wanted to make this four-screen film, because I—at that time, we were just beginning to recognize that we were—the image world was everywhere, and that we were all reading images all the time. It was even before television would have extra little screens showing what was going on on a different channel. People were just starting to talk about visual education, media education, and how it influenced us. The digital culture, really.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I wanted to say we can read four screens at the same time, and also, if I shot Super 8 and reshot it on 16, it would be as clear as original 16, because it takes four as original Super 8.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: It takes four Super 8s to make a 16-millimeter film. And I wanted to juxtapose home and homelessness, because Florrie—and my—through knowing Florrie, and also through my ethnic identity—we're privileged, and we're privileged to—she had her own home. [00:28:04] We were both, you know, Caucasian. We had the difficulties of being women, second-class citizens in a world, but we didn't face issues of being refugees, being a woman of color, being disfigured or—if one can say that, or a woman with disability.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Anyway, we had a lot going for us, but what about the people that didn't? And I wanted to say, "Lesbians—middle-class white lesbians can't live"—now we would say, "Non-sectionality-wise"—and that was before "intersectionality" was used—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but I wanted to bring in the homeless people on the street here in New York. I shot in Soho the white folks wearing their furs and I shot Florrie getting off the plane. And so, our relationship is embedded in a public performance, you could say, of the socio-geopolitical world around us, which wasn't fair. And on the soundtrack, at the end you have "Spin It." The idea is to get this film that continues like this to move, to share the wealth, to spin it out of control so that favors and flavors fall down into the four different spheres that I've made. The soundtrack is fragmented snippets from the radio about weather that connects with, like, some of the heroin addicts that I was shooting on Second Avenue through a paper bag under my arm with a hole cut out for the lens. [00:30:00] The scariest shots I've ever made. I think I only walked that street once. But I got something, and in Tompkins Square Park I was also shooting, and it also has our intimate dialogue about sharing food, having a headache, trying to put ourselves within this space. And this film was just restored with this grant. It really never went to festivals. It's kind of like an unknown, and I'm very thrilled that the academy's restored it. It'll be available in 16 and digital files. So, relationships—have. [inaudible]—to go through my health crisis now—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm not making any film of this now. I was writing, but I haven't picked it up again since we've gone into this last stage. I'm in the last stages of cancer now. I'm only in palliative care, which means I won't be cured, and there's no other treatment to give me, so once the tumors start blocking—by the way, it's ovarian cancer.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Once it metastasizes in your body, it appears every—or different places. It's always ovarian cancer. It's the very same tumor that you originally had. So, that it's in my lungs does not make it lung cancer.

So, it is there. It's growing. Nothing's keeping it from growing, and the radiation that I will be getting. [00:32:00] Ironically, radiation, making *Sanctus*—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —burning the body—I will be getting it for the first time—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, it's the first—

BARBARA HAMMER: —in my life—

SVETLANA KITTO: Oh, okay.

BARBARA HAMMER: —in about a week to 10 days. I'll get three treatments, which hopefully will keep the air duct open a little bit longer than if I didn't have it. But there's more than one tumor there. They're growing.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Eventually, I'll be out of breath, and I'll have home hospice care here. And Florrie's dedicated to seeing me through a peaceful death. And I'm trying to learn, which I haven't yet, what a graceful death might look like.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yes.

BARBARA HAMMER: None of us get to explore death until it's here and we've all been so afraid of it. I mean, we're taught to be afraid of it. So much of my film has been about mortality. I've been fascinated by it from an early age. And it's like we get to experience birth once, and we can't remember it and now we'll get to experience death once and not be able to remember it. [Laughs.]

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, these two things are existing in the ether.

SVETLANA KITTO: So, like—

BARBARA HAMMER: And it's both—

SVETLANA KITTO: —definitional, but, like, beyond our knowledge.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: All we know is leading up to it.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, at some point you'll be so drugged you'll probably know the drugs more than you'll know your experience of it. You'll know the drug experience of death. But in a way, it's exciting, because it's an adventure. It's something I've never done. [00:34:00] And it's like all the films, and like all the relationships. Every one—and our relationship is like finding new folds of intimacy—new shared experiences that we wouldn't have without this crisis right between us.

SVETLANA KITTO: What do you think allowed you to enter into this new kind of intimacy? Since you hadn't had it before, like, how—

BARBARA HAMMER: A dedication. An intellectual—at first—well, first, attraction.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I still had—I mean, it was still romance for three months.

[They laugh.]

It was still physical attraction—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and then finding out that we could communicate.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: That was the next step. That was solid. Then, finding out that her work meant as much to her as mine. This is the first time. Lots of other lovers had kind of tagged onto me or they had work, but it wasn't as compelling in their life as mine was, which meant it would take more time away from me and my work. So, I needed somebody who was my same age who wasn't interested in being taken care of or admired by a younger woman, and I wasn't interested in an old—I had been interested in older women earlier, like Gloria Churchman,

11 years my senior, because they had experiences that I hadn't had, and I could learn from them. This time, it wasn't. And so, she met all that criteria and—I mean, I don't know that—I do know, because I—[00:36:00] Paula Levine and I were making a film together—it was a video—at San Francisco State called *Two Bad Daughters*.

SVETLANA KITTO: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: And we had received from Lynn Hershman to do our editing there. And so, in between editing we'd be out on the lawn, having lunch, talking. And Paula and I were never lovers, always film colleagues. And we'd be talking about Florrie, and I would be enunciating these things for the first time by talking to a friend—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —who was curious. So, I was hearing myself think out loud—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —because someone else was listening.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And that made a big difference.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And so, I went into the relationship with kind of a broader understanding of what it could be. And I was in therapy at the time—no, I had been in therapy earlier before I met Florrie, back in San Francisco, and the woman had said to me—the therapist—"No reason you can't continue this bed-hopping life. Nothing morally against it. But there is, you know, long-term relationships that you're not having." And I thought I'd take something new for a change, which was the long-term relationship. That would be the adventure—to see how that unfolded.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I already knew the three months—what it was going to be.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, those were all kind of intellectual and emotional parameters that went with my getting to know Florrie.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And it proved to be true. [00:38:00] Her work would take her away, leaving me space—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to do my work; my work would take me away, leaving her room to do space. And it's only now that she's given it up to go through these last stages of cancer with me. She's given up her work and taken on my work, which is a tremendous, to me—not just a gift. It's a sacrifice.

SVETLANA KITTO: A sacrifice, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: Yeah. And I hope she doesn't regret it, because I've been such a businesswoman with my work. And so, much self-promoter, so active on the internet—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and so many things are coming my way since this last retrospective and the photo show at Company. Things are pouring in like never before, and Stuart had told me after the Tate that would happen, but it didn't happen right away. It's really now, years later that it's to the point where I always wanted to be. You know, finally, I'd be asked for work for, you know, auctions, you know, contribute to this, contribute to that, and be one of the New York artists.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I'm a New York artist—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —finally, you know.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, whew, let me say, it's been a long time coming, and I couldn't have done it without the support. I wouldn't have been able to live in a place like this at night and work in my humble studio at Westbeth.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I don't think it would have rejuvenated me to be both living there and making.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: You know, there's just been a lot of comfort in being able to separate work life and domestic life.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: I really appreciate that.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah. Was there anything else you want to say?

BARBARA HAMMER: [00:40:00] Oh, well, the interview has been extremely exciting for me, that I've found myself not being sick but being part of the world again—through talking with you.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And that's life-giving and life-making, and I think something that the therapist that I'm seeing now through the dying process was telling me yesterday that you are who you are, and you're going to be living and making up till the end. Because I keep waiting for a time when the business stuff—I'm really waiting for that—will be settled, and maybe that will happen, maybe not. But will the creative life also still be there—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —up to the end? I don't know, because the business is overwhelming right now. But the way she put it to me, that's the way she saw me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

BARBARA HAMMER: Sometimes the creative life is the business life—

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: —like with Andrew yesterday, Andrew Durbin, senior editor [for the Americas of Frieze Magazine -BH], who I hope will write my obituary, and I want to have these audio files, along with Yale, the unedited ones. So, I have a grant coming to me from the Wexner for unfinished work. They weren't to release the money until July. I won't be alive in July. It's unlikely. So, the idea—what about if I got permission to choose a different filmmaker to finish each of the unfinished projects? *Evidentiary Bodies* being the first. It's already done. Then there's three or four more, each—if they'll allow me, then each of those filmmakers could get \$5,000. [00:42:02] I have the footage. It would be shot by me—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —but they would have the creative freedom—

SVETLANA KITTO: To edit them.

BARBARA HAMMER: —to edit the way—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —they wanted. It would keep my work alive in the world. It would help another filmmaker—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —and it would set up another relationship.

SVETLANA KITTO: Right.

BARBARA HAMMER: So, this was a creative idea that actually, though he had it yesterday, it built on something I started about three years ago—

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: —upstate, where I was giving away in a workshop my outtakes for people to make new films with. And writing to people who I knew—filmmakers—"Would you like the outtakes of *Optic Nerve* to make a new film?" Well, one of them responded, and that was Joey Carducci, who had made *Generations* with me.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And he asked for the outtakes of *Tender Fictions*, which I gave him, and just with the restriction that he never use anything that is in my film. He can't use any shot that's actually in my feature *Tender Fictions*. And he made a trans coming-out film with the imagery.

SVETLANA KITTO: Wow.

BARBARA HAMMER: And his way of voiceover was, like, a video letter to Barbara, because, of course, we started working—I was going to save him—well, her at the time, Gina—as a lesbian filmmaker, because she hadn't made a film in five years. So, making *Generations*—maybe she'd catch the spark again.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: She caught the spark, became a guy, and now is going on in this trans work. So, as much as you plan something, the thrill, openness of something new happening and coming in is always an option and to be embraced—not denied.

SVETLANA KITTO: Yeah.

BARBARA HAMMER: And I hope I die embracing new options, not denying them.

SVETLANA KITTO: Thank you so much, Barbara.

BARBARA HAMMER: You're welcome.

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[END OF INTERVIEW]