

**GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
EAST VILLAGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral History Interview
MARLIS MOMBER

By Liza Zapol
New York, NY
June 15, 2015
October 28, 2015

Oral History Interview with Marlis Momber, June 15, 2015, October 28, 2015

Narrator(s)	Marlis Momber
Birthdate	April 19, 1943
Birthplace	Germany
Narrator Age	72
Interviewer	Liza Zapol
Place of Interview	310 East 4 th Street, #15
Date of Interview	Session 1: June 16, 2015, 3:40pm Session 2: October 28, 2015, 10am
Duration of Interview	Session 1: 1 hour, 52 mins; Session 2: 1 hour, 11 mins
Number of Sessions	2
Waiver Signed/copy given	Y
Photographs	Y
Format Recorded	.Wav 98 khz, 24 bit
Archival File Names	Session 1 150615-000.wav [2.15 GB]; 150615-001.wav [1.74 GB] Session 2: 151028_001.wav[2.15 GB]; 151028_002.wav[312.5 MB]
MP3 File Name	Session 1: Momber_MarlisOralHistory1.mp3 [74.5MB]; Momber_MarlisOralHistory2.mp3 [60.4 MB] Session 2: Momber_MarlisOralHistorySession2_1.mp3 [74.5 MB]; Momber_MarlisOralHistorySession2_2.mp3 [10.9 MB]
Order in Oral Histories	19



Marlis Momber at the Sixth Street Community Center. Mural by Howard Brandstein depicts (from left to right) Will Sales, poet; Curtis Momber, Marlis Momber's son; and Bimbo Rivas, Poet who named Loisaída. November 2, 2015. Photograph by Liza Zapol.

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Marlis Momber

“I came out of LaGuardia at the time, came over the Williamsburg Bridge, down Delancey Street. There was this mural, this most beautiful mural. So I got up there on the wall. I asked the cab driver, ‘Could you please drive by there?’

He says, ‘I ain’t going there.’

I said, ‘What do you mean you ain’t going there? This is New York City. This is like, you know, five minutes away from where you’re supposed to take me on Fifth Avenue and 25th Street.’

‘I ain’t going there.’

So I came to the studio. I asked my assistant to give me a loaded camera...I got on my bike and went back and took my first photo. That was it. That was the end and the beginning of Marlis Momber, fashion photographer becoming a documentary photographer.”

(Momber, p. 4)

“It turned into a fabulous collaboration, because he [Tyrone Jackson] saw the slideshows and immediately took his tape recorder out with him, got all sounds from the street, and then edited it with this incredible Afro-Latin music that was then playing on the radio like discothèque music, from which Europeans heard it, ‘Oh, yeah. I used to dance like that.’...But fabulous music, and so they were playing it in discothèques all over the world, including New York. Every car, ‘Diamond in the back, sunroof down, diggin’ the scene and the gangsta lean.’ It was all there. I’d seen it all. I photographed it all.

I get goose bumps now just thinking about it. It was so exciting. I mean New York was, even then in [19]75 and then into the late [19]70s, dark, dirty, and dangerous. So much fun. So much—somewhat smaller. You knew everybody. I had at first a studio on 17th Street between Union Square and Fifth Avenue. Andy Warhol was my neighbor. He was also my buddy. Very, very sweet man who adored me, who protected me, who—Max’s Kansas City was the only place where one could hang out, and I had a free bar there. I had like Andy, you know? ‘No, Andy’s paying, Andy’s paying.’

He was starting to get notorious, if not famous, and that was evident and all that. He asked me to be—I was in one or two film shoots—last scenes where he needed more bodies, rolling around and doing all kinds of crazy stuff. But I never took advantage of it. I never photographed him. I have two snapshots of him. A friend, a photographer friend of mine came from Germany. We went through Central Park, and suddenly he says, ‘I think that’s Andy Warhol.’ I said, ‘Yeah, That’s Andy.’ He was with a companion, and I let them approach us, and Andy came and embraced me, and my friend just was blown away. ‘I didn’t take any pictures.’ I said, ‘I’m very glad you didn’t, because that’s not what this is all about. Andy’s my friend, you know.’ Very hard to lose him.”

(Momber, pp. 6-7)

“When people came in by taxi, I always told them... ‘Give the cab driver just the number, do not say ‘C’ and ‘D’, because he won’t take you. If they do figure that out, by the time they cross First Avenue, and they cross Avenue A, tell them to take them to—I’ve forgotten. Now I forgot the street address of the Ninth Precinct, but on 5th Street, between First and Second. Give them that address. It’s a precinct, and you ask them—politely—to inquire, whatever they wanted to know, and why they wouldn’t cross Avenue A.’

But when you did cross Avenue A, and dependent on what street, what cross street, you ran into the plight of the neighborhood...Avenue A was just desert, was just nothing. On the east side of it and on the west side of it, at least Tompkins Square Park... but right across from it, very few stores. One or two bars. They were pretty grimy. We loved them because cheap beer [laughs] and cheap stuff and locals. You could really mess with the locals there.”
(Momber, p. 38)

“First of all, the bars in particular were of course mainly male patrons, and then a few adventurous and probably known as wild women [laughs] females. Or very strong-willed and very determined women, who said, ‘We have the same right to be here.’ But I have to say that some of the organizations were—one in particular, is called the Bullet Space, which is one block south of here, on 3rd Street between C and D. That was before I was in the homestead, even. No, after I was in it, in the late ‘70s. There were a bunch of white guys that just simply didn’t speak Spanish, didn’t have any blacks, didn’t have any women, and decades later, it’s [unclear] in Pueblo Nuevo, which they didn’t even know the name of. They’re, the southern part. Because they were in Loisaída, they didn’t care for that. I said, ‘What was it with you guys? You were so,’—and they all admitted it. They said, ‘Yeah, we didn’t know what we were doing. The reason we weren’t out there is because we didn’t speak Spanish. We didn’t understand them. We didn’t want confrontation, and they’re not knowing what’s going on. With you women, we just wanted, you know, we wanted to be women and not activists,’ [laughs] like that. We all laughed about it, but it was a serious issue. Still is.”
(Momber, pp. 40-41)

“It started pretty early, in [19]92. We moved in in 1980 after only two years of renovation. Renovating meaning gutting, and that was done via sweat equity...We were a coop, but we were a sweat equity coop. We paid thirty-five dollars to belong. That’s it. But the word ‘coop’ conjures all kinds of mighty ideas in people’s minds—‘Oh, we can sell, we can get rich, we can,’ you know, ‘profit from it.’ That’s not the way it’s designed. Our deed does not allow that. It has to stay within the income level, within the guidelines...We met regularly—monthly at least—often we had to call other meetings. So everybody had to sign and log in a certain amount of hours to their ability
(Momber, p. 47)

“The worst case, most tragic case...was the building on Avenue D, right here between 5th and 6th Street. We all knew that homeless people lived in there, and they accessed it from the back—not from Avenue D side, but from the empty lot. The whole block was empty, practically—was already taken down and stuff like that...We knew there were homeless people in it. The other homeless people tried to stop the people from the fire department. They wanted them to go in there and find the people first. They were sure they were in there. The fire was already blazing. And they didn’t.

I have photos of one man, one homeless man, climbing the walls, trying to get to his friends. He was drunk, but I think if I had a pint of something, I would have done that, too, at that point, in his shoes, in his situation. It was really, really, really hard to take. Then you saw those crumbling walls, and you knew there might have been people. Or even dogs, cats—who knows?—in there. It was arson. It was planned arson.”
(Momber, p. 50)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Marlis Momber

Photographer and documentarian, Marlis Momber [April 19, 1943-] recounts her early life in Europe, her career as a photographer, and her life in New York City and the East Village in this oral history interview.

SESSION 1

Born in Berlin in 1943, Momber states that she was a “war baby” and narrates the story of her birth. At age two, Momber’s father, a German soldier, relocated her mother and two siblings to an area of Germany near the Baltic Sea, which would become West Germany. Momber recalls playing with her siblings in piles of rubble and throwing aluminum cans into the paths of tanks to watch them flatten. Momber also recalls the return of her father from war. Momber recalls a strong Socialist leaning in her family and attention to matters of social justice.

Momber connects images of war torn Germany with description of the East Village and Lower East Side during the 1970s. She attributes her shift from a career in fashion photography to a career in documentary photography to experiences she had after returning to New York from Panama City. Momber began photographing murals by Maria Dominguez and the CITYarts Workshop, beginning her involvement in the East Village community. She mentions meeting her collaborator, Tyrone Jackson, with whom she later had a child. Momber also mentions Andy Warhol and briefly describes their friendship.

Momber’s early career unfolded in Europe, where she apprenticed with world-renowned photographers and worked for *Der Spiegel* magazine. Momber discusses her early career trajectory, including time in Paris, which ended in deportation back to Germany. Following her time at *Der Spiegel*, Momber reentered the fashion photography industry before coming to the United States in 1966.

Momber describes coming to New York as an au pair, moving in with a fellow German immigrant, and building her photography career, beginning with a job in the studio of fashion photographer, Tad Yamashiro. A work trip to Panama redirected Momber to documentary photography from fashion. Momber narrates the story of her first marriage to James Matthews and circumstances surrounding their divorce.

SESSION 2

In Session 2, Momber’s narration focuses on the East Village. She articulates the boundaries of the Village as Houston Street to the south, 14th Street to the north, the East River to the East and Avenue A to the west.

Momber describes the whitewashing of the East Village, literal painting over murals (including murals by Maria Dominguez) and evidence in the community of gentrification. This second portion of the interview includes discussion of urban homesteading, surrounding areas (Stuyvesant Town, Grand Street Settlement, Seward Park), racial and gender dynamics in community spaces in the East Village (Bullet Space), and Momber’s activism as a documentarian in the East Village, photographing sensitive spaces including the police precinct, synagogue, and rallies and protests.

Momber demonstrated with housing agencies, including GOLES, in Cooper Square against demolition of buildings in the neighborhood and describes being part of a protest in which Mayor Ed Koch was approached at his home, where he delivered a famous line: “Well, if you don’t like it here, why don’t you jump in the river and swim to Brooklyn?” Momber recalls being privileged by police as a documentarian. On one occasion, Momber would have been arrested, were it not for an arresting officer who allowed her to continue working.

As a photographer, Momber worked with the Catholic Church, Catholic Workers, Save the Children, Habitat for Humanity, housing agencies, schools, churches, and block associations. She briefly states she was part of an effort to transition city afterschool programs into daycare programs.

Momber returns to her discussion of urban homesteads in the East Village. She explains the beginning of the sweat equity coop in her building and support from the Urban Homestead Program, the benefits of continuity for the people who live in homesteads, and she offers an anecdote about being on security duty as parquet flooring materials were being stolen.

Describing changes in the East Village, Momber points out the disappearance of street art and graffiti, a resurgence of hard drug culture, demographic shifts, and homogeneity in dress and culture. Momber comments that the quality of life in the East Village has become poor, compared to what she has experienced there. Momber maintains community in the Village and mentions affordable housing activists Frances Goldin and Sarah Farley.

Session 2 begins to close with a discussion of Momber’s film, *Viva Loisaida*, produced by Gruppe Dokumentation, and how she obtained funding for it. She points to the support of German Public Television.

Momber revisits the formation of her political views as a product of her upbringing in wartime Berlin and expresses resistance to adopting American citizenship due to her objections to issues in American politics.

Momber reiterates the whitewashing of the East Village and closes the interview, mentioning her own case of cancer and the helpfulness of medical marijuana for people dealing with chronic disease.

General Interview Notes:

This is a transcription of an oral history that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

GVSHP began the East Village Oral History Project in 2013. The GVSHP East Village Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing East Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Light edits are included in brackets, while more substantial edits are in footnotes. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

The views expressed by the contributor(s) are solely those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or endorsement of our organization.

From Marlis Momber:

I want to mention these publications where you can learn more about the East Village, and see some of my images:

The Quality of Life in Loisaída. A Bimonthly Magazine edited by Mary M. McCarthy, (1978-1991) Complete collection stored at the New York Public Library Milstein Division of Local History.

From Urban Village to East Village: The Battle for New York's Lower East Side by Janet L. Abu-Lughod. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994.

Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnicity and Culture in New York's Lower East Side by Mario Maffi. New York: NYU Press: 1995.

In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam by Urayoán Noel. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press: 2014.

There are dozens more that I wanted to give credit to, as well as many more people and organizations: it takes a village to make a documentary photographer!

Oral History Interview Transcript, Session 1

Zapol: This is the Oral History Project for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. It's June 15, 2015. This is Liza Zapol, and I'm here at 310 East 4th Street, and if I can ask you to introduce yourself, please.

Momber: I welcome Liza to my apartment at 310 East 4th Street. My name is Marlis Momber. I have lived in this apartment in this building for thirty-eight years—not always on the top floor, but before on the fourth floor with my son, who is thirty-seven years old. We kind of toss each other around. When I'm here, he is not, and the other way around. Sometimes we overlap; sometimes we don't.

But my son is really my proudest product from my life—very much involved with my work as a photographer.

Zapol: Thank you. If we can begin by sharing where and when you were born and a little bit about your early childhood memories—where you see your, the seeds of your beginnings as an observer, as a photographer.

Momber: I was born on April 19, 1943, which happened to have been the day before Hitler's birthday. That's Adolph himself. My mom already had one pregnancy and one birth, induced, because in Berlin you never knew when you end up in a bunker. Bombings. In '41 when my older brother was born, that wasn't so acute yet, but she had also introduced [induced] his birth.

My birth she had planned in such a way that it would have—due date would have been the 20th of April. Then there was a mandate to co-name your child Adolph or Adolphina. My family on both sides—my mother's and my father's family were totally anti-Hitler, and so she concocted this whole way of having me the day before. She wanted the full term, or as full as possible, because it was difficult enough in 1943 already with food shortages and all kinds of other things.

So I was born that day at five o'clock in the afternoon, 17:13 [military time], and by eight o'clock, we were in a bunker for three days. Whereas of course, I don't remember any of this—This story was told each April 19th, when the day came near, and I have later many, many questions, and wondered, you know, what was Hitler, and what was labor, and what was babies, actually, you know, and all this stuff.

The influence that all of it had on me was like all our—everybody who was born during the war or close to the war is called ‘war babies’. We all have the same kind of shortcomings because of no food. Or have bad teeth. Bad bones. I’m deaf from that bunker experience, because they bombed the hell out of Berlin, and it was very, very turbulent.

That was not the only time. It was, you know, we stayed there until [19]45, until late ‘45. Or May ‘45, I think, we stayed in Berlin. Then my father swept us out. He was an officer in the Army. Altogether he had been in ten years, including wartime. By then, 1945, he was stationed at the bunker. Had a high position. From his 119 men in his battalion, only nineteen were still alive.

But he took a jeep, packed up my mom, my younger brother, my pregnant mom. My younger brother—my older brother and me in May of ‘45, so I was a little bit over two years old and drove us through the night into what he knew was going to be the Western sector. Mainly British. Hanover. Near Hanover, where also his garrison was from. As a soldier that’s where he was.

[He] deposited us in the middle of the country in a beautiful farmhouse. Then my memory kicks in, because I remember distinctly we were playing. There was a circular driveway, grandiose, at least from my little perspective. I was two years old. We had this roundel. We had lined up all broken toys and broken wheelbarrows and anything that had wheels, but of course it was probably not in any shape to be used or anything, and played choo-choo train. **[00:05:22]**

The train didn’t move. We moved. We moved from, you know, plaything to plaything, so that we actually got around. One day, my older brother got up and ran towards a man, total stranger. A man came down the driveway. I immediately knew it was something big and important. But I was immobilized. So these boots ended up next to me. They were as high as I. He was wearing these high, high boots. He picked me up, and he said he was my dad.

He got captured by the Russians, but was exchanged because officers got exchanged against other officers. He ended up actually being an American prisoner of war and was released early—very early, six months after peace—whereas the other surviving fourteen men, after the bunker, all ended up in Siberia and came back five years later. They say they lived another five years and then married the rich war widows from the garrison and then died. One of them was my godfather, which I hadn’t had. As you grow up and you’re little, you didn’t have a godfather. I don’t know why I never had a godmother, but it didn’t.

But then when he was there those five years, I got totally swamped with presents, of course, on my birthdays. He taught me how to tango when I was like eight or nine years old, time wise. Yes, something like that. I never forgot that. When that film came out, *Scent of a Woman*, I was like totally brought back to my uncle, my godfather. We called him ‘uncle’.

So the war was over, but we grew up with it, with all the stories, especially in Berlin where my grandparents still had property, and they ended up in the Western sector. They had a huge property called a city farm, gentleman’s farm—a small farm or a large garden, depending on how large [an] orchard. From the First World War, there was a pond created, because a bomb crashed into the garden, and there was a spring underneath and so we had a pond.

The same happened in the house, so we had—well it didn’t explode. It just fell in and then crashed through the floors. They never repaired the floors where the huge staircase going up to the second floor and big skylight. We all knew it was from bombs, and we wondered what that was. When we were little, we were, we kept living in the west, the British sector, on the Baltic Sea, and later on went to visit my grandparents.

Obviously, we started asking questions. “What do you mean, a bomb fell here?” And of course, everything around their house was truly destroyed. They lived in a village square, a little bit outside [Berlin], which is now totally urban but was then very, very suburban. Rural almost, field and potato fields and others.

But at the time [there were] only bombed out, burned out buildings, empty lots where women in kerchiefs and maybe they had an instrument—a hammer or some sort of instrument—that cleaned every brick from the mortar and made these beautiful pyramids of clean brick from which Berlin was rebuilt.

The reason I’m going into this detail is because when I first hit the Lower East Side in 1975 after I had been here already nine years—I came in [19]66 via Paris as a fashion photographer, or wanting to be fashion photographer. Then I became a fashion photographer, and I saw this neighborhood when I came back from Panama City where I had just photographed on an odd job. My [studio] manager [Jimmy] got us so we could travel on a luxury liner—actually in the Gulf of Mexico, but we went to Panama City taking the train over to the Pacific Coast and ended up in Panama City. [00:10:02]

There were these incredible murals, you know. Of course, they were in the ghetto. I mean wherever I go, I end up in the ghetto, I have to say. Wherever I go, I start out—immediately I’m

drawn to the ghetto. The police took us out for our own safety. Sure enough, you know I told Jimmy. I said “Jimmy, Let’s just say ‘yes, yes, yes,’ sign papers. We’ve got to get out of here because they’ve got my film, the film that I photographed that morning from all these murals.”

He said, “I ain’t going back.” I said, “We’ve got to go back. Let’s get out of here.” [We] took a taxi after they released us. We went back to this place where I remembered this very slight tug on my equipment. I had a canvas bag. Sure enough, somebody had sliced it open and took twelve rolls of exposed film. That don’t go. You know that was my work, OK.

I go back there. Jimmy stayed a little bit outside because he saw a cop, and he stayed close to him. I went back into this thing [a Tiki Bar]. My Spanish was really terrible. I hadn’t sharpened it yet. I said, “Oh, sorry. Photographer. Mi película. No es bueno para ustedes. Mi falta. Mi película.” They all grinned from ear to ear. Gave me my film back in the same plastic bag that I had it in. Yeah, it was just wonderful. It was just incredible. I threw the last Panamanian money, dollars, on the counter and said, you know, “Tequila para todo.” I had a huge swig of it myself. Almost got the worm, too, which was an honor, but I didn’t take it that way.

Then they drove us to the train to take us back to our boat. It was just a miracle, so I obviously, I love those ghettos. I absolutely love those ghettos.¹ I came out of LaGuardia at the time, came over the Williamsburg Bridge, down Delancey Street. There was this mural, this most beautiful mural. Right up there on the wall. I asked the cab driver, “Could you please drive by there?”

He says, “I ain’t going there.” I said, “What do you mean you ain’t going there? This is New York City. This is like, you know, five minutes away from where you’re supposed to take me on Fifth Avenue and 25th Street.” “I ain’t going there.”

So I came to the studio. I asked my assistant to give me a loaded camera. He said, “Yeah, but it’s got film from Panama.” I said, “It’s OK. Give me an extra roll,” blah, blah. I got on my bike and went back and took my first photo. That was it. That was the end and the beginning of Marlis Momber, fashion photographer becoming a documentary photographer.

It overlapped many years afterwards. But really my main focus was then on street photography. Lower East Side. The entire Lower East Side, including Chinatown, Little Italy, and then also, you know, what then was called “ABC Town,” Alphabet City—all this from

¹ M.Momber noted on 1/12/2016: “I loved ghettos because I could mess with locals.”

those too terrible drug movies where everybody of color was demonized as a drug dealer and everybody else was a poor victim of the drugs.

So we hate that name for our neighborhood. Our neighborhood now is a Spanglish name called from ‘Lower East Side’ to ‘Loisaida’. We are very proud of it. I need to take a break.

Zapol: Sure.

[PAUSE]

Momber: So I wanted to go back to one point where the women in Berlin and the burnt out and rubble bricks strewn lots and properties and houses—the woods, actually—because when I came here, that’s what the Lower East Side looked like. It was like mind blowing to me. I mean I had already lived here for nine years. I mainly hung around Manhattan, of course. Sort of knew it pretty well. I even had been to Harlem at the time, which was much, much different than now—not really photographing, but we went to events and sightseeing. Slumming, I guess, uptown.

I’d been to Little Italy. No, at that time I hadn’t been anywhere. I hadn’t been anywhere. But I didn’t know the other boroughs. I knew nothing but Manhattan—Central Park, maybe [00:15:02], as background. Some Riverside, but even that not, no. All was around my studio—was in the end Fifth Avenue and 25th Street, the Flatiron Building. I have tons and tons of photographs with that as the background. It was a great location.

But here, on the Lower East Side, I thought, wow, now you are a grown up, and you have [the] full choice of getting involved. I found out from that mural, which actually depicted the stories of Asian immigrants, and since the Vietnam War wasn’t that long ago, some veterans must have disliked any glorification of Asia, and they shot those paint balls at it. So there was some paint balls dripping down through the rice fields of this mural, many totally loaded with information. Then I found out who was responsible for that mural, and of course, on the bicycle I’d already passed several other murals further up north. Then [I] found out CITYarts Workshop was a not-for-profit organization. Very, very poor. Not the same as nowadays where they’re very, very wealthy and doing a fabulous job in fundraising and all that stuff and producing murals all over the world.

This was simply local, and very much an initiative of a handful of people who ran CITYarts Workshop. Of course, then I found out where the others are located. I made these photographs available to them. They were all thirty-five millimeter chromes or slides, mostly. So

I mostly did murals. Of course, the murals then drew in street life along with the murals. Then I was doing multimedia productions for Elizabeth Arden, for fashion and for their products—their cosmetic products—I worked for *GQ* [Magazine]. I worked for *Glamour Magazine*.

These multimedia shows then prompted me to load up the projectors. I always had four or six of them working at the same time—different projection sizes. Sometimes just the screen filled—had six images or only three or only two or only one. I filled them up with the stuff from the street. I liked it a lot. The murals then grew more into street, and into street, and into street. Then came the event that I was asked, probably through CITYarts Workshop, could they borrow these slides for fundraisers?

I said “Yeah, if I can project them the way I see it.” Of course I could, and it was fabulous. It was just really fabulous. There was no sound in the beginning, and then came the other life changing event that I met the father of my son, Tyrone Jackson, through work. Because people felt that I could not roam the streets off Little Italy, Chinatown, and the Lower East Side by myself—I was a sitting duck.

I didn’t feel that way at all. But I thought since I wanted full movement, I said, “OK, what’s the solution?” They said, “Well, you know there’s this guy who grew up in this, or who knows this neighborhood.” He didn’t. He grew up in Mississippi, but he used to be a Black Panther and came to the neighborhood with the peaceful intention of the Black Panthers and not the violent ones that turned later. Somewhat.

We had already heard about Tyrone and four of his compatriots or his companions, and I’m going to skip something here. So I said, “Sure. I’d be glad to talk to him.” And we met. I told him what my schedule was. He could actually only do it in the evenings and weekends. The evenings, of course, were important, because as it gets darker, then—the morning I did by myself—there was nobody over there—on my bicycle.

It turned into a fabulous collaboration, because he saw the slideshows and immediately took his tape recorder out with him, got oh sounds from the street, and then edited it with this incredible Afro-Latin music that was then playing on the radio like discothèque music, from which Europeans heard it, “Oh, yeah. I used to dance like that.”² And after this discothèque, it was, “Clean it up, clean it up, the ghetto.” They didn’t have no idea it was the real thing. There was a real ghetto that needed to be cleaned up, and people did it with sweat equity. It started to

² M. Momber noted on 1/27/16 that “oh sounds are a film term for ambient sounds.”

bloom, that whole scene and stuff like that. [00:20:28]

But fabulous music, and so they were playing it in discothèques all over the world, including New York. Every car, “Diamond in the back, sunroof down, diggin” the scene and the gangsta lean.” It was all there. I’d seen it all. I photographed it all.

I get goose bumps now just thinking about it. It was so exciting. I mean New York was, even then in [19]75 and then into the late [19]70s, dark, dirty, and dangerous. So much fun. So much—somewhat smaller. You knew everybody. I had at first a studio on 17th Street between Union Square and Fifth Avenue. Andy Warhol was my neighbor. He was also my buddy. Very, very sweet man who adored me, who protected me, who—Max’s Kansas City was the only place where one could hang out, and I had a free bar there. I had like Andy, you know? “No, Andy’s paying, Andy’s paying.”

Often, he wasn’t there, of course. I have to say I was tempted. He was starting to get notorious, if not famous, and that was evident and all that. He asked me to be—I was in one or two film shoots—last scenes where he needed more bodies, rolling around and doing all kinds of crazy stuff. But I never took advantage of it. I never photographed him. I have two snapshots of him. A friend, a photographer friend of mine came from Germany. We went through Central Park, and suddenly he says, “I think that’s Andy Warhol.” I said, “Yeah, That’s Andy.” He was with a companion, and I let them approach us, and Andy came and embraced me, and my friend just was blown away. “I didn’t take any pictures.” I said, “I’m very glad you didn’t, because that’s not what this is all about. Andy’s my friend, you know.” [It was] Very hard to lose him.

But the neighborhood was 17th and Union Square. I met Grace Jones there and Jessica Lange. This is fashion photography. I threw the two of them together. It benefited all three of us in different ways.

A quick glance back at fashion photography: I went back to Berlin to study photography and was the only one out of twenty-seven graduates from the photo class who actually had a job right away in an advertising company where I did everything. I was exposed to everything an advertising company does, photography-wise, which was a fabulous experience.

Then I fell in love with an Italian journalist. He had given me his Paris address, so of course I took the train to Paris after six months only of actual experience in photography as a job. His wife answered the doorbell, so that was the story, the end of that. But I was in Paris, and I had a three-month visa and a work *permit de travail*—*carte de sejours, mais cette rien* [French-

a work permit, but it's nothing]. I mean that really didn't make a lot of difference. You had to have a job for those to be actually valid.

After three months you go to the police, and they give you another three months, and then you go underground, because if you didn't have a job, you actually had to leave the country. I made many friends. I worked for Peter Knapp, you know, the giant fashion photographer. Got great experience. People paid me with food and wine and cheese and what have you.

That was rough. Then I was finally deported and came—so Paris was a great experience, but then I was deported. The police gave me two phone calls to make. Of course, it was a very dramatic story, but that's not what we want to hear right now.

I was put on the train—this was five o'clock in the morning. They came into my cheap little hotel that my friend was actually paying for me. I had a friend from Algeria, a prince. Of course, the Algerian problem in Paris had just been not solved, but come to a point where there was no more danger, per se. But I was not well perceived, you know, to run around with this beautiful, beautiful dark-skinned man. [00:25:06]

He actually was there to study German, and then his father found out that we were going out together, so he put him into Germany. He came on weekends by train. It was amazing. So I then at five or four o'clock in the morning, there was a knock on the door. I jumped out of bed, and there were two, you know, FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] officers, just like in the movies. It was the hat and the collar and the badge and the guns someplace. They were giving me ten minutes to pack my stuff and took me to the station. But *mes copians* [French] [00:25:41], they all were downstairs already in the—I hung out with people that—actually, they were like loafing around. They were maybe wealthy in the background, maybe not. Not particularly interested in work. There were no drugs, but wine and beer and stuff like that. Cigarettes. For pleasure, they'd hang out in this café all day long, and people [would] come by with their cars and jump into the store to get a pack of cigarettes, leave the keys in the ignition, and we'd jump the cars and take a pleasure ride until the gasoline was gone.

I have to say that once I acted as the initiator. I said, "Look, keys in the car." And they dragged me with them, so I was in it. I was in it. There was no doubt I was in it. It was incredible. It was so—I can't believe that I did all these things. They saw me being escorted out. They didn't handcuff me, which was nice. They said [they] wouldn't do it if I behaved myself. Of course, I behaved.

I barely packed enough. I think I grabbed cameras and negatives and stuff like that. One of my suitcases had fallen apart, so I didn't have any place to put stuff. I was crying by that time. I was shocked. I was barely dressed. It was terrible.

They took me to the station, two phone calls. Fortunately, my mom answered the phone and said, "Yes, I'll pick you up in Cologne."

They put me on the train in Gare de l'Est, and I saw my companions running with packages. It only could have been the rest of my stuff or some of my stuff, as I found out two years later. They were running towards us, and I said, "Don't be stupid. Don't come near me. You're going to get arrested," and then all the other stuff is going to fly in my face, right? Because I'm sure they had records and stuff. They didn't make it. They didn't see me. They didn't see us.

So they put me on the train, gave my papers to the train personnel. The train compartments are wooden benches, straight up and down, square. Nothing. No upholstering. No nothing, OK? I was sitting there maybe for three hours while you know there are still passengers in and out of train stops. Then comes a whole long times when a train doesn't stop before the border and right after the border. Then only in Cologne.

During that time, the train people, I befriended them, of course. They fed me wine and cheese and apples until I got almost sick. I told my story, and they laughed, and they—I was a hero. I was an absolute hero, you know. I was in touch with them, two of them, for quite some years. Then my mom was on the other end, and you know, I said, "Don't cry, because I'm just tired, OK? There's nothing wrong with me."

I was suddenly back in Germany. The whole reason I had left Germany was because I was still questioning, as we all had, what happened—"What did you do during the war?"—the entire family. Up to this day, my older brother who studied German literature, and my younger brother and my younger sister all were students at the time where everybody was a Communist—really belonged to the Party. You could only do that living in West Berlin, not in West Germany.

They studied and lived in West Berlin. Then there were some West German universities that did allow, at least my sister, to study there. My brother was then a professor, and he left and lived in Japan. The other one, my younger brother—all of them became like basically the opposite of Communist. We were all Socialists at heart. I say that to this day, that I'm a Socialist

at heart. I am for social justice. Always have been. When I was very little already, because I didn't understand why the people had to live in the bombed out basements when my grandparents had such a big house. I would bring everybody home to live with us, basically—or at least to eat with us. [00:30:02].

I left Germany because I couldn't get the answers. I felt that racism was rampant. I was probably over sensible, or just sensible enough that it really bothered me a lot. All was it that I felt like an outsider, and I had to leave. So that's why I went to Paris. In Paris what do I do? I hang out with the wrong crowd, also. I didn't hang out with the ones who could be promoting me, even though the photographers that I worked for all loved me, and I was a great worker and had great work ethics and worked my butt off and all that stuff.

I was talented, also. Fun, I'm sure, for them. I was back in Germany and my parents had put an ad in the paper "Daughter of higher means family"—you know, upper middle class family, something like that. I don't know exactly the wording. I lost all that stuff, unfortunately. "Looking for photography school in Berlin," which was a state granted exam that I passed. I was an apprentice, a state-approved apprentice and ready to do my masters and went for job interviews. It was really amazing.

[I] ended up in a small town that in the summertime [Celle]—at that time it was summer again—was a theater town. There was a small photo shop. The owner of this photo shop hired me to run the shop. What the heck do I know about running a shop? His wife was pregnant with twins, and it was a very precarious pregnancy, so she had to stay in bed, and he had to stay around. He was only doing theater photography. I developed the film, and I printed it for him, and I ran the store for him.

What an experience. All of his employees were also in the same program. You could either do it via school or you could do it via internships if they worked for this photographer. I had to teach them photography, which was fabulous. I loved teaching from then on. I loved it, because two of the kids were more or less like, forget about them, and one was just brilliant. We had a great time and ran the store and did fabulous photography.

People came in for passport photos and family photos and other things. Then I sent them out to just do other things. I said, "Why don't you go out." This was in a tiny little town, Celle. Very medieval looking thing. Beautiful. I said, "There's a wedding. Go and photograph that wedding. Let's see what you can do with it," and stuff like that. My entrepreneurship was like

there, fully awake.

But after six months, I quit. I couldn't stand it anymore. I went to Hamburg with my [portfolio]—I also used his [my employer's] darkroom to print my stuff from Paris, for whatever I rescued and went to Hamburg to work for *Der Spiegel*, which is like *Time Magazine*. That's what I wanted to do, more street photography also from this little experience in this little town. I did a lot of that in Paris, I have to say. A lot of that. Where? In the ghetto. In the Algerian Quarters, in the Moroccan Quarters, and so on—all the lesser parts of, you know—what some people would call “the lesser parts of Paris.” For me, it was where life was.

I had a fabulous portfolio, and I walked into *Der Spiegel*. *Der Spiegel* was a very small company at the time. The publisher or the editors were all like buddies, and I saw the editor who only does the covers, and I know that he went to school with my dad. He hired me to be the vacation—everybody who went away, I took their part. Again, a fantastic experience.

Their photographer, the main photographer was Max. Max was a war photographer who taught me so much it was just unbelievable. Anyway, there was another photographer. Before I left my family to join the photo school—because I went out on my parents—there was a photographer called Otte Zacharias in a northern town, in a Baltic Sea town called Kiel. A big sea town. All they did was sailing. [00:34:52]

I was her apprentice for three months. Since I was the daughter of [an] industrialist, she took me under her wings and slaved me to death, but taught me stuff that in no school was it taught. In no book was it written, what she taught me. OK? And the same was true of Max. I loved these two guys. Otte was a little much. She could spank us, literally, pull us on our ear, which hurt a lot. But she was so well known that all the political figures came to her to have their portraits done. Did I learn from her, oh my god—did I learn from her.

So then that's when I decided I could do better by going to school. Went out on my parents. My father had to pay thousands of marks to get me out of that contract later, which I didn't even know about. I wasn't talking to them for a couple of years. Then my mom came to Berlin, and we made up, and she bought me a fabulous coat for five hundred bucks. I said, “Mom, give me the five hundred dollars. I need jeans and sneakers. I don't need a fancy camel hair coat.” But it was fabulous. I had it all the way to America. It was like a big security blanket. There was a big hood and a belt like that. I had nothing to wear with it, so either I wore the coat and never opened it, or I couldn't wear the coat.

Otti and Max. Max was in Hamburg. *Der Spiegel* was fantastic. They sent me out and had to go like get up at three in the morning and go into the harbor, go to the bars and find the pilots from the tugboats, who got the big oil rigs from the North Sea through the river, Elbe, into Hamburg. You know, which was an enormous job, these huge things. The Elbe is a big river, similar to the Hudson. Hamburg is situated [similarly] but further inland—a water town. Water, water everywhere.

I befriended these pilots from the tugboats. Then I said, “You know, I’m a photography student, and I want to do a story on the oil rigs.” What I really was supposed to photograph [was the] illegal siphoning off of petroleum. My heart beats now. It was unbelievable. It was so incredible.

I looked like I was eighteen. I was already. This was after Paris, right, so I was twenty-two. Yep. I braided myself some pigtails. I drank with them, like a real water person also, like a boats person. I grew up by the sea, so you know a lot of the stuff was familiar to me.

Finally, I started photographing that stuff, and it became a little wild. It became a little bit too close for comfort, so they hired somebody else, and I was really hurt. I did all the legwork, and then one of their photographers went out, their contracted photographers.

Zapol: What do you mean it became too close for comfort?

Momber: Well, I photographed some pretty rough stuff. They followed up, and their reporters came after. They came with me. They interviewed the people that I had befriended, and then it was taken away from me. Which wasn’t half bad because it was incredibly tiring, also. The drinking wasn’t good for me, because I love drinking, and it was not good for me [laughs].

As my brother came to visit me. He was a student in Freiburg, and he hitchhiked in the middle—it was, again, wintertime. I know it was snowing. He came in sneakers. Oh my god. I bought him boots. To this day—they were called, ‘Shirasu’, some racy name—Italian boots over his ankles. I bought him those shoes.

I took him out to those bars, and we got so drunk that we got three summonses: one for singing too loud in the morning in the marketplace. We sang a song that our grandfather sang during the First World War back in Pomeranian, where they had overseers in the villages from the Kaiser, you know, from the Emperor. One overseer was particularly mean, but he kept having children after children, so my grandfather, one night, took the bicycle, had a lot to drink,

and rode around the village square and said, “*Inner Noch Ein Kind*”—[German lyrics], which means, “Have another child, have another child until you have twenty-five.” He got arrested.

So we sang that song, right, and made soldier [steps] after it. I don’t remember hardly anything of that, but I woke up in the morning, my brother was gone. His sneakers were there, his boots were gone, and we had three summonses. And I had to answer them. One was for throwing up on the subway, one for singing too loud, and one for some other misbehaving thing. Of course, I took care of it. [00:40:12]

Then I got a little bit tired of *Der Spiegel*, because you know they came out every week with a fabulous, fabulous magazine. It was stressful. It came out—I think we put it to bed on Thursday afternoon, and by Saturday it was out. So Friday we had kind of off. We went sailing. With everybody. You know, [Rudolph] Augstein, a very famous publisher, was ‘Auggi’. I was ‘Mombi’. A friend of mine, who was a closet homosexual at the time—we actually lived together. We shared a bed together. My best friend ever was Walman. His name was ‘Wally’. ‘Mombi’, ‘Auggi’—everybody had like a nickname.

We talked to each other like that. We didn’t say ‘Mr.’ and ‘Mrs.’, you know, like—In school, they called me ‘Mrs. Momber’. If you don’t show up after your second semester with a camera—because we didn’t have a camera. Did everything with photograms, which was a technique you only need an enlarger for, or you only need a light bulb for and developer and ‘hypo’ and paper. I did my entire portfolio like that, all the assignments, which was a fabulous—photogram is a photographic technique that doesn’t use a camera.

They called me Miss: ‘*Fräulein Momber*’, [German] I said, “How can they talk to me like that?” *Gefälligst* [German] means like, “You better have a camera or else,” which I did have a camera. But then—so we’re stuck now. Where are we stuck? In Hamburg.

So I was getting a little bit tired of that schedule and the drinking, also. They were all alcoholics, as far as I was concerned. Wally, my good friend, had put in papers and suddenly said, “I’m leaving for Australia.” He had put in for papers to immigrate. You could immigrate to Australia, Canada, and America. Australia had given him a few—sign your life away for two years, they pay for your trip one-way. Only there, not back.

He had done that. His time had come for the trip, and he hadn’t told anybody. Not even me, which I was very mad about. We had a few days. We went to the Baltic Sea and walked a lot and talked a lot. Then he was gone. They had all seen my fashion photography and teased me

about it. But it was good, OK. My fashion photography from Paris was really good.

So I made a portfolio when nobody was looking. I printed a portfolio and went to the then biggest fashion photographer in all of Germany, who had a studio in the bunker, an above ground bunker, which meant the walls were ten feet—or ten meters—ten feet. I mean they were enormous. The walls were enormous. The thing was eight stories high, which was this big klutz in the middle of nowhere next to the slaughtering house, where every Wednesday thousands and thousands of everything from goats to cows to pigs was delivered and killed and processed. It was horrible. That part was horrible.

But the bunker was fascinating. Huge building, huge inside spaces, and a paternoster. You know what a paternoster is? A paternoster is an open-faced elevator cars that keep going around and around and around and around and around. You have to jump on and off. No doors, OK. Fabulous. I mean we played with those things, really, to madness.

I walked in there. Business *Leiter* [German for boss] Hübner really liked me right away and said, “When can you start?” I said, “Tomorrow,” which was not true. But basically I had like two weeks to give notice and come over. I did, but those two weeks—it was different. I didn’t tell anybody. One night they teased me about the reason I’m working at *Der Spiegel*, because I expressed my unhappiness now that I was no longer shooting for them, you know. I was doing dark room work because Max had gotten ill, so I had a lot of darkroom work, all his work. I didn’t really mind, because it was good. Good work and important work, but only in the darkroom.

One night, they were all drunk, and they said something about, “Oh, Mombi only got her job because Mombi and Auggi and Waxi went to school together. They went to the Arnd Gymnasium, and the Arnd Gymnasium is the high castle of socialism,” or something like that, “and that’s why she got the job.”³ [00:45:18]

I quit my job. I said, “You know what? That’s not true. Augstein saw my portfolio. Waxi saw my portfolio. They hired me on the strengths of my work, OK?” By that time I was really hurt. Wally was gone. You know, my good friend was gone. I still had a really good girlfriend there. Actually in October—this was already January, I think. In October, they put the magazine to bed, went sailing, but it was raining, so we ended up drinking instead, with Waxi and Auggi

³ M.Momber stated on 1/29/16 that “Wachsmuth or ‘Waxi’ was a cover editor, second in command after Augstein.”

and the entire staff—from the little staff, right? Two handfuls of people.

Auggi said, “You know that guy there?” And there was obviously an American—very, very tall. Crew cut. These huge shoes. American dress. Everything American—chewing gum while he was drinking whiskey. “That is that fellow that didn’t let you into his country.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “He’s an American Consul of Hamburg.” I said, “Really?” And Bede said, “Really? Let’s go. Let’s talk to him.”

So Bede was very, very beautiful. She actually had an affair with one of those our father’s age guys, right. Whatever. But she was really gorgeous. So we went and sat on each side of him and started talking, and Augstein sent over drinks. Before we knew it, everybody came to the bar and was—I had told him my story. He said, “OK, I’ll make a deal with you.” This was Thursday—no, this was Friday, actually, Friday evening. “If you can come in on Monday, bring in all your papers so that you have a reference, fill it out one more time, and I promise Wachsmuth or Augstein here that within three months, you have your papers.” Mainly, the green card. The famous, famous green card.

It cost five hundred bucks. I don’t have five hundred bucks. Auggi, Waxi and somebody else pulled out their wallets and gave me five hundred bucks. That was my monthly salary. That was my monthly salary.

So Bede came home with me because she lived a little bit outside the city. She wanted to make sure that I got up on Monday morning and get all my papers together, because we were pretty hung over for the two days it took us to recover.

I went to the consulate and did the whole thing. I didn’t see our friend. He had arranged for everybody to just—there was no sign that he was messing with me or knew me or anything like that. I have no idea what happened behind the scene. Absolutely none.

I filled out the papers and then paid the money. I had photos taken and other stuff, and basically, did I forget out it? No. But I had this in mind, that I had a way out now, out of Germany. I had already put in for Australia. They tried to give me the same deal. By that time, Wally had written postcards only, and they were already months old. Said, “First of all, Australia sucks because it’s even more homophobic than Germany, and *Der Spiegel* is three weeks late.” OK, and a funky postcard.

Canada really accepted me. Quota done in six months. “You can go.” I didn’t tell anybody, not even my family. Waxi knew and Bede knew—my girlfriend knew. Wally knew,

too, but he knew I wasn't going to come to—I mean he didn't want me to come to Australia, so I had this way out.

I quit the job and went over to a fashion studio, and the fashion studio at the time was loaded with homosexuals, which was all not yet quite out of the closet. But they were all beautiful, and they were totally jealous of me.

Kirschner was the only straight guy—the business manager—as far as I could tell. I didn't know that much about it either. I was ignorant. I was with Wally, so I knew what it was about. Again, I did a fabulous job. One day, he did a hairstyling job. Black and white film, Hasselblad. Larger negatives. One twenty millimeters. Asked me to practically spend the night and develop all the film because there was a deadline. I said, “Sure. No big deal.” You know, a hundred and twenty rolls of film. A lot of film. [00:50:05]

You had to do it all manually. Put it on the wheel, put it in the tanks, and stuff like that and control the tanks temperature-wise and all of that stuff. Put replenisher in between. I did everything. There's always a couple of rolls that you test before you do the rest of them. I tested it, and I couldn't believe my eyes. There was barely an image on the film. Barely an image.

I dumped the developer. Mixed new developer, or it was already mixed probably. I don't know how it went. But you know, these big, big tanks. Did it again. The same result. This time I chose two random rolls of film and put it in a small tank and did it in a small tank and did everything you're supposed to do. Same thing.

So I thought this was terrible. Obviously, this was sabotaged. How am I going to prove it? I souped—it's what's called “souped”—the films, by developing. Instead of seven and a half minutes, first I did one for twenty minutes, then I did one for half an hour, then I did one for an hour. Then I did the rest of them for an hour because there was an image, finally—but the faintest image.

The first workers came in. I had the first films in the dryer and said, “Hands off. Nobody goes near the darkroom.” I called Kirschner right away. I called him at six o'clock in the morning, told him what happened. He came in early. But he came from outside, so actually people were there before him. It was wild. It was really wild. Because of course they knew that I had found out, you know.

I mean now I'm getting really upset about that. Wow, it was insane.⁴ So Kirschner saw it

⁴ M.Momber clarified on 1/27/16 “It was an insane scene.”

and said, "Can you make prints?" I said, "Well, I can try." I'd made prints, but they were silhouettes, basically. Beautiful, because the style was very brilliant, like it was perfect for silhouettes. It could have almost been the job assignment, to shoot silhouettes. Only black and white, no detail. Tiny little detail, but not the beautiful girls with all the makeup and all of that. None of that. Black and white.

Kirschner said, "OK, let me handle it from here. When [F.C.] Guntlach comes in—I called him up and said we were running a little late, la-da-da." By that time, he had talked to the boys and said, "I'm not going to do anything now. I want them to print for you. Tell him exactly how you printed this." Because I was shocked. I was totally—I was destroyed, physically and mentally.

That's what happened, and I took a nap someplace. Then I saw the contacts, a couple of blow ups. Then I had to present it to Guntlach. I did it as if it was nothing. He said, "Just go in and see what he says." I said, "You mean I'm supposed to tell him that I changed his technique? You must be kidding me. He shot this—I know exactly. He shot it for detail so you can see every pore, every hair, every nuance of makeup. Everything." Of course, it didn't work.

He threw a fit. He was a hysterical person anyway. You know he was probably on drugs at the time. It was horrible. I got fired right away. Got hired back of course. Kirschner hired me back. It was really, really horrible.

I come home—I'm getting the sequence a little bit out of—I didn't come home. But anyway, it was December. I come home, and I have this package from the American Consulate. All formal, with all the stamps and looked very, very formal. It was rather large.

I go inside. I said, "Shall I open it or ignore it?" I said, "Marlis, don't be stupid. Don't ignore it." I didn't ignore it. I found my green card, and I found all my papers and the health things and the—and everything was there that I needed to travel. I said, "Oh my god, I'm going to America." Twentieth of December it was—I'll never forget—1965. So I was twenty-two years old, almost twenty-three.

I quit Guntlach and found a job at another fashion studio where I was the stylist, which is a much different job. You just go and get a bunch of junk together so the photographer—and that's something that I knew from Paris—you know, how to accessorize stuff. It was evident with my photography that I knew how to do that. It was amazing. I had a car. I had a station wagon. I had cash. There was no credit cards. There was no cell phone. Everything was done.

We had to stop the car and jump into the payphone and call in and do that. Da-da-da-da.
[00:55:08]

I had several other people. We were running around. We would run into each other at the same store sometimes. It was amazing, but exhausting. At night, Friday, Saturday and Sunday night, I worked in a bar, a suburban bar that was owned by a family—mother, father, son. The son had a fiancé. She was there, too. Supposedly everyone was working and me. They only drank and ate, and I did the rest.

I bought myself a full corset, a full body armor—to wear under my dress, because the customers pinched me in the butt, or wherever they could pinch me. I had to buy that, and then that didn't work. They couldn't do it. It was ridiculous. The young couple is sitting there kissing all night long, and I was the, was the focal point of all the customers. It was fun and stuff like that. I got tons of tips, and that's what I wanted is tips. I needed money for my ticket.

I did that for about two and a half months, and then one night I cheated. I actually stole money. I never went back. I stole about a hundred bucks, because it was so easy. There was no tabs on me whatsoever, and I was honest as could be. That day I had just paid my ticket, my one way ticket to America, via Icelandic Airline. Luxembourg Airline, sorry. Luxembourg Airline. I needed to pay my rent. I was going to pay it back of course.

But then I couldn't go back. I made some excuse that I had a cold or something—which I did have. I did have a cold also. I was hoping that, you know, a hundred bucks, they're not going to call the police. Obviously, if I don't show up, that proves my guilt—if they even find out. There's no way for the to find out. No way for them to find out. I mean I drove myself crazy.

Told my roommate, who was a seamstress—so she was a little bit short-brained. Actually, she was very, very sweet, but she didn't get it. She said, “A hundred marks. [German] [00:57:20]” I said, “It's nothing.” And I said, “I stole money. I don't steal.” Nothing. Not even matches. But I lived with it. I prepared myself. I called the love of my life at the time. I had saved up five hundred bucks. That's it. He was already in college, and I was hoping that he would ask me to join him rather than go to America. He didn't.

I said, “Well then, Let's go skiing. I have five hundred bucks.” And we went skiing in the Italian Glaciers in the Marmolada for a week. Blew all my money. Then he didn't even bring me to Luxembourg to the airport. My brother and his girlfriend did. I had five dollars on me.

I had also booked three nights in Iceland. It was on the ticket, because I've never been to

Iceland. I went on the plane—I didn't [go] on the plane, I was carried onto the plane by my brother and his girlfriend, and then one Icelandic person took over. I was crying. My two little suitcases, my camera bag. It was tragic. It was really tragic, you know.

I was in no shape to go to America. [slight skip in audio] The plane took off. The whole plane was full of immigrants. At the time the gangway was loaded with luggage. You couldn't move. Everything was loaded with luggage. Obviously, the plane had a compartment for luggage, but everybody took everything on board that didn't fit there. It was unbelievable.

I ended up sitting next to this really nice guy. He had a family of twelve children. He invited me to his house, but I had a hotel booked, so I went to the hotel. He picked me up for lunch, and all his family was there. All the ones who weren't were out for jobs and stuff like that. There was this one boy who picked on me. We became friends. We became lovers, actually. It's absolutely crazy.

I spent three days in Iceland with this young man on Shetland ponies. Everybody had two ponies one for the overnight gear. We rode the ponies from hot spring to hot spring. It was an early spring. It was the 20th of March, because I had to be in America. When I left it was the 16th of March. I had to be in America on the 20th, three months after I got all my stuff. Otherwise, everything would be nil, zilch. **[01:00:04]**

By the time I got back on the plane to go from Iceland to New York, that plane was, of course, propeller machines—Icelandic four motor machines. Noisy and bumpy and unbelievable. Suddenly, we came into a bad storm. We could see it, feel it and all that. The captain said, "I'm sorry, we have to do an emergency landing on a military base in Newfoundland," because the thunderstorm was too big, and we were running out of fuel because we had to circle. We couldn't go on.

We land in Newfoundland, and I could see it. I saw these reindeer and amazing things—a couple of bears bobbing along where the plane was landing. I mean, Newfoundland, my goodness! After Iceland, we had no idea of how long we were going to be there. We go through, had everybody disembark, took some stuff with them.

I was denied entry, because of my papers. My health papers were not quite in order for them to let me—I had one vaccination that apparently wasn't valid. I had it, but they did not allow me entry into Newfoundland, which meant that the crew brought me back to the plane—unheated plane—wrapped me in a parachute, and left me there for eight hours. Of course, they

bought me tea and food and soups and stuff like that.

I said, “I’m going back.” I begged them to send me back. I said, “My father”—I had only a one way ticket, remember. I said, “I’m not going to New York so take me back to Hamburg. It was the same distance,” da-da-da-da. Of course, they wouldn’t do that.

I landed, then, a day late at Idlewild [Airport]—JFK was called Idlewild—and was being picked up by M-R-S F. Robert N-E-U, a German fellow, also an acquaintance of my father, business acquaintance.

[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE, ‘Momber_MarlisOralHistory1.mp3’; BEGINNING OF SECOND AUDIO FILE, ‘Momber_MarlisOralHistory2.mp3’]

Momber: He would be there wearing a red coat and a white hat. The MRS [acronym]—I didn’t speak any English by the way. Or very little, very little. Only from popular music, you know. “Love Me Tender” from Elvis Presley or Louis Armstrong, whose lap I sat on when I was fifteen in Copenhagen.

But then I didn’t speak any English either, because I learned Latin and then French. I lived in France a lot as a child, and speak fluent French. So, where were we stuck? In Newfoundland. No. Oh, Idlewild. Idlewild.

Zapol: Being picked up.

Momber: The day after I was supposed to land, on a Sunday, Idlewild is empty. Empty, empty like you could not believe it. I’m left there. I’m out of customs. I was also had to spend at least to hours with customs there, but they let me in the country.

I had a phone number, but I had five dollars. A dollar bill, five dollars. So I waited and waited, and finally I tried to make a phone call, and somebody helped me make a phone call. The Neus answered, and they said they already—no, they didn’t answer. They were there. Suddenly, they materialized. I saw the red coat and the white hat, and it was *her*, of course, Mrs. Robert F Neu—I had no idea—with the three boys that I was supposed to be au pairing for them—you know, babysitting.

It was really nice, and they drove me out to this—I was in America, and of course I cheered up immediately. It was a big, big American car. These wild kids. I said, “Oh, wow. This is going to be fun.” My inability to speak English—but Mrs. Neu, they really hired me to be her

companion. She was sad, married to the boss of then ESSO. He was the head of ESSO, which is now Exxon. It was an office in the Rockefeller Center. It was the 33rd floor in the Rockefeller Center.

She was alone all day long with these three unbehaved boys. It was so sad. It was so sad. We sat in the kitchen, and she made me work. I cooked with her. We spoke German. She cried me a river about her life and stuff like that. Her husband would come home. He was huge. He was very, very tall. The boys [were] taking after him. They were already taller, at like eleven, eight, and four years old. The four-year-old only ate marshmallows and ice cream. You would squash him, and he would bleed. Couldn't get a thing into him. And I tried in my German way, a funny way, everything, you know?

They liked me. Boys liked me. I romped around with them and stuff like that. I knew it was near the beach, and I couldn't wait to go to the beach. But it was obviously too cold. When I revisited them in the summer, it was OK.

So after ten days—OK, Mr. Neu came home one night, and he had in the garage a martini—where he put his briefcase, a martini. In his walk-in closet would change clothes, a martini. The next martini was at the dinner table.

The kids wouldn't sit down. She told me in German that they want the traditional German meals. Do I know how to set the table? I said, "Of course, I know how to set a table," because everything goes in a particular spot, and there're glasses for this and forks for that. So we did that for breakfast, lunch and dinner. But the boys, they didn't eat. So it was wasn't possible.

That night when he came home, the table was set really, really nicely. We had a beautiful dinner ready. The kids were nowhere to be found. They were under the table, in the closets, wherever they were playing.

Mr. Neu took off his shoe and banged on the dining table, which was beautiful mahogany, with all the settings on it. Banged on the table. "If"—and in English, which I still wasn't—I knew he was mad, but I didn't know exactly what he said. The boys appeared at the table and sat stock stiff. Sat at the table. In silence. I was totally, totally shocked.

Mrs. Neu was crying. Then I started crying. I left the table. I had a room behind the kitchen, like a real maid. He came in after me and apologized, and I didn't come to dinner. The next day he took me into the city. They didn't know I only had five dollars on me, but I had asked, I said, "Couldn't I, on my day off, ride to the city with you so I could get to know it?"

That was a workday, however. It was in the middle of the week, so in the morning I got up, I got dressed, I got my five dollars, my passport, my green card and all of these things someplace on me. And I just followed him into the car, out of the car, onto the train. [00:05:07]

On the train there were all these, mostly men. I swear they all looked alike. They looked exactly like the arresting officers in Paris. Raincoat, hat. They didn't have badges, but you know, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, vroom.

The train, I'm like riveted. I'm glued to the window. I took a window seat, of course. Suddenly, then there was New York, and now I know it was Harlem with the way you came in there. Suddenly, we were in a tunnel. No more landscape or nothing. Everything was strange to me, and we went very fast.

We got off the train, into the subway. Got out at Rockefeller Center. Right from the station, downstairs to the 33rd Floor of Rockefeller Center. I was blown away. I was blown to smithereens. I said, "Marlis, you're sophisticated. You've walked up the Eiffel Tower. You can certainly take this, right?" I could, of course.

The reason I got Mr. Neu was because his secretary was German, and she knew my father from something else. It was all my father, my father. My father had arranged all of that, which then the light bulbs went off after what happened at *Der Spiegel*. So they were right. The doors were opened by my father.

Mrs. Kameron at lunch took me over to her apartment. The apartment building was right on Sixth Avenue, which was at the time, full of bordellos and small bars, and everything. Nothing was higher than three stories, except the Rockefeller Center. I think Time-Life Building was maybe already up. One or two skyscrapers were already there, but not a lot. It was dirty and grungy and, you know, and after Paris, which was at least a little chic, it was still very grungy compared to now. Not after the war, but in the [19]60s.

I said, "Oh, this sucks. You know. This is New York? Well—" The apartment building, all the windows—was [a] dark apartment building, red bricks. All these people are into pets. They all have their hamsters hanging out the window [which was] the air conditioners. Of course, I didn't know that.

So we come to her apartment. It is very, very chic and very elegant. She had lunch there. I was dressed in jeans, bell bottoms. They were likely frayed on the edges, you know. Had my camera around my neck. She wasn't happy with me at all. She was not happy with me. She said,

“Well, how are you doing with Mrs. Neu?” And I said, “I love Mrs. Neu, but I don’t think I can do it. Quite frankly. I cannot do it.”

She said, “Well, you have to. You signed up.” And I said, “I know. I’ll do what I have to do. I’m not going to let you down, or, I guess, my father.” I had all day to roam around, and I said, “I would like to go to Greenwich Village. The Greenwich Village.” She didn’t even understand what I was saying. She said, “Go on Sixth Avenue.” I had a map of Manhattan, of course. I walked straight down Sixth Avenue. Wanting to go into every side street. I said, “Marlis, don’t be stupid. You don’t know how far it is. You don’t know how big it is. You know nothing. You stay on one street today. That’s it, OK? No varying, variances.”

Of course, once I was in the Village, that changed immediately because the streets were no longer square. They were more like Paris, and I was right away at home. I sit in a café, and somebody bought me a coffee. I knew they would. [laughs] I behaved outrageously. Unbelievable. Then eventually, I went back to the office. It was a really exciting day.

I actually spoke English, I have to say. I really, really tried. It was pitiful, but I said, “This is it, Marlis. You can’t go on anymore.” And then I went back with him and stayed maybe another three days, and then they let me go, because I had correspondence with another German immigrant—a girl, a woman—I forgot her name. It’s terrible. She became my first roommate in New York.

She had told me that yes, she has an apartment, and I can be her roommate. I look at the word “mate” and I think, “This sounds like ‘maid’. I’m not going to be anybody’s maid.” You know, I’m going to be—au pair is a little different in a fancy house, and da-da-da, but I’m not going to—” So I didn’t respond to her.

She figured out how to find me because I had told her I’m going to be with the Neus for a little while until I can figure out how to get out of there. So she found me, then said that I could live with her. Mrs. Neu said, “I’ll drive you. I’m not happy because I think it’s too dangerous for you.” She had really gotten to love me. That was clear. She was maybe fifteen years older than me. Not quite a whole generation, or it didn’t feel like it. **[00:10:19]**

I just had turned twenty-three. She drove me to the city, and the apartment was on 77th between Broadway and Riverside Drive. These brownstones, really dark and dingy, dark and dingy, dark and dingy, looking immediately dangerous at night. There were no lights. It was right off Needle Park. Seventy-second Street and Broadway was called, ‘Needle Park’—

gunshots almost every night. It was wild.

We were the only women in the house. Everybody else was Muslim and guys, which we didn't know, of course. The landlady was a crook. She was the crook of all crooks. Nobody knew that. They didn't speak any English. Ellen was her name, my roommate. Ellen spoke fluent English. She was making \$250 a month by being a dental assistant. She was educated. She had come to meet an American and get married to him, and he was abusing her.

So immediately, I said, "Ellen, why do you see him? Why do you see him?" "Well, we're engaged." I said, "If he does what he does to you, are you kidding me?" So we became friends and tight. I told her I had no money. I had a job, however. I also had not responded to something. In school, was Regina Brown went to America right away, right after school. We exchanged addresses, because I was going to Paris. We exchanged addresses. I said, "Well, you know, maybe we can switch jobs. If you find a job in America, I take it over, and you take my job over in Paris."

That was the plan. We had master plans everywhere, even in Berlin. Sure enough, she was ready to go back to Berlin, and she introduced me to Tad Yamashiro, a Japanese American from Chicago—a photographer—who had a studio in a beautiful brownstone on 15th Street between Second and Third Avenue. I started working the next day.

Regina left right away, so she couldn't teach me. She showed me around a little bit. You had to come in at seven in the morning. Make his coffee. Make his toast. Bring it to his bedroom door, then do stuff in the studio, whatever—cleaning or whatever needs to be done. Wait 'til he wakes up.

But he still had a Japanese assistant who spoke fluent English. He showed me around, and he became, of course, my buddy. You know he was leaving, also. Maybe three, four weeks that he stayed and showed me—and during the whole time I barely saw Tad. He didn't have any jobs. He was incredibly neurotic and full of drugs. None of which I had been exposed to, not even in Paris to that extent. I knew some people were on drugs, but I wasn't exposed to it.

So I barely saw him. Then the Japanese fellow left, and I was the only assistant. I had the house key. I came in every morning. I lived on 77th Street on the West Side. Subway was luckily fifteen cents at the time. Sometimes I didn't have that. I would walk home. I was making the grand sum of \$37.25 a week. Tad would give me the check on Friday after three o'clock, so I couldn't cash it.

So what I did, I took two dollars from petty cash for the first few weeks. Every weekend and lived from that. I lived off of that. I bought a bar of Philadelphia Cream Cheese—thirty-five cents. A bottle of Ballantine Ale—forty-five cents. Some bread. They didn't have what I call bread. The first bread I put in my mouth and stuck on my gum—I almost choked to death. Some sort of bread that I toasted to eat it better. That's what I lived on all weekend.

Then I started roaming the city right away. One thing, [Tad] was very liberal with his cameras. He said, "You can take my—" I wanted to shoot Rolleiflex, because I was used to it. He gave me his Rolleiflex. Or did I have a Rolleiflex? I forget. The first films were all Rolleiflex. [00:14:44]

I ended up under the Manhattan Bridge the first weekend already, roaming with my camera, where there were a bunch of African-Americans, veterans—bums, total bums. They were catching crab in the brownish water of the East River. In a big drum, they had fire. It was still cold. I was freezing to death. I was starved hungry, and I ate. I ate crab soup, whatever else was in there. Some vegetables. Because it was very near the fish market and very near the market. They had vegetables. They had a pretty good stew, I have to say. But they cooked with the water from the East River.

I should have said, "OK, Marlis. You've done that. You did this, you know, the Seine [River] water in Paris. You did it. You can do it again." And it was amazing. They were really sweet, actually, but a little bit wild. Alcoholics, of course.

So in effect the first bums, which I later got very much into documenting after my fashion photography, were all veterans and they were all on the bottle—all on moonshine and midnight train and all these cheap, cheap, cheap bottles of liquor. Alcohol. There were not a lot of drugs, until they released a whole bunch of them that were actually from hospitals and who had been on morphine to fight the pain. Released them, and then they needed drugs. That's when morphine came in, and heroin came in. I have that documented.

At the time I knew nothing about it. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I had no idea something like that existed. Had I ever seen a veteran in Germany? Well, I knew from my uncles there had been prisoners of war. They came back and married rich. I hadn't seen that. I had not seen—in Paris, yes. In Paris, the military was in terrible shape. The ones that came back from, at the time, Morocco and Algeria. [cell phone vibrates] I have to take this break.

Zapol: OK.

[PAUSE]

Momber: So here we are in Manhattan in 1966. I arrived on March 21st because of my delayed arrival. By the summer, I was a New Yorker [laughs], because I walked a lot, an awful lot. Often I didn't even have money for subways, so I walked and walked, even though it was fifteen cents. But I had somehow managed to save up enough money—because I needed to keep my eyes healthy. Because of this incredible sunshine, I bought prescription sunglasses, because otherwise I couldn't really work. I couldn't really see anymore. They were expensive at the time. They cost, I think, a hundred dollars. Now they cost \$400. The subway is, what? I don't even know what the subway is because I have a senior pass. I felt at home. It was amazing. I felt at home.

I had my first visitors coming. They were all amazed how on how much I knew already and what I saw and what I knew, where I could take them. My job. What happened first? Oh, OK. Now the timeline goes a little bit even screwier than we were before.

Working with Tad became unpleasant because he made personal demands on me, and of course, I wasn't into it. I had looked around. I had met James Matthews [phonetic] [00:18:52]—I can right now say already—my one and only ex-husband.

We met at an opening of Cornell Capa's photography. Capa was a Vietnam photographer who was killed.⁵ His brother, Robert was the photographer, and Cornell was his brother. Robert was the photographer?

Anyway, it was an amazing exhibit. There were two young men, one an American, who kept speaking French to a French Canadian. I said, "Ah, French, here. This is what I must do, because, you know, I speak fluent French." So I saddle up to the Canadian guy, knowing that the two of them were together and stuff like that. We had a wonderful afternoon at the exhibit. Then we decided to go to Chinatown to eat. [00:19:50]

I said, "I don't have any money." They said, "That's OK." Jim didn't have any money either, but—the Canadian didn't say a lot, but we went to Chinatown. The next thing I knew—and openings then and for years to come—decades to come—were full of alcohol. I mean not like wine and beer, but alcohol. I wasn't used to it. At all. I never drank whiskey. I never drank gin. Gin and tonic and all these things, which I then liked was because of the sweet stuff in it.

⁵ M.Momber clarified and commented on 1/27/16: "The opening was of Robert Capa's photographs, who photographed the Vietnam War and was killed. His brother Cornell was the founder and director of ICP, who I knew well. I'd like to add a quote of Robert Capa: 'the pictures are there, and you just take them.'"

Cocktails or whatever they're called.

Incredible food. Then we walked to Chinatown because the exhibit, it was near the Rockefeller Center, actually, in [Joe] Portogallo's gallery, which was also a lab where the prints were made. They made those prints, which is significant later.

I ended up sitting in Chinatown looking at a whole fish, because I like my fish whole. I must have ordered it. We were in the basement. I never, never walk by that place.⁶ Unfortunately, I didn't know the name of the restaurant. This was 1966. Just recently, last time I was there was last summer. it's no longer a restaurant. We would always go back there.

We had a wonderful evening, laughing, and speaking French and English. Found out that—I forgot the French guy's name. Gilles [phonetic] [00:21:29]. Gilles—I'll call him Gilles. Gilles was only there—he was leaving a day later, one more full day that we planned to spend together. But on the way home—everybody's going home—James Matthews lived on 77th Street. I lived on 77th Street. So Gilles did not. He lived on the West Side.

But he said, "OK, we'll take a taxi, drop you two off, and then we'll see—" So we come to 77th Street. It was on the east side. I lived on the west side [laughs]. Oh, my god, it was funny. So Gilles, of course, said, "Well, come with me, I'll drop you off," and so on. Jim was like all flabbergasted because he thought I would be his neighbor or maybe even join him or something like that.

But we were all pretty much under the influence the entire time. It was fun, though. It was not to get drunk. It was just summertime. We had just seen these horrible war photographs and got very impressed by that, very influenced by that. So we needed to celebrate life. We did. I got in the taxi with Gilles, and he dropped me off. Drove through Central Park, which was very romantic. A little hand holding, but nothing else.

He dropped me off and said, "I'll see you tomorrow." We all met in Jim's apartment, and I brought my portfolio along, the one I had from Paris and some that I did already from New York. Gilles loved it. Jim didn't have a lot to show. He worked actually at the Museum of Modern Art as a photographer in the department that Edward Steichen founded. For the Edward Steichen's printer, who printed every one of his—for thirty years, printed his stuff, his fine art stuff. Pete Peterson taught James Matthews how to develop black and white and print it.

Expertly. I mean the best printers, both of them. I met his boss and his wife who were

⁶ M. Momber noted on 1/12/2016: "I never walk by that place without remembering that date."

immigrants. Very poor. Still being slave labor, not fully paid. Doing this incredible work. The Museum of Modern Art, I called it “The Snake Pit” right away, because the openings were full of drunks. Full of drunks. Famous people drunk. Really famous painters. Everybody drunk, drunk. I hated it.

Then when I found out the inside work was throat-cutting, throat-cutting, throat-cutting. The young people who worked there were all Rockefellers and Paleys. There were kids from rich folks. Jim was from West Virginia, from middle—we were from the same middle class background—he American, me German.

Pete Peterson and his wife, Eva, were like really poor. They were saving every penny. She used to be a ballet dancer, and now was working as a waitress for tips, because I don’t think at that time they got any wages. I’m not sure. They lived in a one-room apartment. But they were good, good friends. They were like family to me. German, you know. They loved me, I loved them. **[00:24:59]**

Jim and I stayed friends. He, of course, always thought that I had spent the night with Gilles, which I did not. That carried over into our marriage, which was ended after six years. I left him because he was an alcoholic. I had talked him into quitting the job, but he was not cut out to be a freelancer, so he drank at home. He started drinking. He spent the day drinking. I felt really guilty, so I stuck with him for a little while. I said, “Jim, it’s either the bottle or me. Nothing else in between.”

“Oh, you like drinking, too.” I said, “But I don’t get drunk. My personality doesn’t change. Yours does. You become nasty.” By that time, we lived in a fancy neighborhood. He insisted we live right around the corner from the Whitney Museum, because we went—of course, all we did was in museums, in galleries, and he wanted to be an actor, originally. He had been in the Paul Newman School. We knew the Newmans. We knew Angela Lansbury. We knew really a cool group of people, artists and actors alike. Hung out with them and stuff like that, went out twice a week, either openings or music and theater. It was really great.

We were poor, you know? He was making \$125 every two weeks at the Museum of Modern Art. I was making seventy-five dollars a day, sometimes working seven days a week, sometimes working not at all. Then I was getting better and better and better paid and better paid. So I became the enabler of our life.

We rented a house up in Pawling, weekend house that we both loved. Four years we had

that. Then we lost it all because I left him. I couldn't do it anymore. My sister, my youngest sister who was born after the war in 1950 was then growing up with my two brothers who were both students. They were all three of them students, but she was the chick, and they were already graduated and what have you. They all lived in Berlin. I married James Matthews less than a year after I know him.

We married in “the Little Church on [Around] the Corner”, which is right downstairs on the 32nd Street, I guess, underneath the Empire State Building. Everybody got married there. It was a chic thing. Some Paleys paid for our wedding. We lived in a sublet of Jackson Pollock, but *ach Du lieber Himmel* [German- ‘oh for the love of Heaven!']. How can I forget that? One famous artist had this beautiful Parisian-like studio on 34th Street, on top of a camera store of all things. We lived there.

From our bed, through the skylight, we could see the Empire State Building. It was totally Paris, OK? Like tiny little bathroom. Tiny little kitchen, if you can even call it that. Everything was tile and glass, and windows. It was beautiful. People came there. We partied there and partied in other people's houses.

We were definitely the poor ones. There was no doubt about it, but we spent as much time in Southampton as we possibly could and upstate, and then we rented our own weekend house because my career went sky high. Within one year I had my own studio after I met James—Jim—because he taught me everything about New York that I didn't know, of course—all the travel in taxis and buses and all of that stuff. Every situation, social standards and stuff. He spoke well enough French so we could go out to French restaurants and order in French. That was interesting. He wasn't a typical American. But the drinking, when he became freelance, was horrible. I made a lot of money, He made some money. He worked for *The Sunday Times*.

In the fall of 1966, when I already knew him, a life-changing thing happened. My mother committed suicide in Germany. She was not living with any of us. She was living with my younger sister, who was only sixteen. One of the dinner parties that we had—I finally had my hair teased and my makeup on. Believe me, OK? I tried to be American, maybe? I don't know what had gotten into me. Dinner was ready. I had a letter from my little sister. She's seven years younger, but I didn't grow up with her, because I left when I was seventeen, and she was only ten. She wrote me about the boyfriend, and she was in love with the French teacher and all this stuff that I always had time to read later. [00:30:00]

And I opened the letter, and it says, “Mother killed herself.”

I went out like a light. Like a light. I was able to make a phone call. At the time, it was like \$40 a minute. That was the day of the funeral that I got the letter. I was gone. I was gone for—probably the funeral was the 17th, the 16th of October, I think—until Christmas.

By that time, Joe Portogallo had discovered me—the guy where we met, the gallery? I went back there and said, “Can I work here, because this black and white photography is my thing?”

So he made me spot all the war photos from Vietnam. I said, “Joe, it doesn’t make sense to spot this. It takes away from the value of the picture. Let me print. There will be nothing that needs spotting, unless it’s in the negative, which then I can take care of.”

Finally he let me in. One night, he said, “Give me five negatives.” Sure enough, the ones that I couldn’t spot, they were so dirty. I said, “Can’t they at least use air to—” There were air cleaners and all kinds of cleaners to clean negatives. The printers didn’t, because I was such a good spotter. I put myself through school like that. I spotted for the other photographers. They couldn’t spot. I could, because Auggi taught me. Max taught me a lot, too.

Zapol: So spotting is sort of putting color to match where there is—?

Momber: So when you have a piece of dust there, it comes out white, but it might be in a gray area. It might be in a black area. You have to match the tone of the background. That went just too far for me. I became Joe’s printer. Suddenly, instead of making very little an hour, or whatever, he was paying me. I was making a lot of money.

It was really fun. Then my mom died. Then Jim got me up in the morning, brushed my teeth and walked me over to Joe’s place. I printed and printed and printed and printed. Christmastime came.

You know, I did things like at the time, I was wearing contact lenses. I went out in the middle of the night without contact lenses. Got totally lost. I was totally desperate. Didn’t know where I was. There was no cell phone, nothing like that. Didn’t have my keys. Jim went crazy.

It was really, really horrible. Christmastime came, and Jim had bought two bottles of wine, because I didn’t drink at all at that time. We had two bottles of wine, and I guess I finally cooked dinner again or something like that. He asked me to marry him [laughs]. Since he had been my only support and the one that pulled me out of the mud and was there for me—I never

said, “Yes,” I have to say. I said, “When?” and, “How are we going to do it? We don’t have any money,” and da-da-da. He said, “It doesn’t matter.”

Eventually, we set a date. I arrived the 21st of March [1966], and we got married on the 3rd of March [1967], so not even a year. The whole weeks until the marriage, we did nothing but fight. We fought so badly. It was unbelievable. But there was love. There was definitely love. He was the love of my life. He looked like a Kennedy, exactly, tall and handsome. Girls would come up, women would come up all the time and say “ Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Kennedy.” He said, “I’m a Virginian. I’m not a Kennedy.”

But part was also magic. There’s no doubt about it. Our wedding—some distant relatives happened to be in the city. His parents came, who he hadn’t talked to in years. They gave us \$400. after having no money. I was then making a little money.

We drove, took the bus and the train and the bus out to Montauk. Montauk Inn was a very chic, very elegant place directly by the sea. Deer came by while we were sitting in the tub. We had four days of lobsters. Now it’s a horrible place—busloads of people, all these extensions. It’s like a motel. Horrible. **[00:34:36]**

It was snowy and cold. I mean it was just—that was also magic. He was also very, very envious and jealous. My career went sky high. I started working for Elizabeth Arden and—I can’t remember anybody, but really a lot of people, a lot of magazines. I got little clips of that. I was wearing John Lennon glasses. I was not a hippie, and I didn’t do drugs, but I came in ’66 when everybody else was doing that. Flower children and all that stuff. Then came Woodstock. I didn’t know what was going on there, and now I live right next to it.

My sister got really ill, had her first nervous breakdown from these experiences with my mom. She never got over it. I left him with a leather bag I had just given him for travel. I said, “Can I borrow the bag? I have to go see my sister. She’s sick.” I never came back.

By that time I already had the studio on Fifth Avenue. I started living there illegally at the time. It was a huge studio. We didn’t have the house. The house we had given up already. I don’t now how it all went, but you know I had to go. I had to go. I had to be really strong about it. I mean I left him, and he did one heroic thing, one unbelievably heroic thing. I lived in a house on 12th Street and Second Avenue. Corner building. It’s still there, of course. In the house—and we had a VW [Volkswagen], which we shared.

There were parking meters out front, and when I needed the parking meter, there were

also prostitutes there. I knew them well. I photographed them in all kinds of situations. I gave them cash, and they put quarters in. At the time it was probably nickels—when I needed it. I was friendly with them.

I lived on the top floor. I walked up six flights. The tub was in the kitchen. Very small rooms. Have you ever been in one of those apartments? When they have the bathrooms outside, kind of, the toilet, then the tub is in the kitchen, and you can cook while you're sitting in the tub.

Then the bed was on the fire escape. There was one room big enough to put a bed in, and the rest was big enough for the tub, then, you know—kind of very small. But kind of very, very small. “Romantic” is wrong. That was roughing it, but it was great. It was simple. I loved it.

One night, James Matthews comes via the fire escape into my bed. I thought that that was great. He begged me to come back to him, and I did. That lasted three weeks, and I went back to my apartment. We also had a dachshund that he gave me one Christmas, and it was hard to leave him. It was really a hard, hard thing. But he wouldn't budge, you know. By that time we had been to Germany several times. My grandparents met him. Everybody loved him, really liked him.

They realized that he was drinking. I didn't realize it so much because—I don't know why. There he was very nervous so he probably drank more. Was louder as he got drunk, or something like that. I didn't know. My grandmother was glad. Everybody else was really upset. They said, “You can't, He's your husband. You stay with him.” I said, “I can't.” I went. By that time we lived around the corner from the Whitney Museum in a small apartment, which was horrible. But it was chic. Gristedes [Foods] where we spent \$500 a month on those shrimp cocktail, something like that. We had an account there. Insane. Suddenly we had money, you know?

I went to a meeting at the church on Park Avenue—and AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meeting. I came back, I said, “Jim, this is it. This is it. You've got to go,” and he smacked me. I left. I said, “One touch,” you know?

It had happened before when as a fashion photographer. I would travel a lot. One time, we were in Bermuda, and we finished really early—three days—and we still had paid hotel. I said, “Come over. We have a hotel.” He came over, and he immediately said, “No, I don't want to stay in the hotel. Let's rent a cabin.” So we rented a cabin. He went out. You rent mopeds there, you know, motorized vehicles? Bikes. Brought three gallons of liquor. I said, “Why do you

need three gallons of liquor for three days?”

At the time you could still travel with that stuff. You could take it home. It was cheap. \$1.75 for a gallon, OK? So we had three bottles of liquor. My assistant, a French guy, Pierre, had snatched one of the models. He was like this short, and the model was this tall. They also had rented a cabin. We had an argument in the cabin, and he smacked me. I fall on the king-sized bed. It was two twin beds standing next to each other. I cracked it open with my body. So I was injured, badly. [00:39:55]

I got out. I said, “Do not touch me. I’ll kill you.” I was really upset. Went on the bike and drove down to the cabin of Pierre and that girl. [I] was already kind of put up on the screened in porch, and then he came down. He figured out where I must have gone. I don’t know exactly what happened. We went home separately, and I never went into the house, into the apartment. We had a beautiful apartment around the corner from Sutton Place, which was his insistence because all our friends lived there, the Paleys and the Rockefellers. They had their condos. We had a rent-controlled apartment, which was gorgeous. We fixed it up really gorgeously.

We got robbed three times, because people think when you live there you have. So one day, we’re going out at night and had all my grandparents’ china and crystal and stuff—put a crystal bowl of German potato salad, which we ate after. We ate hotdogs outside and brought that home. After theater we would do that, right?

Came home and the apartment was broken into. The dog was nowhere to be found. He was actually locked in the bedroom with the bowl of potato salad finished, and he [was] like a little balloon. Everything was gone. Stereo, everything was gone. It was horrible. Our potato salad. Oh my god, oh my god. New York, you know?

Anyway, James Matthews was over, and I was living in the studio, and two years I didn’t—I had somehow made him sign the separation agreement, because I didn’t want to go through a divorce. We had to be separate—we call it ‘bed and table’. You don’t share bed and table, and automatically you are divorced. It costs \$250.00 at the time, filing fee.

He signed it. I said, “If you don’t sign it, you’ll never see me again. I will sign. I don’t care. But you will never see me again. Sign this paper now,” knowing that I’m not going back, or promising myself I wouldn’t go back. It was rough. It was really rough.

But I worked my butt off. Man, did I work. I had nothing else to do. Work. Go to Max’s Kansas City. My drinks were paid for. I had all these friends. I put together, for example, Grace

Jones and Jessica Lange, chocolate and vanilla. Successful for all three of us in different ways. It made me notorious, which I already was, because I already sent a mother all the way to the Supreme Court when I did a lot of children's fashion. One day the most wanted little boy in the business was up to nothing. Not to smile, not to—we were friends. We played. He came to my studio because he wanted to become a photographer. He was nine years old.

He had big tears in his eyes. I said—names are a problem today. I don't know why. Too many at once. "Please, give me, give me that smile. You know, our smile," because he wasn't a cheesy smile. It was something that came really from inside. It was a joke that we had. He did like—he make a grimace. He showed me his teeth. Tears start rolling down.

Then his eyes widen up, and more tears came out. I looked around and the mother put her belt into her handbag. I got arrested that night for kidnapping. It was too hard. She called the cops. I said, "Is this what happens at home?" He said, "Yes." It went to court. It went to the Supreme Court, and I dropped it, because they made provisions that this could not happen again. I saw him four years later. He came by. I hadn't seen him. We didn't have any other contact. It was all just stipulated that I didn't have any contact with him.

But he came by. Said, "We're moving to Hollywood." I said, "Why? Are you going to be an actor?" He said, "Yes." "Do you like it?" "I love it." I said, "Are you sure? How about the belt?" He said, "I'm not going to talk about that. I know what I need to do. OK? I'm going to make a—" He was only fourteen, right? "I'm going to make a lot of money. I get away from my mom."

So that was the end of that. So I was notorious, you know. The client at the time was Macy's. I did their catalogs. I did some shitty jobs, too, just to make money, I have to say. But I did some great jobs. So I was notorious for that. No drugs in the studio. No smoking. I stopped smoking cigarettes. I had fabulous parties. Oh my god. The studio was so big. My elevator man, Lucas—an African American gentleman—gentleman *par excellence* [French]. I mean he was the perfect. In a romantic movie, he would have been my butler, like that kind of thing. He was so protective of me. Unbelievable. He stopped people from coming in when he thought it was overloaded, or people that he didn't like, he just didn't let them in. I said, "Go ahead. That's your job. I appreciate it." And people would complain.

Racism was still rampant. I would come, and I had a Bloomingdale's offer to do their catalog. Come into the conference room, all my photographs are all over the table. [00:45:07]

This goes too far. Sorry. This goes too far. But that incident was particular. They were going to hire me to become their photographer. That was not Bloomingdale's. That was somebody who makes coins, but they did fashion catalogs also. They had their studios in Pennsylvania, and I was going to move there. Curtis [Momber] was little, and I was single by that time. I wanted to get out of the city.

I come to this conference room—first of all, the art director, who was going to hire me for catalogs—I'd already met him once—the first thing he offers me is a row of cocaine. Pulled from his fountain pen, or some sort of pen-like thing. I said, "You can leave that out of sight, please. Out of sight. Now." He wasn't. I turned around and left. Next I get a call and said—this was Bloomingdale's. That's right. That was Bloomingdale's. So I messed up that job. Never got that.

Come out to Pennsylvania when I was pregnant and ironed my silk dress and put a big iron burn mark on the back of it. But it was so perfectly placed that it looked like a cut out. I said, "I don't care." It was so hot, I was so pregnant. It was the only dress that would hide everything, or almost. I got on a helicopter with the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of this company, a coining company. Very famous. I don't know what's happening with my memory. But it's not so important.

We were going to move there. Then I come to this town, and everything is—let's call them Meijers or something. Everything was Meijers this and Meijers that. The whole company, the company owned the whole area. I thought, "Oh my. Be careful." I came into the conference room, and my photographs are on the table. So many times before—the art director is this guy from Bloomingdale's, and he stands up and said, "Miss—" I called myself Matthews from Jim's name, because they always messed up Momber. "—is not employee material."

I said, "How do you know. I've never been employed." [laughs] It was fun. It was really fun. I said, "Look at this little cocaine stuffed nose." We went through this, and they all interviewed me. I said, "Fine." We came to agreement. The people who were no longer there to negotiate deals left. [It] was only me and two people.

The guy I flew over with on the helicopter—which was also funny because he didn't speak to me the entire time because I was glued to the window. Can you imagine a helicopter ride from LaGuardia to Pennsylvania? Gorgeous country. Then he did talk to me. I said, "The only thing that I insist [on]: vacation between Christmas and New Years. I go skiing. Downhill

skier. I'm a champion skier, and I need to ski." " Oh, you can ski around here all year, all winter long."

I said, "No, between Christmas and New Years is a holiday. I take it." And then they look at each other, and I know that I had said something wild. I was going to insist on it and didn't care. I said, "Oh, here comes—" the guy who said that I wasn't qualified to be an employee. I said, "Well, I guess he's right. If you can't give me five days off"—unpaid vacation. I had negotiated four weeks' paid vacation. I said, "I'm from Europe. I need that stuff. I need vacation. I'm a young mother. I have a young child."

Tyrone is going to come with me, a black man with a black child. It was a lot for them. They had to swallow a lot. I walked out. I mean I walked out. I didn't know where it was going. It wasn't decided then. Then I heard from them that they decided to hire somebody else. I was so happy. I was so relieved.

On the one hand I thought, "My, this is like—" It reminded me of, I lived in Manhasset with the Neus, the first family, when I came here. They lived on Long Island. I just said it, the town. It reminded me of that. Everything was gated. All the houses looked the same. The smaller ones, the big huge ones looked the same. Then there were really big ones that didn't look the same and so on.

Anyway, that was the end of that. Then the Lower East Side came in like a winter storm. A summer storm. A hail storm. A fire storm. It really did. It really did. I talked about it a little bit, but maybe we leave that for the next time because I should get some photography ready also.

[00:50:12]

Zapol: OK.

Momber: OK, I'm sorry this took so long. You have to edit this.

[END OF INTERVIEW, SESSION 1]

Oral History Interview Transcript, Session 2

Zapol: This is Liza Zapol for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation East Village Oral History Project, and it is October 28, 2015. I'm here at East 4th Street with Marlis Momber. We are here for our second interview. The first interview we spoke at length about your history as a photographer, your travels, and your ultimately coming to the Lower East Side. It was interesting. On Friday I came to your slide presentation of some of your work, and I really enjoyed that. I was contemplating, thinking about a lot of—this was focusing on your work. You presented, with two slide projectors, your work from the 1970s to the 1990s. Is that about right?

Momber: To the 1980s, yeah—

Zapol: To the 1980s, ok.

Momber: Mid-70s to mid-80s.

Zapol: OK. Can you tell me, first off, the subject of the area is Loisaida. Tell me about the neighborhood in the late '70s, early '80s. What were its edges? What were the boundaries? And can you tell a story about what happened at the edges?

Momber: Yeah. The edges were very clearly—maybe, not to anybody who would walk the neighborhood, not that clear, but even that was pretty clear, because in the South is Houston Street, which acted like a Grand Canyon towards the south of us, which became to be known as 'Pueblo Nuevo'. The housing agency that made sure that low-income people still had houses and apartments. On the river, it was easy, or the East River, including the FDR Drive, because you don't cross a river that easy, and the Williamsburg Bridge is in the south of us. But the park also belonged to the people, the section from 14th Street to Houston.

In the north, 14th Street, was the big housing project on the north of it, definitely middle to upper class. Incredible housing project. Huge and apartments [were] very desirable. The whole situation was very desirable. People would put in an application and gladly—not gladly—wait ten to fifteen years, then finally got in. Then a few years ago, it kind of almost collapsed.

Zapol: This is Stuyvesant Town?

Momber: Yeah. That was a shock, even to us, watching that. I mean, were we a little bit envious? I couldn't have lived there, I can't live in huge buildings where you walk down a long corridor and pick a door and so on. But I felt really very alerted by that, because that was such a stronghold of secure housing, and it faltered. It almost faltered. Some people actually did lose their homes.

Then, to the west, which was of course—let's say the bloodline to the rest of the city, because you had to cross it to go to the West Side—for us, it was Avenue A. Everything west of Avenue A, [we] considered it the West Side. When people came in by taxi, I always told them—because by number, 310 East 4th Street, we should be anywhere between Third [Avenue] and Lafayette [Street] or Third and what is called Fourth Avenue in our section. Or maybe between First and Second, but not between [Avenue] C and [Avenue] D. So I said, “Give the cab driver just the number, do not say ‘C’ and ‘D’, because he won't take you. If they do figure that out, by the time they cross First Avenue, and they cross Avenue A, tell them to take them to—I've forgotten. Now I forgot the street address of the Ninth Precinct, but on 5th Street, between First and Second. Give them that address. It's a precinct, and you ask them—politely—to inquire, whatever they wanted to know, and why they wouldn't cross Avenue A.”

But when you did cross Avenue A, and dependent on what street, what cross street, you ran into the plight of the neighborhood. Probably not so much on Avenue A. Avenue A was just desert, was just nothing. On the east side of it and on the west side of it, at least Tompkins Square Park—between 10th and 7th Street, there was a park, so there was not the housing thing, but right across from it, very few stores. One or two bars. They were pretty grimy. We loved them because cheap beer [laughs] and cheap stuff and locals. You could really mess with the locals there. [00:05:17]

One bar that we all did go to—and that was actually between A and B, because it was run by Heide, a Hungarian guy who ran the Frog Pond.⁷ The Frog Pond was just beloved by all writers. I mean, artists, revolutionaries, people who agitate also need their diversion, and so that was happening in the Frog Pond and one or two other bars, but not the way it is now with restaurants all over and bars all over—I mean, really all over. When my father came to visit, he asked [laughs] his wife to stay in the coffee shop on Second Avenue. I said, “Dad, why? *Vati, warum machst Du das?*” [German- Dad, why must you do this?] [He said,] “It's too dangerous.”

⁷ M.Momber notes on 1/12/16: “The Frog Pond was actually between First and A.”

I said, “Well, but not with you. You can protect your wife, can’t you? I pass here daily, and I look just about exactly like your wife.” It was not my mom. She was only five years older than me. Then he got this typical German, which is one of the reasons I left Germany. Told us what to do about the whole thing. Said, “Couldn’t you at least paint it all white, you know, all the buildings.” I said, “Well, we’re doing pretty much that, but we’re using a little color,” and then I pointed out the colors that Maria Dominguez and other muralists and taggers and graffiti artists and so on had started.

Of course, huge graffiti scene, and murals were coming up. But also more spontaneous, the cinder block buildings—totally empty buildings that the city wanted to secure so they wouldn’t become infested with ‘undesirables’ who are then very hard to deal with. They actually have squatting rights, so they wanted to intercept that and cinderblock the building. Cinderblock is easy to break. Even I could do it. Anyway, Maria, for example, painted beautiful murals on them. Made them look like storefronts. Very colorful with people, vegetables, stuff you buy, and so on.

So, what was plight to casual visitors was actually a work in progress—saving buildings to us. Saving the streets, saving the parks, the empty lots, turning them into gardens. Playgrounds. I think we identified two hundred, almost two hundred and eighty buildings that would pass for homesteading, because [there] at least was supposed to be a staircase. These were all anywhere from two, three, four, five, six, one or two seven-story buildings without elevators—mostly without elevators, but they had to have the stairs in tact. And the roof. The roof one, of course, was very particular to 21-23 Avenue C, which was dubbed the Umbrella House, because they had no roof. They had a roof, but it was so leaky, everywhere they employed umbrellas, and so it became known as the ‘Umbrella House’.

Other squats [did what] they could do to secure whichever room or floor they had picked to make that water-tight, not necessarily the roof first. Stairs, you know—there are always fire escapes, almost always fire escapes. Our stairs here at 320 4th Street, which was a homestead—we secured the building in 1977, paying five hundred dollars for the real estate—the city [didn’t know] there was a building on it. That was the state of the affairs here. Me, quite in particular, I was really adamant in trying to empty it, to just erase it, bulldoze it.

Zapol: This area.

Member: This area. So we go again from 14th to Houston, which is fourteen blocks, and from Avenue A, B, C, D, Riverside Drive, and then the park—to just empty it, except for the projects, which were already between C and D, all along the river. [00:09:55]

Outstanding, south of us was Grand Street Settlement, of course. To me, much different looking than Stuyvesant Town. They had balconies and we're not that blocked together. I mean, There's a huge tract over there from 14th to 23rd Street, basically. It's a huge tract. Grand Street wasn't that big. Of course, Seward Park was still there. Again, I'm talking south of here, but in the first few years, I really roamed everything north of Chinatown, including Chinatown. Everything north of Chinatown. I drifted into Wall Street, of course, and even west and Soho and so on.

But then, when I became really involved in local point, there was simply no time to include everything. Because of CITYarts Workshop, who worked all over the Lower East Side, I still ventured out south of here, never north, never west, and definitely not east.

Zapol: Can I ask you a question about—

Member: Yes, of course.

Zapol: So when you were speaking about your father, talking about why don't they paint it all white, and then you respond by saying, "Well, we are working on that." So there's, you know, you have this sense of belonging here—

Member: Yes.

Zapol:—and then in other times, you seem to say, "That's where you would go to find the locals." Or, that's where you would go to—or even they were working on these things. So, can you talk about this sense of being an insider sometimes, an outsider other times? As a photographer, I know you kind of have to be both to get the kind of access that you did.

Member: Yeah.

Zapol: Can you speak of maybe some examples of where you felt either?

Member: First of all, the bars in particular were of course mainly male patrons, and then a few adventurous and probably known as wild women [laughs] females. Or very strong-willed and

very determined women, who said, “We have the same right to be here.” But I have to say that some of the organizations were—one in particular, is called the Bullet Space, which is one block south of here, on 3rd Street between C and D. That was before I was in the homestead, even. No, after I was in it, in the late ‘70s. There were a bunch of white guys that just simply didn’t speak Spanish, didn’t have any blacks, didn’t have any women, and decades later, it’s [unclear] [00:12:53] in Pueblo Nuevo, which they didn’t even know the name of. They’re, the southern part. Because they were in Loisaída, they didn’t care for that. I said, “What was it with you guys? You were so,”—and they all admitted it. They said, “Yeah, we didn’t know what we were doing. The reason we weren’t out there is because we didn’t speak Spanish. We didn’t understand them. We didn’t want confrontation, and they’re not knowing what’s going on. With you women, we just wanted, you know, we wanted to be women and not activists,” [laughs] like that.

We all laughed about it, but it was a serious issue. Still is, looking back. I just listened to public radio this morning, and I said, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, why do they—the Leonard Lopate Show, all male names”—but in the fundraiser, right? I said, “I can’t believe it.” Then, of course, one of the announcers this morning was—now I can’t remember her name, but there is a woman who we all know, whose name we all know, because she’s there constantly. But it’s still pretty much male-dominated. I see it in my archive, just deals with this neighborhood. Center for Puerto Rican Studies—the upper positions are still all male. In that case, not white—Hispanic or ethnic. But then thinking about the elections, thinking about the, really the “other”, you know, which now, on this date, 28th of October, 2015, is refugees. [00:14:45]

I finished a book tonight that dealt with refugees, immigrants from Turkey, Greeks, immigrants who lived in Turkey, got displaced there, came to America, and how that family integrated into—and the ending is just stunning, and I thought, “Wow, another saga.” It could be like the famous southern saga. Elizabeth Taylor in the movie role—what am I talking about? Oh, come on, the biggest saga. When I go south, on my travels down to Florida, I go through that area and find it amazing—*Gone With The Wind!*

Zapol: Ah, yes.

Momber: OK, so re-reading it, I, of course, I went to Charleston and all of that stuff and found traces of all of that.

Zapol: Can you tell me about times when you—within this neighborhood, also—felt like when you wanted access you weren't allowed access, maybe because you're a woman, because you were white, because you were German-born, you know, perhaps times where you felt excluded.

Member: Actually, I always have to say I never felt discriminated because I was female. That didn't enter my mind. It could be that there were cases, but it didn't enter my mind. Access, I had through my camera. I said, "I want to photograph this, OK?" For example, I went into the police precinct, and I said, "I want to photograph what goes on behind the scenes." I went to the synagogue on Clinton Street, I said, "Can I photograph behind the scenes?" and they let me. They let me also photograph once—I don't know how I got that one—not necessarily in this neighborhood, but it was because of this neighborhood, somebody from this neighborhood. I got access to a locker room of a very famous football team. I don't think it was the Mets, because I didn't know nothing about football, I mean nothing—

Zapol: [laughs] Mets are baseball, but—

Member: Baseball, exactly, for example. I know nothing about either of these sports, a little bit basketball, but not much. Football is something else, but—and handball, but—

The toughest place was the precinct. Really, really tough. In the locker room—I mean, where they check in in the morning, they leave their private stuff, and they came by uniform, but they had their kind of space where they got ready to come out and be counted and all of that stuff. Roll call. Roll calling, yeah. They definitely put on a show for me, there was no doubt about it. Same with the sports locker room, whichever sport it was, was uncomfortable, to say the least. The synagogue was, I was air! I was total air. There were all these incredible—a lot of ancient looking men and wise looking men, just because of the habit and the hair and their beards and the whole how they were dressed and how they behaved—Their implements, the prayer stuff and the shawls and the beads and the books and that. I forgot to pull the shutter.

What should I say, the religious part of it, really inhibiting me, because I knew that they didn't like me there, but the then Rabbi wanted documentation, you know? So I got some very, very quiet shots. It was a quiet environment anyway. Right now, my knees get soft. Not about the police, not about the soccer, but about—that was really incredible. So I didn't feel excluded, and when it came to the political part, neither. I busted the door, but quite to say, "Hey, I'm here to take pictures." I finally had a pass, or a press pass, also. You have to have enough publications

in public in order to get a press pass. I applied at the police. You get it from the police. So there is like a shield. Many times, they couldn't arrest me, even though I was right with the demonstrators. They tried a few times, and then once I did get arrested, and they got reprimanded for having arrested me.

Zapol: What's that story?

Momber: That was just, during one rally, they just got me in the paddy wagon, where I actually wanted to be, because I wanted to photograph there, too, right? But then when I came to the front desk appearance, I strongly objected, and whoever was then in charge said, "Yeah, let her go now. You don't even talk to her, OK? Don't talk to her. Let her go." That kind of thing., which was fine by me! [laughs] But I felt always a little guilty. Everybody knew. They felt it was more important for me to document than to get arrested, OK? [00:20:04]

Zapol: Can you talk about a memorable protest, a memorable moment?

Momber: The most memorable protest was the one on 10th Street and Third Avenue where they already had taken down a whole block of perfectly acceptable three to four, five-story high storefronts with apartments on top. They already, they just bulldozed it and without proper anything. Every housing agency—Cooper Square, GOLES [Good Old Lower East Side of New York], of course, already—

Zapol: GOLES is Good Old Lower East Side.

Momber: Even JPC, HPD [Housing Preservation and Development], Joint Planning Council was in its infancy, because they did Pueblo Nuevo later. But the churches, especially Father Kennington of the Holy Redeemer was very active anyway, and the people from the Joint Planning Council, who were for the people—and at the time, there were plenty of them. They were in the majority. They chained themselves to the construction equipment, OK?⁸ We had balloons. We had congas, making noise, making a racket, and they came at us with motorbikes and horses.

⁸ M.Momber noted on 1/12/16: "The main protesters at this time were the Community Planning Board, not the Joint Planning Council."

I have one particular thing. The noise, you know, heightens fear. It was all done by fear. Every ruler uses fear on all levels. But when there are sticks against the metal fences, it makes a horrible noise. It's a corrugated iron thing. Or even the mesh fences, you know. It was really, really amazing, and then finally they got, paddy wagons, and I was almost in, but somebody remembered, recognized me, the arresting officer, and said, "Let her go, let her go," and I didn't even pull my pass—which I didn't have at the time, which was really weird. They said, "Let her go, let her go. She's a photographer." That was very memorable. The one that I missed was on 13th Street, the squatters, where they came with tanks. I was not there.

Zapol: Around Tompkins Square—

Momber: No, on 13th Street between C

Zapol: Further.

Momber:—B and C.

Zapol: Up and east.

Momber: Just one block south of Stuyvesant Town, OK? They were very, very radical. They were part of the other movements, citywide, countrywide, and they were very radical. They knew what they were doing. They had renovated these buildings almost to the point of—they could have gotten a C. of O. [Certificate of Occupancy].

The reason I was never—the squatters, except the ones locally and the one across the street, the Umbrella House—was simply because I was too busy with our stuff. They were pretty much all on drugs, and/or alcohol, and that I couldn't tolerate. They were a different class. I mean, there were lots of runaway kids from actually well-to-do households or even wealthy, and they ran away for protest and then found to be accepted there. Wonderful books—the best book that was written about the local scene was some guy, Yuri Kapralov. Over there. Have you read this book? Oh, you must read this book. I'm not going to lend it to you, because it's the last copy I have, but you have to come here and read it. He lived 7th Street, mostly, between B and C, and the most descriptive book ever. Let me just find it.

Zapol: It's ok, you're attached, so maybe I—

Member: I'm attached, I'm attached to—I'm wired. This was obviously before my time, also. I came only in 1975. Then the next best was, best demonstration was—did I already talk about Mayor Koch? Going to Mayor Koch's residence?

Zapol: No.

Member: Right at NYU?

Zapol: No. [00:24:41]

Member: He lived like on the twelfth floor, in this kind of narrow block. High buildings, and we had the best crowd ever and most organized. We had a whole platform on wheels that we could push forward. We had bullhorns. We had fabulous banners and stuff, and we knew exactly what we wanted, and then when we came to his residence, he looked out the window, and he said—I have to look at where he said—It was that demonstration or another one where he said, “Well, if you don't like it here, why don't you jump in the river and swim to Brooklyn?” But we invited him down, and he came. That was one thing about Ed, that he was approachable. He spoke back to you. He didn't just ignore you. I mean, he ignored you by his action, by his commentary in wishing us away and shooing us away and putting us down, but at least we could get all the way to him.

So he came down, grabbed a bullhorn. I think he said it on the bullhorn, but I have to—I don't know whether anyone has it on video. You have to put that out online and see if anybody remembers that particular demo.

Zapol: You say, you know, “We were too busy with our stuff,” or “I was too busy with our stuff”—how did you identify—what were some of the groups that you felt that you belonged to?

Member: Well, lots of them hired me. The Catholic Church is very active. They hired me. Catholic Worker hired me, Save the Children, Habitat for Humanity, Housing Agency—I forget all the abbreviations. Housing groups, educational groups, schools, churches, block associations, they hired me. If they always paid me is another question. Though I would do it. I would volunteer a lot.

Then I was going to be a mother, so what did I care about? Daycare. And there was none. There was really none. It was all privately handled. The Hispanic families had their *abuelas*, and

the white community had their grandmas and elderly women and homes where we dropped off our children. There was a city afterschool program, which we turned into daycare centers. All the ones that we founded are still now very, very strong, and all public schools. I haven't kept up too much with it, but I see them now, coming into our park across the street, and into Tranquilidad.

Five, six groups—they're all white. Very few children of color, very few that look like they were here, [like] their parents were here when we were active. The children of the inhabitants from our homestead all went to college, because they had the certainty of the homes. They weren't run around anymore by landlords, having to find new places to stay and new places to live. Their kids could speak English if they couldn't, and they got more fluent in English. They knew their rights better, and they all found their own homes because they had lots of children, and they couldn't all live with their parents, even though some still do, including my son. But it's because he's studying again.

So the continuity of the living in a homestead, where they could afford the rent, it was safe—afforded them to go to school and they're all very, very smart and very wonderful. I love these kids, and they love me, and they know if their kids—I feel like their grandmother in a way.

Now I'm just archiving all of that stuff, and I owe them all whole family albums. I have no idea how I'm going to achieve that in a collective way. Then starting to branch into single families, starting with this house and then going on to the neighborhood—very redeeming, very, very—this is redemption time for me. Come on out with the stuff. I can't wait to show the NYU stuff that was really fun, because I will have an exhibit there.

Zapol: Oh, good.

Member: Yeah.

Zapol: Well, from what you've said, I have a lot of questions. First of all, this apartment building that you're in now was a homestead. Can you talk about the process of you coming to live in this apartment?

Member: Well, we were very lucky. We were only sixteen units. It used to be thirty-six units, so it was tiny apartments, and we got the deed in 1977, and it was signed by Howard Brandstein, who is still my neighbor. [00:30:11]

Zapol: Were you a part of renovating the building, as well?

Member: Well, our building in particular was a kind of a demo. There were three other buildings involved: 310 4th Street, 523 East 5th Street, and I still didn't look up the other one, but it was on 3rd Street. That didn't make it. Pretty early adopted. It was mismanaged. So was the one on 5th Street, and so is ours, unfortunately, after all these decades.

It started pretty early, in [19]92. We moved in in 1980 after only two years of renovation. Renovating meaning gutting, and that was done via sweat equity. Unfortunately, we also named ourselves 310 East 4th. We were a coop, but we were a sweat equity coop. We paid thirty-five dollars to belong. That's it. But the word 'coop' conjures all kinds of mighty ideas in people's minds—"Oh, we can sell, we can get rich, we can," you know, "profit from it." That's not the way it's designed. Our deed does not allow that. It has to stay within the income level, within the guidelines, within—we have, of course, our what do you call it? Our rules, what are they called? Bylaws. Bylaws. We met regularly—monthly at least—often we had to call other meetings. So everybody had to sign and log in a certain amount of hours to their ability. Obviously, some—I was really—I love demolition [laughs] because you can see the progress. It's like I try to keep my apartment really clean, but when I help other people, I love to clean places that are really dirty because you see what you're doing really quickly, right? Then it's clean. Then, of course, maintenance would be it, to keep it that way.

Zapol: And of course as a photo documentarian, you also can see change. You're interested in seeing change.

Member: Right, yes, definitely. So I then, became pregnant, and so instead of doing the hard work I volunteered to not only scrape and prime and then paint the fire escapes, but I did it. Not by myself, of course, but I did a lot of it. I loved it! And not so much the back, because nothing much was going on. I liked working in the front a little better. I painted it white, because I didn't see why I would step out onto a black fire escape, and it was only changed recently by the now very hostile administration of this building. The direct process was really incredibly laborious. We had to do security. That persisted in spending the night in the building, which was not easy. It certainly wasn't. It was before cell phones, before telephones! Finally, our construction supervisor went through lots of changes because some of them were, had diverted funds and all kinds of other stuff that were illegal. Changed a lot.

What happened was that we entered the homestead program [Urban Homestead Program], by which the process was that the city, the state and federal government would fund us and give us loans, and so on, and then paid for the contractors and that stuff. Basically, they had to probably apply for these kind of jobs, and there wasn't a lot of input we had on who [could] do the finishing work—finish meaning, took all out the piping, the electrical. The bricks were standing, and in our case the staircase was pretty good, except some of the marble had been taken away, so we had—there was some floors that we had to triple-step and be careful.

The roof was in good enough condition so that it wasn't raining. It wasn't getting wet constantly. But the door was plywood! It was a big, thick chain. You could have taken the chain and banged it in and banged on the plywood.

I'll never forget, one day I had security, and I was in the front apartment, which became a studio apartment, and here was the plywood door and the chain. You have to go and check on things. When you hear a noise, you have to go check. What made the most noise was taking the bloody chain out of its position. Click, click, click, click, clang, clong, you know. Everybody knew you were coming, so whoever was there would be gone by the time [you got there]. Then one night I heard really bad noises in the back—an over-eager supplier had supplied our wooden flooring, our parquet—pretty pieces of wood—in other words, much, much, much too early. There was a huge pyramid inside one of the totally empty and unfinished apartments in the back. They were also unsecured—no windows. Or did we have windows? No, I don't think we had windows, because it was the first floor, and they all had gates. [00:35:25]

But it wasn't secured, you know? Sure enough, somebody was throwing out the wood and collecting it outside. And what do you do? I behaved as if there were other people in the building, and I said, "Hey, Jose, Tyrone, come on down. There is something going on here. Give me a hand," blah, blah, blah, and then it stopped. [laughs] But I was inside. I was too scared to go outside. I thought they'd be waiting for me outside or whatever. No telephone, you know? Ridiculous. On top of it, there were an enormous amount of drug activity, dealing, shooting up, lots of gun fires. You heard gun fires—

Zapol: In the area.

Momber: In the area, but especially on this block, because 3rd Street is in the back of us, and it was one of the heaviest blocks down here. Then we have heavy points around 9th Street and 8th

Street, where now the new precinct is, which I only found out, coincidentally, is only for the projects, It's not even for us. It's only really east of Avenue D. I had no idea! Projects are a huge, lots and lots of people. They still live in squalor. They are overrun by rats now, OK? They are now infiltrated by people who know how to work the system and really don't belong there, because their income is higher and all of that stuff. The city lets it happen, displacement. Designed displacement. One of the projects that I wanted to, one of my, did I talk about my book projects?

Zapol: You haven't talked about it.

Member: I would like to do, one is called *Loisaida Triangle: Where did all the people go?* Asking [about] for profit, people being displaced by corrupt landlords and by design of the city, of the laws that the city puts out, about qualification for living in subsidized housing and stuff like that. You can all—where there is a law, it can be broken. The more laws you create, the more people go to prison, and the fathers are missing. Sometimes the mothers are missing because they became addicts, too, or became corrupted, too.

Zapol: You speak about this area, there being drugs, there being gun fire, and then in your images, you also show arson and big fires in some of these buildings. Can you describe your understanding of why that was happening, and even a particular fire?

Member: Well, obviously—

Zapol: Sort of the life of it.

Member: It happened all—I came in '75, so it happened in the late '60s. Yuri [Kapralov] writes about that a lot or mentioned that for sure. It was just pandemonium then. Later, apparently, what happened, people who lived in already once damaged buildings—building burns. The landlord might have put out some sort of a warning, and said, “Wednesday at four o'clock in the afternoon,” blah, blah, blah, or “No overnights,” or something like that. Then the building burned, and the fire department always came late. It was never—it's right here, right on 3rd Street. Where's the next engine? I can picture them—you know, they're not that far away. It took hours to come. Maybe they were busy with other things, but mostly not. Then by the time it was really bad. By the time the fire engine came, it was the water truck, and they put the water on this

hot, burning bricks. The landlords had free demolition. Didn't have to pay for demolition. By daybreak, the bulldozers came, and the wrecking ball—the crane with the huge ball—to knock down the last walls. I photographed that several times.

The worst case, most tragic case—it probably happened much more than we know, that people really perished in those fires—was the building on Avenue D, right here, between 5th and 6th Street. We all knew that homeless people lived in there, and they accessed it from the back—not from Avenue D side, but from the empty lot. The whole block was empty, practically—was already taken down and stuff like that. It was one block south of—no, it was the block north of—no, south of Habitat for Humanity. That was part of the block on 6th Street between C and D. Habitat for Humanities took over a whole block by President [Jimmy] Carter and his wife. Came twice a year and spent their vacation. He did carpentry, and she did whatever. She lived with the nuns and he with the monks. It was like wonderful! I seldom saw them, and I would have never taken that much advantage of—I have no photographs of them, whatsoever. It was a little before the time I came. By the time I came, they were already—have to look that up. Carter was still President. When was Carter President? I have to look that up. [00:40:31]

Zapol: Well, I know he was—[19]70, late. By [19]78, I think he was President.⁹

Momber: Yeah, yeah, right. But he had started earlier already, his Habitat—I don't know—that building. We knew there were homeless people in it. The other homeless people tried to stop the people from the fire department. They wanted them to go in there and find the people first. They were sure they were in there. The fire was already blazing. And they didn't.

I have photos of one man, one homeless man, climbing the walls, trying to get to his friends. He was drunk, but I think if I had a pint of something, I would have done that, too, at that point, in his shoes, in his situation. It was really, really, really hard to take. Then you saw those crumbling walls, and you knew there might have been people. Or even dogs, cats—who knows?—in there. It was arson. It was planned arson.

So what happened is, in the beginning they just did kind of little fires. Then they collected the insurance, sold the buildings within their family. The next acted exactly the same way, and they would come every day or every month, and knock on their doors and give them a

⁹ Jimmy Carter was president from 1977-1981.

new rent bill, and in English—no translation, no nothing. People were scared. When they had the money, they paid. When not, they had to move out and find something else. They were vagrants. Whole families. Displacement.

So, where did all the people go? It's still hard to see that, because with all the new construction and new buildings. Even affordable housing—which, you know, was done diligently by some wonderful people. Most importantly, there were lots of male-run organizations. There were a couple of women who formed their own groups. There was Sarah Farley who was an African-American woman from the South. She was involved in the whole freedom struggle from down south. She was a wealth of information, and she had her own principles by which she guided the people who listened to her, you know, she had—there was networking going on from her house, from her office. She had a real big office on the downstairs. She was somewhat handicapped, so she couldn't move around that much, and then, of course, there came Frances Goldin from Cooper Square, who—I have lunch with her now all the time. She has a documentary coming out where—did I talk about her?

Zapol: No, but I've interviewed her also for this project, yeah.

Momber: Yeah, when the filmmakers came to me, of course, to get material, they picked like seven photographs. I said, "What's up with you? Don't you see what you've got here?" And they, "Oh, we're OK, we're OK." Young people from New Jersey. I'm not saying that they're not knowledgeable. Who knows? When Fran saw the few photos, She said, "Go back there and get everything you can!" [laughs] This happened like five, six years ago already. It started, or even longer? And the thing's still not finished, because Frances knows what's out there—

Zapol: It's still in process, yeah.

Momber: It's a process, and I volunteered to give all my photographs for very little money. She sent me a \$250 check last spring, which I promptly used to pay my docking fee for my habitat in my winter quarters, because I really needed that.

Zapol: Because you spend your winters on a boat. That's right.

Momber: Yeah. Because the only way I can afford it—

Zapol: In Florida.

Momber: It's three hundred, thirty dollars a month! You couldn't even get a room—sleep, be a couch potato someplace for that kind of money. So—

Zapol: You're talking about the documentary about Frances, but you also made a documentary, *Viva Loaisida*.

Momber: Yeah.

Zapol: Can you talk about that process? I saw that, it says "Gruppe Dokumentation" [laughs] was the producers of it.

Momber: Yeah. [00:45:04]

Zapol: How did that come about? How did you make—

Momber: The chronology goes something like I had something published in *Der Spiegel*, which, you know, is like *Time Magazine* in Germany and then about the murals. Obviously, it's photography, but the murals are so attractive, and I photographed the murals. They picked stuff that only showed the murals, not the neighborhood. But the journalists who came, of course, saw what went on around it. So I went to Germany once a year, because my entire family was mostly in Berlin—my brothers and sister. My grandparents were alive. My father and his wife were alive, and my half-sister—I had a lot of incentive to go back to Berlin, where my political roots are, also.

I stayed away from Germans for ten—a whole decade. Whenever I saw Germans, I walked the other way, because I didn't want to be influenced by them. Finally, I gave in, I went to Goethe Haus. I went to Deutsches Haus at NYU. I went the consulate, I went to ADAD, which gives a lot of money for artistic projects that are civil and civil sense, like housing and environment. They funded me. They hired me. I did stuff for them, so then I met a producer from German television.

German television is run by the government. It's either regional or state or federal. This was [a] regional program in Berlin, and the director was this wonderful man, Uli Wickert. He became my close friend through my other friends, and these were all people who lived in duplexes on Central Park and who knows where and what. They were amazed about me and how

I lived and came down here—come slumming. But they understood what the message was. There was a need for what we did, for grassrooting.

I went over there and talked to the people who gave the money, and they gave us a hundred thousand bucks, German marks, which was only—divided by four—was very little money then, the currency. But I had it in cash on me one day when I was flying over. I was already pregnant. I didn't tell them. Only my husband—well, the father of my child—and a very good friend knew this. I had a very good friend who made it possible for me to deposit that money into an American bank—cash. Banker. Wonderful people. All knew that we had to bend some bars that kept me from doing, or us, from doing what we were doing. It was like really wonderful. I became at peace again. They were also all a little bit my age. I was then already in my early thirties, no longer in the twenties. Seventy-five, I was how old? No, [19]43—can you do the math? In my early thirties, right? Thirty-two, thirty, maybe, something like that.

Zapol: Yes.

Momber: I was doing well as a fashion photographer, also. I had cash. I never had any wealth, but anyway, I traveled all over, and—

Zapol: So you're saying you came to peace with Germany? Or with the German—

Momber: In other words, I accepted their assistance, you know, which—

Zapol: Yeah.

Momber:—I ran away from, because everything had to be done by connection. You had to be connected, and my father was very well connected, and I realized that everything was really done because he made a phone call, or something like that.

Zapol: Yes.

Momber: I had to get away from it. I don't really know why—this is a totally different story. My grandfather, who was a landowner, and he had that land, which made him a wealthy man in comparison to just a farmer or to apartment dweller, or something like that. In Berlin they had gentlemen farms. In what is now Russia, they had a big farm, which of course they lost. He was

a socialist. He shared with a certain sense of power, because he had to keep it together for his community, for his community of workers—of people who came [seasonally].

He knew that being a job giver was really important to those people, but he had a sense of power also. Not like my father, who was a soldier. He only gave commands like that. He was a soldier all his grown-up life. I mean ‘til after the war, of course—after the Second World War. My grandfather was in the First World War and survived the second one. Both my grandparents—not all four of them, but those two did. Now I got diverted again. We were—
[00:50:23]

Zapol: We were talking about *Viva Loisaida*.

Momber: Yeah.

Zapol: But I want to continue with what you were talking about—

Momber: Oh, the movie.

Zapol: Yes, the movie, but I am also interested in what you are talking about here, because you said your political roots are in Berlin, another time.

Momber: Yes.

Zapol: And so what does that mean, you know? Berlin is in a particular moment, of a communist, socialist, capitalist experiment. Then here you’re—I’m not sure how you would describe your politics here at the same time, and sort of—

Momber: Yeah.

Zapol: And so I’m interested in that relationship.

Momber: Well, I was born in Berlin in 1943, 19th of April, 1943, a day before Hitler’s birthday. I talked about that, right? Then, of course, when the war was over it was still too little to get the whole thing, I was just a kid, and I had fun playing in the ruins and the rubble and the stuff and loved visiting my grandparents. We already lived in West Germany, in a British sector up north, near Denmark—south of Denmark—on the Baltic Sea, and then moved all over West Germany.

Always from the French to the British sector to the—Berlin was four parts and then finally really divided by the wall.

That was an enormous thing for us. We could travel easily between all the other sectors, but always knew where we were—French, English—who were the four Allies? The Brits, the—

Everybody had these names. We were the ‘Krauts’, and Soviets and *ami*, or [unclear] [00:52:01] and the ‘Frenchies’ was—they had, I can’t remember. That’s terrible! But anyway, it was fun. East German money was much devaluated, so we could go and buy bicycles there for much less money than here. My grandfather took us to the race courses. Of course, we all grew up with horses, and so my grandmother forbade it, but we would still go there.

Zapol: Why did you have such easy access? Was it through your father—

Momber: No, no, it was like that. There was no wall.

Zapol: Ah, yes, not, before the wall. I see.

Momber: But they had their own administration, their own money—East German money all over East Germany. Don’t forget that Berlin was inside East Germany, like an island inside the Soviet Bloc really. When they built the wall around that and then around Berlin, it was fortified. The impact was enormous. You couldn’t just travel anymore. You had to go through western point to get into the eastern thing, then out of the eastern into the western. A trip that now takes two and a half hours could take all day or longer because of the controls. They would search your car, take the tires off for whatever reason, just to make it difficult for you, you know?

Of course, the whole airlift and all of that had happened much earlier. After the war, the Soviets tried to isolate Berlin in a way. They didn’t succeed. In a sense, it didn’t succeed, because all four of them had their feet in there. My father knew when it was going to happen. He also knew in the west how it was going to be divided, so he first got us out of there. I talked about that, I think, right.

But the impact of growing up having the bigger picture—Americans really don’t know. I mean, they now travel a lot, and some people probably always traveled and always had the bigger picture, but the general population, the one that makes the majority of the votes, the ‘ninety-nine percent’ as we call them today, really didn’t know. Really didn’t really have an image. They knew Greek temples and maybe some churches and castles in Europe and stuff like

that, but there was really a power behind it, and we knew that. We knew that the Brits were powerful. The French were powerful, the Americans—The Russians certainly were. We were always interested in politics, whereas the so-called Christian Democrats could easily be compared to Republicans now in early history. They did enormous work. [00:54:48]

The first thing was to pay damages, pay to [create] the state of Israel. Paid trillions and trillions of marks. I still don't understand how that worked, how they had the money. Then the Marshall Plan came in, initiated by Americans, by the American government, and probably all four Allies. Three Allies, not Russia. So we had an opinion, also. I liked the Americans better than the Brits, and—oh, I liked the French best, actually, because I spoke French. As a kid, we spent a lot of time in France.

We would have these discussions—who were better occupiers. We called them 'occupiers', not 'liberators'—the Liberation Army—but they really occupied us. They ruled us. When we lived in the British sector, at one point—did I talk about that yet? They had their tanks rolling, and they had us pretty much scared all the time. As kids, we would watch them and try to throw—we didn't know what a soda can was, but they would give that to us, soda cans, and we would throw that under the truck things so they would pop [laughs] and come out flattened, stuff like that. But we lived on a dirt road. The village we lived on was the Baltic Sea. The promenade, dunes, main street that was tarred or whatever, and we lived on a street that was not, and so when the tanks came there it made a mud field out of it. So the cans didn't get busted. But, yeah sorry, yeah.

Zapol: But I'm struck by this image of you seeing the tanks as a child in the British sector, and then you're talking about that demonstration, which you didn't see, but that was on 13th Street here—like this relationship to the power—the powers—and here is, as you talked about it here, it's the city and a combative relationship to the city.

Momber: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Zapol: Can you relate how you see, if any relationship between your—sort of the power relationships in Germany, and here?

Momber: Yeah. Well, I hate people with guns, absolutely, no matter who they are. Police, soldiers, I do not like guns. Guns were pointed at us when we went to the Russian sector. Even

from the west, they had machine guns pointed at whatever was happening down there. Close up, also. They walked around under that. The last trip I did with my son in 2013, we went to Paris airport.¹⁰ Oh my god, did we go to Neuilly, I think we landed in Neuilly. Yeah. Curtis said, “Mom, look at this,” and there were these young boys. They could not have been older than twenty-one, nineteen years old, with machine guns! Five, six of them together. With the berets and the boots and the thing, and strapped like—they looked like robocops in a tourist situation. We all came to have fun, to travel like that, and it was really, really intense.

Of course, when I lived in Paris, just before I came to America in [19]64 and [19]65, the Algerian conflict was just barely over. It was still really, really tense street scenes. So constantly, this uniformed gun-toting presence, OK. I didn’t hear about wars in America, but of course there was a war, especially in New York. It was a war between classes, and the police was involved, and many times the troops was called in. The student killing Chicago—I couldn’t believe it.

Every time I wanted to become an American, put in my papers—because I came with my green card. I didn’t have to marry anybody or anything like that. I came with my green card—because of connections, but still. I had been deported from Paris because I didn’t have my work papers and couldn’t get a job. The economy was bad and stuff like that. I had to leave. I was deported. Then I made sure that this couldn’t happen, so I had my green card.

Then I was married, almost—unfortunately—right away, and that marriage fell apart after six years. After eight years, I was divorced, and I said, “OK, now you have to become an American because you don’t have the male protection anymore from your American husband.” My German passport and my green card, which was then called ‘alien registration card’.[laughs]

I travel to Canada. In the early days, all you had to do was show your driver’s license, New York driver’s license. Now, just three years ago, I went up there, and I hadn’t traveled there after the restrictions had changed and need now a passport to travel. I showed my passport, and I called it ‘green card’. The Americans just jumped down my throat, said, “Can’t you read, it’s ‘permanent residents’.” I say, “OK, OK, I’m sorry.” They said it one more time. Then once I traveled, I told them, “Accidentally, I left my passport in New York. Can you give me something?” and they gave me a paper and something. I came to the Canadian. They also let me in. **[01:00:21]**

¹⁰ M. Momber corrected this on 1/27/16 – the year she traveled with Curtis to France was actually 2011.

Now the thing was to get out, because this was my fifth trip in that summer. I had met somebody in Florida, and we were constantly traveling back and forth. I said, “You have all the documentation, even the dates, of when I have traveled,” so they could see that, and they let me back out. Then it happened again [laughs] that I left my green card, and I called it ‘green card’, and they jumped down my throat. They said, “Permanent resident.” But I never became a citizen, because of the violence that was perpetrated by the government onto the people. Very single-pointedly, like that incident in Chicago, or killing of a President? Killing the President! Killing his brother! Killing Martin Luther King, killing—I mean, Malcolm X? I just couldn’t believe it, this gun thing. You know? So I said, “I’m not going to become a citizen of a country that has—”

Then, the last time it happened, also then they hiked up the fees tremendously. In the beginning, Germany didn’t allow dual citizenship. I didn’t want to lose my German passport because of my male son—my son, my real child—and so I kept my alien registration card and my passport. I still wanted to go to Cuba, also, which I had not achieved, and I will go. The last time, I have my papers ready to go. I have like twelve passports, of fifty years I’ve been here—

**[END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE, ‘Momber_MarlisOralHistorySession2_1.mp3’;
BEGINNING OF SECOND, ‘Momber_MarlisOralHistorySession2_2.mp3’]**

Momber:—not a couple of decades, but half a century. I feel totally New York. I love America, I love New York, but I love South America. I love countries there. I love islands. I love Europe. I went to Japan. I think this earth should be, wherever you pay your taxes is where you—your home.

Zapol: So yeah, where is your home?

Momber: Where is my home, It’s very, very—yeah. Right now, I feel very much like an immigrant, very much so. If it was really becoming more Republican more than it is now, they could easily oust me. They could strike my social security. Some people that know my status, will say, “Oh, don’t you feel like a thief?” I said, “Why? This is the law. I’m not living here unlawfully. I’m no longer a registered alien. I am a permanent resident.” I cannot leave this country longer than six months. They wouldn’t let me back in, or would make it very difficult. Punitive actions taken and stuff. In other words, they would also not let me in. So that’s very precarious, all of that stuff.

With the situation of what's happening in what we call the 'Near East'—from Europe we call, from Turkey on, everything there Near East, and then Far East would be China—is tremendous and that the German government allows so many immigrants in. It's a very welcoming thing for those poor people, but how much, other people get inside that stream is unknown, and the future of Europe is really, as far as I'm concerned, changing forever.

In America, we're concerned with how many, percentage wise, how many Puerto Ricans we have. Aren't Puerto Ricans American? No, they're not. They're the state that is stateless and the state that does not really belong and doesn't have full citizenship rights and all that. Why would I become a citizen of that? I would immediately be a diverse, a subversive, what do you call it—I'm always a revolutionary. I wear a shirt, "Stop bitching, start a revolution." The revolution meaning to revolve, or to evolve. Leave the "R" out. Let's evolve into a peaceful, all-encompassing state— world. World. I don't even want to say state or country, you know?

Zapol: So you're talking about particularly Puerto Ricans in America, but also let's talk about Loisaída and the changes that you've seen.

Member: Yeah.

Zapol: You spoke a little bit about the childcare collective and the color of the children in that collective—

Member: Yeah, yeah.

Zapol:—but what do you see right now in this neighborhood?

Member: What I see right now is that I see white, white, white, white, white. Whole walls are being washed white where there was tagging, graffiti. Certain murals were whitewashed, if the building wasn't taken down, period. The scene around here, I find it very superficial. Everybody's into shopping and dining and wining. Drugging. The new drugs, no longer necessary.

Also drugs are right now becoming much, much stronger. We see people again shooting up on the stoops, again smoking, and I have to say that when I smell marijuana, I walk right after, because I like the smell. But I never smoked. I never drugged. I had my beer and my wine, but, no excess of that. But I find it superficial.

Everybody looks the same, the same hairstyle, same nails, same trendy clothing with the name of whoever made this clothing right on—I mean, you have to pay me a lot of money to wear a shirt or something that—Nike, I got sucked into that because I play tennis. I found a pair of tennis shoes, really cheap, because they're very expensive, so I own a pair of Nikes. I find it not as rich as it was, because we had so much [more] spontaneity to create a festival, to create a memorial— people died left and right, and first drugs and then AIDS and both combined. I was like overwhelmed from my fashion background, where the AIDS was of course mowing people down left and right. [00:04:54]

I refuse to go to memorials, and now I have friends who have— I'm a cancer patient for the last four years, so I know kind of chronic disease—which is what AIDS basically also is—are very difficult to deal with, but they're healthy. They're functional. They're wonderful, and they're my support, male and female.

The other thing is the quality of life, where is there all these expensive restaurants, and some of them serve excellent food, and some of them are getting vegetarian or at least do without HMG. What is it called?

Zapol: MSG [monosodium glutamate]

Member: MSG. [laughs] All this abbreviation, all that stuff, are very conscious about it, and—

Zapol: That's important to you.

Member:—and is overpriced, and processed food, obviously, kills. Kills, kills, kills. The overrun and costly healthcare could be easily remedied if they were forbidden to put all the chemistry. They're eating chemistry. They're eating chemistry formula. Worst of all is what they call “cheese food,” the American cheeses, wrapped singularly, and stuff like that. It's not even cheese anymore, you know? So—

Zapol: So Let's talk about, as a photographer—

Member: Quality—

Zapol: Sorry.

Member: Yeah—

Zapol: Finish.

Momber: Quality of life looks grand and glamorous. I think it sucks. And being treated like a patient when you—I don't take chemo, OK. I refuse, and I'm fine. I'm surviving. Chemo kills. Food kills. I mean, chemo heals, chemo heals.

Zapol: Oh no, food heals.

Momber: Food heals, chemo, that's supposed to heal, kills. Kills all your organs, kills your immune system, which is what cancer is, a failure of the immune system. It's out there. We all know that. I'm going to a conference on the 7th, that—finally, people dare to come out again.

They used to kill people—literally kill people,—people who grew hemp. First it was a requirement. You had so many acres of land, you had to grow that much hemp to create ropes for the Marines and sails and what have you and stuff, and all the medical benefits that came with it. Then they forbid it. Then they hunted people down. They killed them.

Three years ago, just when I was diagnosed, I looked into hemp, into marijuana for healing. Of course, it heals certain things—especially good for me, especially for my son, who has epilepsy. Would be great if it was legal, right? I ran into these old guys online. I met one in Canada, because they all fled to Canada, It's one of the reasons I went there. They either had to go to Canada or to Mexico to keep doing what they're doing, healing with marijuana. They became very old, but now they're dying, and now they're being killed again. They're being killed again. They come back, they get [a] visit and suddenly die on the road. Have heart attack. All very wishy-washy.

Zapol: Shady.

Momber: Shady.

Zapol: Yeah.

Momber: And scary. Even if they really do—they die of their heart breaks because they see their old house that now is a condo, like that, that's the thing. But it's amazing, They're very much aware of—and there are only a hundred left in the organization.

Zapol: What is that organization? It's like hemp growers, or marijuana growers association?

Momber: Yeah, yeah.

Zapol: I'm aware—

Momber: Of the time? Me too, I'm just starting to get a little itchy.

Zapol: Yes. It's ten thirty now.

Momber: Oh yeah, oh—

Zapol: So I know we—

Momber: Ten thirty!

Zapol: Yeah.

Momber: Oh my god!

Zapol: I know we need to end. Let me unplug you.

Momber: I can't. I cannot be late for this. I have to jump in a taxi.

Zapol: No, no, I need to unplug you.

Momber: Oh!

Zapol: So I just want to say thank you, Marlis.

Momber: Yes.

Zapol: Thank you for your time.

Momber: Maybe we can have a short session and finish it.

Zapol: I mean, I think we're in a good point right now for ending, but, I'll give you the chance to review this as well—

Momber: Yes.

Zapol:—but thank you very much.

Momber: Thank you!

[END OF INTERVIEW, SESSION 2]