Oral History with Amy Marsh

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Interview with Amy Marsh

SESSION 1 (3/21/2019)

[00:00:00]

BLOOM: Okay, so the recorders are on. I have one recorder recording my voice, and then I have a recorder that is recording your voice over the phone. Can you just say a few words? Maybe tell me what you had for breakfast so I can make sure the levels are okay.

MARSH: Okay, I had a protein shake, and a leftover frittata.

BLOOM: Okay, all right. Everything looks good. I'm going to go ahead and get started and it is March 21st at ten AM. This is an interview that we are doing over the phone, an oral history with Amy Marsh. My name is Molly Bloom. I'm a GSR (graduate student researcher) for Center for the Study of Women. Amy, why don't we start by telling me when and where you were born?

MARSH: I was born in Mesa, Arizona, on November 1st, 1954.

BLOOM: Okay, and how long did you live in Mesa?

MARSH: I think it was only a couple of years, if that. We returned to San Diego. That's where my mom had grown up, and I believe my father actually his parents had lived in a part of San Diego that was San Diego county that was closer to the Mexican border.

BLOOM: Okay, and where did you do most of your childhood growing up?

MARSH: In Coronado and La Jolla, so these are both beach towns in San Diego county.

BLOOM: Okay, great, you want to tell me about what your parents did in San Diego?

MARSH: Well, my father was a pilot, and—Sorry, I'm going to pause for a minute because one of my cats is wanting to love me with her little claws. I'm trying to get her off of that. Sorry. Yes, my father was a pilot. When we lived in Arizona, he did crop dusting. Then, later he became a Pan Am pilot. There was a time when we lived briefly in Honolulu—in Waikiki—because he was flying a lot between San Diego and Hawaii. But my mother was very young when she married him and didn't even finish high school. She wasn't doing much except taking care of kids which is a lot, but as far as outside the home—nothing. Later, she became a folk singer.

BLOOM: How young was your mother when she married your father?

MARSH: Sixteen.

BLOOM: How many siblings did you have?

MARSH: I have—boy, that's an interesting question. I have three others that I grew up with, and then there's also a sibling who got adopted out. When my father remarried—there are two daughters from that marriage, but I've never met them.

BLOOM: What's your relationship like with your siblings?

MARSH: Very distant right now. I think the oldest kid is sometimes treated as an almost parent in terms of the weightiness of the effect we can have on our younger brothers and sisters.

[00:04:03]

BLOOM: Did you do a lot of caring for your siblings while you were growing up?

MARSH: I did some babysitting, but my Aunt Mary and my grandmother also helped out, especially when my mother started working nights.

BLOOM: When you think of your childhood, and you think of your relationships with your family, how would you describe them?

MARSH: I think mainly all right. I say that with some hesitancy just because I was in my own head a lot, my own imagination. I also spent a lot of time playing on the beach and in the tide pools, and the only times I remember playing with my siblings was when I was a pirate queen, ordering them around as my crew. I loved my mom. I had a good relationship with her. My father was totally out of the picture; he didn't communicate with us. My grandmother was a sometimes positive and sometimes corrosive influence. My Aunt Mary was actually quite wonderful, but I don't think she got a lot of credit for her efforts on our behalf.

BLOOM: This is your grandmother on your father's side or your mother's?

MARSH: My mother's side.

BLOOM: Okay, and your Aunt Mary, as well?

MARSH: Yes, also on my mother's side. My father's parents—I think they came to see us once after the divorce, and that was it. They didn't stay in touch.

[00:05:52]

BLOOM: You said your father was absent. Was that because he was busy working? What made him feel absent?

MARSH: He was the classic deadbeat dad. As a pilot he worked for Pan Am, and then also the CIA owned airlines—Air America and Southern Air Transport? He was actually in that group of pilots that were probably smuggling drugs as part of a way of supporting the Vietnam War. There are books about that. I don't have a lot of information. I just know that existed, and he worked for them. He basically didn't want to pay child support and didn't for a long time. When he was finally grounded from Pan Am, he purchased a big boat. He went sailing all over the Pacific with his new wife and daughter, so it was very hard to find him. I think my mother finally found him in Guam and got some of the back-child support from him.

BLOOM: Did you say he was working for CIA-owned airlines?

MARSH: He was. Yes, Air America and Southern Air Transport were apparently—now this is what I've heard. I don't have documentation to back it up, but I know there's documentation out there. I just haven't researched this on my own, so I can't cite anything. Apparently U.S pilots working for these airlines were smuggling drugs and possibly also gems, but that might be a fabrication. But I think he told my mother one time he was smuggling jewels. They did correspond slightly, every now and then.

BLOOM: Okay, so how old were you when your parents divorced?

MARSH: I was five.

BLOOM: You were five. What was your father doing at this point?

MARSH: He was a Pan Am pilot.

BLOOM: So was it up to your mother to support the family?

MARSH: Yes.

BLOOM: Did she do that as a folk singer, or how did she support the family?

MARSH: As a folk singer. Or we were on welfare, off and on, when she didn't have a singing job. She would reapply and we'd be back to that.

[00:08:18]

BLOOM: Did you ever have to work to help the family out?

MARSH: I actually left home the first time when I was sixteen. I was working at a beach area free clinic, Mission Beach in San Diego. I was getting paid through a government funded program for disadvantaged youth called Neighborhood Youth Corps, so I did that for two or three years until the funding was cut. I didn't give money to the family because at that point I was on my own for the most part.

BLOOM: What was school like when you were growing up?

MARSH: I got pegged as a smart kid. In fourth grade my teacher saw my artistic talent and had me paint murals outside the classroom during some of the lessons. In junior high I started butting heads with authorities complaining about dress codes. This is the 60s, and I was turning into a little hippie kid, so I was very much anti-authoritarian. And didn't want to pledge allegiance to the flag because of the Vietnam War, that kind of thing. So, there was a point where we moved to Los Angeles for a year because my mother thought it would help her singing career. She had an agent that was apparently going to help her, but he didn't really. That was terrible, that was truly terrible. So once we moved back—I. School is so complicated. I was supposed to be in an independent study program because I'd been in a special thing in junior high in La Jolla, and the teacher didn't want to let me into the special program because I'd been a loud mouth about dress code over at the other school. So, I stopped talking. Eventually, we got sent to continuation school for tenth grade and couldn't really hack that. And then, my mother sent me to a hippie free school called Paideia.

BLOOM: How did you like that?

[00:10:42]

MARSH: That was all right, except it wasn't accredited. We would have to hitchhike to the different teacher's homes, and the classes were pretty fluffy. Theater, games, or playing recorder, organic gardening—that's what I chiefly remember. School camping trips, there were a lot of misfit kids in this school. It was based on the Summerhill education movement in England. It was a thing.

BLOOM: Was your mother supportive of you going to this school?

MARSH: Well, my mother, yes—as I said she sent me there, she realized I was having problems. One of my younger brothers also went. Basically, she was overwhelmed, so she wasn't really an advocate for us in mainstream schools, and she didn't really participate in contributing to the free school either.

BLOOM: Okay, sounds like you are—

MARSH: Sounds harsh, but she was overwhelmed.

BLOOM: So you talk about growing up in San Diego, you moved to L.A, and you came back to the San Diego area, did you have a consistent child home, like a household?

MARSH: We moved a lot.

BLOOM: Do you remember any chemicals that you might have had at your different homes? Think about fragrances, cleaning chemicals or anything like that?

MARSH: Well, I believe that my father being a crop duster while I was in utero—while my mother was pregnant with me—I believe that set us both up for chemical sensitivity because my mother also has this condition now. But these were the days where if you had cockroaches, you bug bombed. If you're poor, you're living in a place that might have them. Even though we were in lovely communities—Coronado, La Jolla, later Ocean Beach, which was more funky and a little more economically depressed, these are all parts of San Diego beach area. Yes, you just did that sometimes. Cleaning products were, of course, whatever was cheap, and on the shelves. I do remember my mother liked a fragrance called Yram, and I also remember being given a bottle of Yardley April Violets. There were perfumes used in the home, but not heavily. It was a lady-like dab behind the ears—both my grandmother and mother.

BLOOM: Did you have any indication of a reaction to those chemicals or was it not really until later?

MARSH: It wasn't until later.

BLOOM: I know in the pre-interview you said it was pregnancy that brought it on.

[00:13:59]

MARSH: Right, in my case and I don't know if it brought it on, but it was happening during that time. I do think hormonal changes might create some vulnerabilities for women, but I didn't have anything to back that up.

BLOOM: Yes. Okay, and I know that you also are a writer, and you are an artist too. You mention that you drew a lot when you were younger.

MARSH: I did. Though I write more now; I haven't done anything visual for a few years.

BLOOM: Okay, what drew you to drawing when you were young?

MARSH: I just had to do it. I'd draw in school; I'd draw out of school. I just drew all the time, and it just was like breathing.

BLOOM: Yes, you also talk about some of your community engagement. You were working with the striking workers, the farmers, right?

MARSH: The farm workers, yes. When I was thirteen and fourteen, I got involved in a group that was started by UCSD (University of California, San Diego) students called Tuesday, the Ninth Committee. This was formed in reaction to Robert Kennedy's assassination, and we had to read a lot of books about racism and even the Warren Commission, on the Watts Riots book. But we would also go leaflet in front of supermarkets in La Jolla to boycott grapes so it was those striking farm workers days.

BLOOM: Yes, and what attracted you to that?

MARSH: I knew things were messed up socially, and I was interested in social justice. I didn't like knowing that racism existed. I didn't have a sophisticated understanding, but young people get very passionate, so I was a very passionate young person about different issues.

BLOOM: Would you say you were invested in the communities you grew up in?

[00:16:27]

MARSH: I was invested in the counterculture community, whatever form that seemed to take that was where I went.

BLOOM: Okay. What about the neighborhoods you grew up in? What were they like?

MARSH: They were, as I say, beach neighborhoods in—La Jolla, even though it's a very rich community, and also a college town, it still had a lot of little, tiny, funky houses that you could rent that were affordable. So, there were parts of town that were much more posh, but there were other middle class, lower-middle class places you could live in and still enjoy the beauty of the water and the ocean and the trees. I would say I grew up in some really, actually, lovely little towns with bookstores, and a lot of culture, and a lot of beauty.

BLOOM: Yes, and so this is when you were growing up and eventually you left home at sixteen. What drove you to do that?

MARSH: I don't know, I guess I was just tired of being at home. I had a boyfriend who was a year younger than I was, and his mother had kicked him out for six months, for the second time. We were both working at the free clinic, and it was just like, you know what, we have money, we could get a house. So, we pretended we were married, and we rented an apartment and it just went from there.

BLOOM: Where did you rent the apartment?

MARSH: In Ocean Beach.

BLOOM: Okay. What was it like working at the free clinic?

MARSH: I really loved that because there was a strong, feminist vibe coming in. At first, I was just making sure the speculums got autoclaved, and the exam rooms were set up, so I would answer the phones, I would go in and do that work. Then the woman, who started the women's side of the free clinic, trained me as a pregnancy counselor, so I was doing pregnancy counseling when I was sixteen.

BLOOM: Okay, and then, you said you were working there until the funding run out, is that correct?

MARSH: Yes. I guess it was only two years now that I think about it.

BLOOM: What did you do afterwards?

MARSH: I worked as a stripper because at that point I was having to support the two of us. I went to vocational nursing school at San Diego City College. It was very odd going from the feminist, free clinic to the night clubs.

BLOOM: How did you like it?

[00:19:27]

MARSH: Well, I pretty much despised it, but I thought it was interesting. And I will say that I met a different class of people than I knew in La Jolla, some very interesting, and some very, troubled. I think that the main thing, doing that did for me at least gave me an emotional outlet because things begin to get very, very rough with my boyfriend, who was essentially gay or bisexual, or maybe even asexual. He didn't make up his mind. I didn't realize that he was—when he'd been kicked out both times by his mother, he'd had to do sex work. I didn't realize that for a long time. And he was doing that, and he was suicidal. Things just got terrible. Eventually, he was diagnosed schizophrenic. It was a very hard time.

BLOOM: Yes, and how long were you with this boyfriend?

MARSH: Until he actually killed himself. He had a lot of attempts. He died in 1976, so it was a few years. I met him when I was seventeen. Yes, until I was twenty-one or twenty-two.

BLOOM: I'm so sorry to hear that.

MARSH: Yes, it was not good.

BLOOM: So how did you move forward from that?

[00:21:26]

MARSH: Well, I moved back with my mother and brothers and sisters for a little while and then I moved back out again. I worked for a couple different interior design companies as a sample librarian taking care of rug and fabric samples and throwing out the outdated materials, that kind of thing. And ended up having another relationship, and we moved to San Francisco. That was interesting because they—John, the boyfriend who committed suicide, and the other one who I moved to San Francisco with—were both going to beauty school, Once up in San Francisco, it was all beauty and fashion time, but coming from a very punk rock perspective. That was an interesting time.

BLOOM: Yes, that sounds fun.

MARSH: It was. I started doing wearable art and putting on fashion shows, and the boyfriend—who I don't want to name—was doing hair and began to do hair for a lot of musicians and artists, and would sometimes do hair for the models that I had for my fashion shows, things like that. So, we had a little bit of collaboration, but that was also a somewhat rocky relationship.

BLOOM: This may be a question that's off base. You were doing hair and fashion—do you think, looking back, were you exposed to chemicals in that sense, too?

MARSH: Definitely, beauty products. Hairspray would be flying all over the place. He would do these hair shows, and have ten, twelve, fifteen different models lined up. Everybody's hair would get done, and it would be gelled, or hairsprayed, and we all had electrical tape on our clothing, lots of makeup on, so definitely there were a lot of products used at that point. Yes, but that was not a full-time thing. This is the kind of thing where you'd have a day job, and then you'd do all your creative stuff in your off hours, so it's not like it was full-time for me.

BLOOM: Yes, were you still working in the furniture industry?

MARSH: Yes, I was sewing, working at a Scandinavian furniture store in downtown San Francisco. Had some office jobs, and eventually ended up working for a public affairs consulting firm who also did public opinion research. That was really very cool because I'd also given up on punk fashion and had co-founded a women's group to promote women's involvement in outer space exploration called the Hypatia Cluster. This was all Carl Sagan's fault because most TV series made me realize I was no longer in love with the dystopian punk rock future, and that there was actually maybe a possibility for human beings, so my imagination was totally sparked.

BLOOM: When did you start Hypatia?

MARSH: Let's see, I think it was '83? There were two other women involved. We just had a glorious time talking about amazing topics together and putting on some educational programs, and we had some pretty interesting people on our advisory board. Buckminster Fuller before he died. Ann Druyan, Carl Sagan's wife and the co-author of the Cosmos TV series. Stan Kent from Delta-V, he was big in Silicon Valley. Let's see—a few other folks. David Webb, he was on one

of the commissions to look at space exploration for the next fifty years. That was overshadowed by the Challenger Commission, to find out why it blew up.

[00:26:23]

BLOOM: When was the Challenger mission? When did that happen?

MARSH: ’85 or ’86? I think it was early ’85. I’m terrible on my dates actually but was it February ’85? Anyway, back then. It was the 80s. There was a very strong pro-space exploration movement at the time. The L5 Society. I think something called the National Space Forum. There was a lot of activity, especially in the Bay Area, with Silicon Valley nearby and NASA.

BLOOM: Okay, so you were still involved with Hypatia around ’85, ’86?

MARSH: Yes, in fact, I think it was shortly after the Challenger blew up that the other co-founders and I, we were invited to speak at the women’s week celebration at the Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo. Sally Ride had flown in by then, of course. My friend and I, my co-founder and I, got to each give speeches, which was quite lovely. Mine got written up in their company newsletter, so I got—the text of my speech was in the orbiter. That was cool. Yeah.

BLOOM: I’m hearing this thread of activism that’s been woven throughout the story, so far.

MARSH: Yes, it really has. I was a passionate young person, and I’m a passionate old lady now.

BLOOM: How long were you in San Francisco?

[00:28:31]

MARSH: Let’s see. Lived there for a long time. Both my kids were born there. We left to move to the East Bay in 2001. Obviously, somewhere in there I met my husband and had kids.

BLOOM: When did you meet your husband?

MARSH: That was ’84 I think—’83 or ’84. No, you know what I think Hypatia Cluster had started in ’82 because it had been going on for a while when I met my husband. I’m pretty sure we met in ’83 in the fall.

BLOOM: Okay, and when did you marry?

MARSH: In ’85.

BLOOM: Okay, how did you meet your husband? Walk me through that relationship.

MARSH: Okay, I won free tickets to the I-Beam in San Francisco. I was dead broke, out of work, looking for another job, but I won tickets, so I went to go see a band called the Gun Club, fun band. He had just broken up with his former girlfriend who was also named Amy. And went to see the Gun Club because he wanted to try to meet one of the musicians in the band who was pretty famous. A famous figure in punk rock history, but she’d just gotten married, so he was out of luck, so I was second choice. But we danced together and started seeing each other.

BLOOM: So you started seeing each other, got married in ’85. I know you have two kids. When were you pregnant with your first kid?

MARSH: My first kid was born in August 1989, and my second was born in September 1996. My husband and I, shortly after we married, started a furniture finishing business together in the Mission District of San Francisco. The public opinion research firm I’d been working for had been sold. Even though I worked my way up from secretary to junior consultant, to executive assistant to the president, and then the manager of officer personnel—pretty quickly because the company grew dramatically in the time. I didn’t want to hire on with the people who bought the business. I don’t know, they just seemed kind of creepy to me, and I decided to throw my lot in with my husband’s idea for creating this furniture finishing business. I took some workshops from this woman who was very big into doing faux finishes and gilding and glazing, so I learned how to do that. That was significant because during that time I had a miscarriage while I was actually taking the second workshop. It was the workshop where we were learning to use chemicals to tarnish silver lace and copper lace, so things like barium and some other stuff. I didn’t know I was pregnant then. I had this early miscarriage during the time I was actually there. That’s when the lightbulb went off. I started researching the impact of chemicals on pregnancy—were they mutagens, were they carcinogens, and started learning that a lot of artists don’t have a long life expectancy, and a lot of that can be related to the products they are using to make art. At the time there was an organization in New York that had started spearheading informational campaigns or had formed an organization to educate artists about hazardous art supplies. I don’t remember what they were called, but I wrote this little, four-page thing called “Paint and Pregnancy,” and made a bunch of copies and tried to give them to the paint stores where we were doing business. I wanted them to give out the information to people, but I don't think they wanted to do that. The stuff probably ended up in the garbage can.

BLOOM: Before that, had you thought much about your health in relation to exposure to chemicals?

[00:33:42]

MARSH: No, no. This was all new.

BLOOM: Okay, so when you got pregnant with your first child, did you immediately stop working in that environment? How did that play out?

MARSH: When I realized I was pregnant again, I got out of there as soon as I could, and just started doing the bookkeeping and office paperwork stuff for the business at that point. I think I was probably there about a month until I realized I was pregnant, and then got out.

BLOOM: Was your husband supportive?

MARSH: Yes, though not—how can I put this? Some people research things and want to find out information and then act on it. For all the good qualities that my husband had, he was never interested in finding out more, like how to mitigate exposures for example. At the time, architects and designers were specking on automotive lacquers, automotive finishes to put on furniture in the home, so baby furniture, we were working with a lot of custom cabinet makers,

kitchens, tables—gosh, you name it. We were all getting inspected on automotive lacquers, some with isocyanate. I began to collect the Material Data Safety sheets and put them in a binder because I understood that's what we were supposed to do. We had to write up a safety manual for employees because at that time we started to get employees. All the work that I did, to try and put things in place, and create spaces where the binder and other material would be easily accessible—that wasn't supported. Then when it came to him coming home with clothing that had the dust particles on it, it was very hard to get him to take those clothes off and put them someplace where the babies—or the baby at the time—wouldn't be picking up the dust crawling on the floor. It was very difficult, so I would be exposed to the dust, and so, of course, were the kids.

BLOOM: Did it make you ill or did it trigger any reactions when you were exposed to that?

[00:36:43]

MARSH: Well, yes, during my pregnancy with my first, that's when I started noticing that all of a sudden, I could not stand perfumes. I couldn't figure out why, and by that point, I had already gone to the workshops and had that miscarriage—my awareness was much increased. Though I didn't know there was a name for environmental illness, I had no idea, I just started getting sick all the time, sinus infections and fatigue and all kinds of stuff. I was pretty much sick all the time for the first three years of my oldest kid's life. But I remember the big—sorry, I'm searching for words here. The big revelation came when I was looking at a California Department of Labor Collaborative booklet—I think it was the California Department of Health, it was called something like "Working with Solvents Safely." Julia Kendall had already put out her list of most common fragrance ingredients, and I remember seeing a chemical in this, Department of Public Health, Department of Labor handbook, that was also in Julia Kendall's list. I don't know if you've run across people yet who've mentioned Julia Kendall, but that list was really famous, and it went around a lot in flyers. And so, looking at that going "Oh my God." Here's products, paint products, coatings, solvents, whatever, that require a Material Safety Data Sheet if you use them, and there's safety precautions. So, can of paint—I forget what the chemical was, but can of paint—with the chemical, here's safety information. However, if you're a woman, and you go in and you buy a fragrance, and it's got the same stuff in it, do they give you a Material Safety Data Sheet and health precautions to go with your bottle of fragrance? No, they don't. And that was huge for me to understand that I wasn't crazy for reacting to fragrances. I couldn't figure out why. But that these were similar, these chemicals were being used in both kinds of products.

BLOOM: Yes. When did you put it together—that it was fragrance that was causing you to be ill?

MARSH: Oh, when I was pregnant, and I went with my husband to a basketball game. There was some woman sitting near us who was just reeking. I felt so sick, and dizzy, and awful. I don't know if we could move—we might have had to leave early. It made me realize I can't be around these things. And then, of course, once I understood what was making me sick, I would notice more and more that, "Oh yeah, there's perfume around." I was also reacting to other things, obviously solvents, carpeting, commercial carpeting, a lot of other stuff. That's one of the

other things at the public affairs consulting company; we moved into new office space and put down brand new carpeting and paint in the offices, so that might have helped contribute to the toxins that I was exposed to. Before our furniture finishing company, I believe there was exposure there as well.

[00:40:46]

BLOOM: You figured out you were reacting to this exposure, to different toxins. Did you express that to your husband?

MARSH: Yes, I used to try to talk him into—so I started looking at, try to find information. I think Heal was an organization out of the South. Trying to convince him to school the designers and the architects to use safer products, but I think it was very hard for him to do. He'd been a house painter. He'd been up to his elbows in benzene as a kid, cleaning brushes, and his aunt and uncle's paint shop back in Kentucky. I think he had just acquired this, let's please the customer, they're paying the bills for out little household here. I think that it's truly terrible that he's had to take on his own toxic load simply to support his wife and child, and then children. But he was not of the kind of person to try and educate the (ambient noise over speech) to use safer materials.

BLOOM: Yes, and what about seeking help from outside? Did you seek any medical attention?

MARSH: Except for an allergist, everybody's eyes glazed over; they still do. They think this is some kind of neurotic pretense that I have. Nobody ever goes into depth, except when I saw a homeopathic M.D. Now that was crucial also. But nobody wants to understand what it's like and how these things can impact you. They really don't, for the most part. It's just outside the medical system. And these were in the early days when there was a Stanford—I believe he was a psychiatrist, or a psychologist at the very least—who was running around—Abba (I.) Terr . He was tight with the chemical manufacturing association, and he was running all over the United States giving talks about how we were all just kind of crazy, and it was all psychosomatic and not real, and therefore, nobody should pay attention to our complaints.

BLOOM: Did you meet others with environmental illness?

MARSH: Yes. What happened was, when I first heard the term, I complained. By this point my oldest kid was in parent participation nursery school in San Francisco. You have to attend meetings, twice a month, to be with the other parents and talk about how you are running the school. I was complaining about the fragrances used in the meetings, and asked the director, "Can we please ask people not to wear this stuff to the meetings?" She popped out with an announcement of "We have someone in this school with environmental illness," and I go, "What? There's a name for this?" That's when I began trying to find other people, and so I eventually found—and I don't even remember how—the Environmental Health Network (EHN) of California, the organization out of Marin County that Susan Malloy was part of, and Barbara Wilkie, and a bunch of great people. Julia Kendall was still alive at that point. The early days of AOL had just started, and so there was an MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) chat group on

AOL. It was so cute. That was my Friday night, that was my social life, was that couple of hours, and that MCS chat group was amazing.

[00:45:02]

BLOOM: What was so amazing about it?

MARSH: God, that we could talk about this stuff with people that understood. We'd get in there and talk. I was typing on an Apple IIc—that was my first computer, was an Apple IIc. That's how long ago it was, the early days of AOL where they sent you a disk to get it into your computer. And so we get in on this really unsophisticated looking screen, and we'd be typing and telling stories and complaining. I remember there was one guy who'd call himself the masked avenger. He was hilarious. Then there were other times where we would make up songs to Broadway show tunes but with MCS inspired lyrics, so there was a lot of humor and light-hearted camaraderie, along with also the really intense piece of information or stories of what people were going through. I just remember living for that part of the week where my husband was with the kids—by that time there were two kids—and I could just get on there and talk with people about what was going on.

BLOOM: Do you happen to remember around what year it was that you discovered this chat group? How did you discover it?

MARSH: Let's see—I am not sure how I discovered it. I don't remember. Of course, this was the early days of the internet, so I must have stumbled across it somehow. I mean, obviously, I did. It might have been from Julia Kendall's handout. I think somehow I had a paper copy of it, and I'm not sure how I got it, but there must have been some information about EHN. Or I remember calling Julia Kendall up and talking with her. I think that's how I found EHN actually—was through a conversation with her. She was sick again, and pretty much stuck in her apartment, but it's been a long time since I've tried to remember all of this. Yes, there was something else I was going to mention about that—anyway, it escaped me.

BLOOM: Was Julia Kendall the first person with environmental illness that you met? The first other person?

MARSH: That I spoke with. I never got to meet her in person unfortunately, but I think she was. And Barb Wilkie was another really, really early contact. She was on the EHN board. I ended up being president because by that time I had something I wanted to call "Working Fragrance Free" because I really wanted to go back to work. I knew I couldn't go back to work at Balmar, and I would still handle the books and the bookkeeping. I wanted to do something. Even though both of my kids were still little, I didn't necessarily want to leave them, but I still wanted the option of being able to work at some point.

[00:48:45]

BLOOM: Did the onset of environmental illness affect relationships that you had? Maybe with friends, or with your husband, or with family?

MARSH: Oh yes, yes all of the above. It definitely affected our marriage profoundly. I don't think my husband expected that he would have to be able to be the one to be economically responsible for all of us because when I met him I was working. I was working more than he was. I had a decent job at a corporation that was doing interesting things. Neither one of us expected that this would happen, and so that was hard. I couldn't go places with him and not get sick. I think the last time I went on a real outing with him, except for maybe a restaurant, was having to go—we got, Clay gave him tickets to the San Francisco ballet. We went, but I had my respirator on the whole time. This is not so fun, for many reasons, and I think it was hard for him to be with me when I had that thing on.

For my mother, before she got sick, she would test products out on me. She wanted to be supportive, but she'd keep finding things that weren't right, and then come over, rub them on her body, and then say, "Is this okay?" I was like, "No, go away." Some people I just had to stop seeing, some friends. In fact, we were in the Noe Valley area of San Francisco at that time—sort of above the Castro, and into Noe Valley. This was a time when a lot of older women were having babies all of a sudden, so everybody rolling up and down 24th street was in my age bracket, but so many of them were scented, and also a lot of people who were taking care of babies were also scented. I just spent the entire life of the early ages of my children's lives, dodging people at playgrounds, and science museums, and just dealing with it constantly. And always having to pull my kids away from something because all of a sudden somebody was in my airspace. I started calling them solvent-based life forms. I would tell my kids, "Hey, solvent-based life form, we got to go."

BLOOM: And did your kids have environmental illness? Were they showing signs of it?

MARSH: I used to think that my youngest was reacting once he got in school, but that doesn't seem to have played out. Now, unfortunately, both my kids vape and use some scented products, so that's really rough.

BLOOM: Is it hard to be around them when they're using scented products?

MARSH: Yes, they try to be considerate about that. Obviously, they lived their entire life with me being affected. But just the fact that they are not listening to me about this that these are hazardous just makes me want to throw my hands in complete frustration.

BLOOM: Yes, so you mentioned that the last outing you went on you were wearing a respirator?

MARSH: Yes, the chemical cartridge respirator, which is the kind of thing we would wear down at the shop. We used protectants, spray suits, and respirators, and so on. But I'd say it was the last outing where we tried to go to a production together. Most of the time if we went out at all, which was rare, it would be to a restaurant, and if course there were people who wear fragrances at restaurants. So I'm always complaining. This is the terrible thing that you turn into, is a person who's always complaining because there's always somebody out there with this stuff.

[00:53:30]

BLOOM: Yes, and when did you decide that you could wear a respirator to go out? Was it something that you learned from other folks? Or was it something that you decided to do for yourself?

MARSH: Well, Steve had access to them, it was easy. I knew other people at that point who would wear respirators outside. I didn't particularly like doing it. They hurt, and I react to the plastics, but sometimes it was necessary. I also had a lightweight, charcoal filter mask that had been created by a woman in Chicago—the I Can Breathe! Mask—with these disposable, charcoal filters. Those would sometimes take the edge off things. But sometimes my left ear would detect a chemical before the rest of my body did. That was really weird. I could feel the presence of a chemical in my eardrum. It sounds so weird, it's only my left eardrum. And then, I'd smell it. It was so strange.

BLOOM: What does it feel like to feel a chemical in your eardrum?

MARSH: It hurts. Yes, it's like starting to get an earache, which I do get from time to time. Happened a lot when I was a kid actually.

BLOOM: And you also mentioned you saw a homeopathic M.D? At what point did you see this doctor?

MARSH: Let's see. I think my youngest was about three at that time, so this would've been—I don't know like '98, '99, something like that. Probably around '99. I went to see this guy who I'd heard someone talking about homeopathy, this guy was really very well thought of in San Francisco, Dr. Corey Weinstein. I have to admit the homeopathic remedy he gave me was really great. It helped to give me some space, some relief from the continuous sinus infections, and then I could begin also understanding what was it that made me sick. There was a point where I got everything out of my house that was toxic. Everything was fragrance free or very low environmental impact. I should also mention that I started going back to school at the point when my kids were young, hoping to train myself up into somebody that would be worthwhile enough to hire and also accommodate. That didn't really work out, but I did go back to school, and started doing things to try to—I had to get accommodation, of course, from student services, disability offices, and such.

BLOOM: What did you go to school for?

[00:56:40]

MARSH: I first went back—okay, so I got my GED, which I hadn't technically graduated from a high school that was accredited, so they had these—hippie-free school. Okay, so I got my GED, then I talked my way into a program at University of San Francisco. At the time, they had an institute for nonprofit management, and they had a development director certificate program. And because I was interested in activism and had started a nonprofit myself without really knowing what I was doing—the Hypatia Cluster—which had dwindled after about three years of operation. I became interested in fundraising, and I thought, well this is a great skill that would make me hirable. Maybe somebody would think I was worthwhile enough to make a no fragrance policy, to get me onboard. Yes, the Student Services Disability Office was great there.

Not all the classmates were responsive or happy, but I basically was able to sit in those classes, do okay. Then I got pregnant with my youngest and had to take a leave of absence for a little while. I also want to back up a bit on that.

BLOOM: Yes.

MARSH: Trying to have an unscented childbirth is really hard because nurses were still wearing stuff. And I was hospitalized when I was pregnant with my first kid for preterm labor and was in the hospital for a week, and then on strict bed rest for eleven more weeks.

When I was pregnant with my second, I had a birth plan with fragrance free in it and talked it all over with my doctor who was supportive of that. Everyone's really big on birth plans. I'm so sorry I am all over the map here, but you have to understand it's a weird life that doesn't make sense. I also had gone through doula training to do postpartum doula work because I also thought that would be a way to make a contribution. I had to battle people with essential oils at that point because they thought essential oils were all healthy and wonderful. It's never ending. And then, I realized I couldn't go into people's homes anymore either. The doula thing came after the nonprofit program. So, I took a leave of absence. I'm sorry, I am jumping around.

BLOOM: Don't worry, it's okay.

[00:59:31]

MARSH: There's so many interlocking circles of things that happened. But when I was pregnant with my second kid Paul—okay, so Asher is my oldest, Paul is my youngest and Asher is transgender by the way. I had a daughter for eighteen years, and then Asher transitioned, but that's an aside, but I always say Asher now when I'm referring to my oldest kid. I started having preterm labor symptoms again when I was pregnant with Paul, go to Kaiser to check in, and this nurse was reeking. It was really, really, really hard to tell her that I couldn't have her as my nurse because she was black. Even though I told her it was in my birth plan, I had this terrible feeling that she just thought I was objecting to her, and not to her fragrance, and that was really, awful because I did not want to be that microaggressive white woman, you know what I mean? Because that's awful. But she was really wearing way too much fragrance, and why do that on a maternity ward? I don't understand. But then I was on bed rest for three weeks with Paul. Anyway, that's an aside. I ended up having him at home accidentally.

BLOOM: Oh, really?

MARSH: Yes, thank God there was—my midwife hired someone to be a doula who was actually a midwife. She ended up being my midwife, so that worked out okay, but that was a little unexpected. Anyway, so cycling back, school—so the first thing I tried was this nonprofit thing, leave of absence, went back, finished the program. It was a year-long program, nonprofit fundraising, but then didn't really want to get a job at that point because now I had another young kid, and wanted to stay home with him, take care of him at least for the next couple of future years. Once we moved to the East Bay I got the—what do you call it—the epiphany that I wanted to go to sexology school. There was this place in the city that was a private grad school for sexology, so then I went. My midlife crisis was all about going back to school.

BLOOM: Okay, and so there's a few things I want to follow up on. You had mentioned that you wanted to go to school for the nonprofit certificate so that you could hopefully convince someone that you were worth hiring and making an accommodation for. Had you tried to find work and ask for accommodations before that?

MARSH: Yes, I'm trying to remember where I applied. Some little jobs. What was I looking at? I'm sorry I don't remember. I know there was a point where I actually thought I could go back to work at Balmar. Like an idiot, I thought that maybe I'd be able to manage that. And walked into the shop, and, talked with my husband and then realized that there's no way—Because I got sick again probably—that there's no way I could go back into that environment. And so that made me want to find something else.

[01:03:27]

BLOOM: Yes. You talked about asking for a fragrance-free environment at your son's school. Do you remember doing any other things like that where you had to advocate for yourself? As like a DIY advocacy?

MARSH: Oh yes, at USF, for example. The Student Services Office is great; they were very supportive, but they can ask, and they can be behind you as you ask your fellow student to not wear fragrances in the classroom, but they can't really enforce anything and not everybody will agree to do that. Not everybody did agree to do that. At Berkeley City College, I took a bunch of classes there after the sexology school just because I like to learn, but I mainly go online for classes, so I don't have to deal with it. But I'm always going into places, school, medical offices, just trying to have a normal thing where I can just be there and get done what I need to be done, without having to run into this. I would say the worst situations were, classroom situations—oh, when I was studying hula. That was tough. Constantly trying to get out into the world to do something and then constantly getting slapped back with a fragrance is how it ends up being.

BLOOM: Yes, it sounds like a tough struggle. So we've talked a little bit about what it was like when your children were really young, and then you mentioned you wanted to go to school for sexology. So, can you tell me a little about that?

MARSH: Yes, that actually worked out pretty well. It was a very small school and it was a little easier to get people to listen to me. Mainly because a lot of people who were also attending had been in the helping professions, one way or another, so they were a little more receptive and kinder. There was one woman in the office who wore fragrance, but I just stayed clear of her. Later on, I ended up working there for about six months. And that woman actually refrained from using the fragrance while I was working there. So that worked out okay because it was small and the type of people who were there. I had figured out at this point that it would be very hard to be hired, so that my best option— because I tried to get some fundraising jobs also during that time, or at least one or two fundraising jobs. I figured out the only way I could earn a living would be to have a private practice or be an entrepreneur of some sort or be a consultant or something. And, so, I was very interested in the topic of human sexuality and thought I'll just do that. I'll see people, and I'll tell them to come fragrance free that way I can control my environment and be able to work.

BLOOM: Were you still on the MCS AOL board or communicating with others with environmental illness at this point?

MARSH: No, not that much at that point. Though, because there's a point I was on the board of EHN for a while. And president, and then board member, and then I was just too overwhelmed with taking care of children, and finding it really overwhelming to be engaged with people who are very, very sick and very desperate. It was more than I could handle, emotionally, at that point, because I was overwhelmed. I was dealing with my own illness and fatigue issues and so on, and so I resigned from EHN. The MCS chat group had fallen away around that time too probably. I backed away from environmental health activism for the most part and concentrated on home and family for a while, and then, go back to school.

[01:08:35]

BLOOM: Were you still with your husband, at this point?

MARSH: Yes. My divorce was only final in 2016. But we were estranged for many years and just co-parenting in the same house for a long time.

BLOOM: Okay, so once you finished school, you got another job at the office—at the school, is that correct?

MARSH: Well, there's some time between that. I actually went through two different programs at the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, and got a DHS (Doctorate in Human Sexuality), and ND (Naturopathic Doctor). DHS is a professional doctorate which I—the school was not what it used to be by the time I got there, but it was still okay-ish. And then I got a ND in Doctor of education and human sexuality and created a 150-hour course on music hypnosis for sexual concerns, which I actually got to teach online through them for a couple of years. And then, after that, got hired on as dean of students for six months. And at that point the school was really crumbling and had been admonished by the California Bureau for Private and Post-Secondary Education, I think it was. Anyway, the BPPE, something—yes, the place was falling apart. It just ended being terrible in that stretch of time. Interesting.

BLOOM: Yes, when did you start your own practice?

MARSH: I really started it in 2008. So, after I got the DHS, and I went through hypnosis training and was actually able to get accommodation from them for that training period. That was great. That's pretty much when I hung up my shingle for real. I had a part-time private practice in the Bay Area.

BLOOM: Okay, and you were doing the fragrance-free policy for this too?

MARSH: Yes, absolutely.

BLOOM: And how did that work out?

[01:11:10]

MARSH: Mostly pretty good. Although there were a couple of times where I had to tell clients to leave because they came in reeking. They were not happy about that, but the ones that I had to ask to leave weren't the ones who came back.

BLOOM: Right, well that's wonderful you did that part-time practice. I'm not super familiar with the geography—you said at one point you moved to the East Bay, so this is when you were in the Bay Area, is that correct?

MARSH: Yes.

BLOOM: And did your environmental illness continue to have impacts on your life at this point?

MARSH: Oh absolutely, yes. I would try to be involved in my kids' schools, and not always be successful at that because of fragrance. What ends up happening is it's a very uneven involvement because there's the up and down of being sick, and the up and down of getting exposed and having energy or not having energy. Chronic fatigue has definitely been a part of this. I tend—when I'm feeling good or not feeling brain fogged or too tired—to really want to go out and do stuff, or get involved with something or have a project, and then I do that until the next exposure or the next collapse. I ended up probably seeming flaky at times because that's just how the illness was operating with me, if that makes sense. I couldn't be 100 percent reliable. I could be as reliable as I could in the moment, but not always able to fulfill all commitments, which makes me feel bad. Once my kids started to turn into teenagers, and their friends started using all these scented products, and I'd be driving them around, there was so many times when I'd say to these kids, "Could you just like—if you know that I'm going to be carpooling—could you please not wear this stuff?" And then, they're kids, they forget. Driving with all the windows rolled down on a cold day, and looking too odd. If you're a kid you do not want a mother that has to say things about somebody else's fragrance. It's so personal. I think it was very difficult.

BLOOM: It's understandable. You hinted that your kids, as teenagers, felt odd—were they also understanding at times?

MARSH: Oh yes. But it's one thing to be understanding at home, and then it's another thing to try to navigate the social implications with your peers when your mother's ragging on your best friend's shampoo. Not that I would try to go into a tirade or anything, but it's just, teenagers are really sensitive. My older kid was trying to find his own way, dealing with the issues of not being seen as the gender that he felt he was. For a lot of that time I didn't understand that's what was going on with him. But I think he had additional challenges socially because he was being seen as a girl and he actually wasn't a girl.

[01:15:28]

BLOOM: Yes, that's a lot of complex factors that intertwine.

MARSH: Quite a lot. May we take a brief break? I've got to use the restroom. Okay, so I'm going to put the phone down now. I'll be right back.

BLOOM: Sounds good. Okay, give me one second. Okay, and at this point let me do a brief check in. So, it's about—What time is it? 11:17, are you still feeling good? Ready to power through the remainder of the oral history?

MARSH: I can power through, yes.

BLOOM: Sounds good. So, tell me then, what your life looked like once you started your part-time private practice?

MARSH: What my life looked like—things were bad in the marriage. I'm dealing with two teenagers, but again, living in a nice community, with trees and charming little houses. Now I have colleagues, and sexology, and doing interesting projects and very involved. Also learning about Hawaiian culture and activism around certain issues there. I get these special interests, okay? And I become very passionate about them and I just dive in deep and run with it as much as I can. So between sexology and Hawaiian stuff, and learning how to be a good clinician and taking lots of other continuing education courses, and I was healthier. I was mostly avoiding stuff that's toxic— began to pay off, and that actually started happening once we moved to the East Bay and out of the house where we were living. It was a much healthier environment. The house in Albany didn't have mold issues, didn't have a leaky gas stove, and it was a lot better place to be in. So I had become healthier, but still avoiding anything I could because I could get sick at any moment depending on what I bumped into. I was actually feeling pretty good about myself, and I was finding myself as somebody who had done some interesting work and was ready to do more. I was writing a lot, also very engaged with learning more about hypnosis. I was even at the point where I could sometimes go to a conference and make a presentation. I did a few of those, and was also doing some online teaching. I created some different courses on human sexuality. So, intellectually and creatively feeling pretty great.

BLOOM: Yes, and you continued with your practice, your clinical sexology practice, for how long? You are still practicing right, correct?

MARSH: Well, technically. If I had any clients left, I would be. I moved to Hawaii once our youngest graduated from high school, and it was clear that, my husband and I were going to sell the house. And we did sell the family house, and I moved to Hawaii for various reasons, and that ended up being a disaster. I did try to find clients and start a practice there, and did a little bit of work but not much. It's a tough place. I was on Hawaii Island. It's a tough place to break into. And it wasn't like the Bay Area, which is used to more frank conversations about human sexuality. It was very different over in Hawaii. And here in Lake County, where I am now, I moved back September 2017—this is also a tough place to crack, for other reasons. Every now and then I have a client. I work online, at this point.

[01:21:22]

BLOOM: Yes, and how did you do with your environmental illness in Hawaii? What was that like?

MARSH: Oh my God, they use Roundup, the county of Hawaii. I was in the Puna district, which is south of Hilo. This is the district that was covered with lava last year, quite a lot of it. I

don't know if you followed that at all. It was pretty intense. But the County of Hawaii sprays Roundup everywhere, along the roadsides by schools, by churches. I realized I'd moved to a subdivision where, every now and then, I'd have to dodge the spraying that was happening along the road, and there was only one road to get out of where I lived to get back on to the main highway to get anywhere. So that was more challenging than I thought. I'd always felt good. I'd visited Hawaii actually fairly often between 2000 and 2015 because I always felt good there. I felt a lot healthier, and I'd made friends and was deeply in love with the place and what I had learned about the culture, some of the political activism struggles. But, actually being in a very humid climate ended up not being good for me, and I hadn't realized it would be that way. I think the Roundup was the most challenging. Also it's not a culture there and I'm talking about overall culture, like the colonial U.S overall on top of everything else that's there. It's not like the Bay Area, it's not like Berkeley, where there's disability access recognition. It was not helpful to me. I could not talk to people about, "Hey, I'm at a meeting to stop the bombing of Pohakuloa, but over here, people are wearing a lot of fragrance, I'm sorry I just can't be here." That was just like, "What?" It hadn't come up that way. The Berkeley disability community is quite different from most places in the world, I think. There, you might not get a good response, but someone would at least know what you were talking about.

BLOOM: Yes, and did that have anything to do with you moving back to California, from Hawaii?

MARSH: Partially. Also just missing my kids a lot, and all my friends who are here in California. And I'm still exiled because I'm three hours away, but at least I'm closer than I was.

[01:24:38]

BLOOM: One thing I forgot to ask about was when did you become the president of the Environmental Health Network?

MARSH: I think it was about, maybe '97 or '98, and then Barb Wilkie was president after me. It happened in the first few years of my youngest kid's life, and he was born in '96. I think that—Oh, now it's all making sense, the Working Fragrance-Free thing, it was definitely at the same time as the fundraising program at USF. I'm understanding now that I'm looking back and looking at the timing because I was trying to make myself employable with this new valuable skill and at the same time hoping to be able to create awareness in the general workplace, or some workplace somewhere, instead of trying to handle two things at once, and then EHN came in, or I came in to EHN, I should say.

BLOOM: Okay, I'll make sure that we adjust that on the record.

MARSH: Okay, yes. Thank you.

BLOOM: And you also mentioned that you stopped communicating with the folks on the MCS board because it just didn't exist anymore.

MARSH: The chat room.

BLOOM: The chat room.

MARSH: Yes, it just for some reason started falling apart, and people just weren't getting on that much anymore. I'm not sure why.

BLOOM: Do you still today communicate with other folks with environmental illness? Is that a big part of your life?

MARSH: Yes, I'm on a couple of Facebook groups. I don't go in them every day, but I stay in touch to some extent. And some of the old EHN crowd are in—Well, one is an EHN Facebook group. The other thing was while I was becoming a sexologist, I was also looking at what are the effects of toxic chemicals on people's sex lives. I created a course that was an online course taught through Sex Coach University on Ecosexology. I'd written up a little booklet called Toxins Ate My Sex Life, which were professional person's reflections on chemical exposure issues and talking about different things—what's it like to try and accommodate a partner who has chemical sensitivity issues, and also some of the information that was coming up around endocrine disruptors and their effects on people's reproductive systems. So, nothing terribly scientific, but more like a strategic, here's some issues to be aware of. Because there's also this green sex thing coming on—green sex products, sex toys that you can buy that you're not going to react to. There's a lot to be said.

BLOOM: Yes, of course. And have you met a network of people through that work?

MARSH: I wouldn't say a network. I'm on the fringe, frankly. I'm on the fringe as a sexologist. I've done a real simple non-scientific study of objectum sexuals and it's—I wrote it up and it got published in the Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality. And that's what I've been known for. And hypnosis, again that's kind of fringy and then this eco-sexology thing, like, "Say what?" And now, I'm investing spectrasexuality. People who say they have sexual experiences with unsane beings, I mean—going after the things that are more unusual.

BLOOM: Yes, of course. That sounds fascinating.

[01:29:36]

MARSH: It actually is. It's very interesting. All of it's very interesting. So, I had this Australian news crew come a few weeks ago because they were doing a show on objectum sexuals. And they led the sound guy, the lighting guy, the reporter, Denham Hitchcock, and the producer, Karen, they came into my house. They had to come fragrance free. The producer made sure they had special bars of unscented soap that they were using before they got here. Or I'm just giving you a couple of super real, super recent examples. The other day I had to get a prescription filled. I drove up to the drug store window; they have that here because I didn't want to go inside. I just didn't want to get exposed to all the stuff inside. Sometimes I'll go inside, sometimes I won't. That day I didn't want to. The pharmacist was wearing super smelly hand lotion and it coated the bottles and the instruction manual for these pills, so I had to keep them outside because I didn't have a Ziplock bag ready. I called and complained. And then I'm just going through this whole thing with the Odd Fellows on attempting to find communities here. So I joined this faltering lodge, which has very few members but the secretary of the organization said they could accommodate me, so I thought "Well, great." Then two guys used this floor product on one of

the lodge halls, and just texted me and said, “Here’s the label, and we are going to use this tomorrow.” I was just so frustrated. That’s why I spent two days working on a letter requesting formal accommodation. I quote unquote “issued a white paper” online, and that this would be interesting and beneficial to the club, because it’s made a point of doing outreach to people in different communities, and it might not have a flagging membership, but you have to know how to do it and do it well. Things are always coming up.

[01:32:06]

BLOOM: Yes, it sounds like you at least have responses at the ready, or at least a toolkit for how to deal with them.

MARSH: I do, to some extent although I think I might go a little over the top. I think if there’s anything I want to say, in this, sorry—I almost can’t talk now. The social isolation is absolutely overwhelming and corrosive, and we have a high suicide rate in this community. People get to the point where they can’t bear it. They’ve lost their family, they’ve lost their friends, they’ve lost prospects, they’ve lost opportunities. They’re impoverished. It’s terrible, and people don’t understand. You get told to go to a senior center and take an exercise class. It’s like well, let’s see how that’s going to work out because generally it doesn’t. And it’s always because of fragrance. You are probably already hearing that a lot. But I think now, people are now doing studies about the effects of loneliness and how it’s even worse than smoking in terms of mortality. It’s absolutely true.

BLOOM: Yes, on that note, I’ll ask you the final question which is about the future. What do you hope will change in the years to come with this social treatment of chemical sensitivity and environmental illness?

MARSH: I want to see precautionary principle put into place in every level of policy making from local to national and everything in between. If we operated on a precautionary principle, we wouldn’t be in this mess. Obviously, capitalism fuels this dumping of toxicity into every single aspect of our lives. I’d like to see that change, but I’m not very hopeful that it will. But I think we’re at the tipping point of a huge public health disaster. We may even be and actually don’t know it yet. What I would hope would change is that people start understanding just how bad these products and formulations are. How untested they are. How much of their hard-earned money is going to buying things that are eventually going to make the sick or possibly even kill them. Who knows? But, I think these products make us diminished in some way in our capacity for empathy and maybe even also for understanding the complexities of what we’re dealing with here. I guess my most realistic hope is that, just like with cigarette smoking, that it somehow becomes banned and rude to wear your fragrances in public. I keep harping on fragrances because that’s what is out there the most that causes access problems for absolutely everything and obviously there’s other bad things out there like pesticides and so on. But the fragrances are the worst because they are everywhere.

BLOOM: Yes, absolutely. Wow, thanks! You have quite the story. Is there anything else, right now, that you want to add? We can always touch base again as memories come up. Is there anything you want to add?

[01:36:39]

MARSH: I don't think so. I think I've given you quite a lot. I've given myself more than I thought in trying to remember these things. I think I feel pretty complete.

BLOOM: Wonderful. Okay, yes, and I'm really appreciative of your time. We spent far more than an hour talking about your history, so I really appreciate it.

MARSH: Thank you. It feels good to be able to be part of something that might do some good. I've been waiting for almost thirty years for people to start taking this seriously, so it's quite hopeful. I was hopeful when the Environmental Working Group did their "Not Too Pretty" project, and I'm hopeful about the work you're doing in Chemical Entanglements. I believe there is a very—we didn't get into this much—definitely, definitely, a gendered aspect to this in so many ways that I can't even touch on right now because we're at the end of our time. But just looking at the products that men use against Material Safety Data Sheet, and all the parts per million or parts per billion that are supposed to be safe. Those are based on adult male bodies and then you buy the other stuff, the household cleaning products, the personal care products, and the perfumes. You don't get a material data sheet with that, and the biggest consumers are women.

BLOOM: Yes, absolutely.

MARSH: Yes, so we're targeted for consumer toxins. Big time.

BLOOM: Yes, that's part of why we believe it's important to take this sort of feminist perspective on the gendered impacts of endocrine disrupting chemicals.

MARSH: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Molly. This has been great. I appreciate it.

BLOOM: Thank you, Amy. I appreciate it, too.

(End of March 21, 2019 interview)