

WILPF	
INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET	Title Page
Ref. No.:	Wav file Refs: (Administrator use only)
Collection title:	
Interviewee's surname: Baker	Title:
Interviewee's forenames: Martha Jean	Sex: F
Occupation: International Vice-President of WII DC	Date of birth: 22 nd September 1944 in Baltimore, Maryland
Date(s) of recording, Compact Flash used, tracks (from – to): 2/2/2015	
Location of interview: Interviewee's Home, central London	
Name of interviewer: Olivia Dickinson	
Type of recorder: Zoom?	
Total no. of tracks: 1	Recording Format: Wav 16bit 48khz
Mono or stereo: Stereo	
Total Duration: (HH:MM:SS) 58:41	
Additional material:	
Copyright/Clearance:	
Interviewer's comments:	

Summary of second interview with Martha Jean Baker

2nd Feb 2015. More about activities in WILPF in Seattle. Quite active after joined in 1987. Lots of meetings, some quite deadly – too much talking. Through membership of WILPF represented WILPF on Seattle Coalition for Peace in the Middle East. Other activities included Hiroshima Day and other events. Official role in the section: became Legislative Chair. Thinking of how to lobby the state legislature in Washington State.

[02:00] At one point MJB worked on campaign for the man who became Governor: Mike Lowry. Solicit food and drink for victory party. Patty Murray was running for the Senate for the State of Washington. She was running as ‘the mom in tennis shoes’. She was elected and is still a Senator. Shortly after she was elected there was a WILPF congress in Richmond Virginia. MJB to go to DC to lobby Washington State federal legislators on healthcare and other issues. Seattle had a congressman who was the only medical doctor in Congress and he’d put together a fine health proposal. MJB went to lobby Patty Murray. Patty Murray had just recovered from a serious illness and had the benefit of the federal employees’ healthcare insurance. PM said no, she was going to support Clinton’s proposal. Clinton’s not ready, why? Patty Murray followed everything Clinton did.

[05:00] Lobbying on my own in DC but can’t remember.

Q: were you trained in lobbying?

One time I was sort of given training before the Prep comms for the international criminal court. Everybody has their own style, found my own way.

Q: did you practise?

I think I just went straight into it. Never really been at a loss for words. Always raise my hand at Q&A time.

[07:00] Moved to Chicago and joined WILPF Chicago branch. Had had a fair amount of money but had suffered terribly in McCarthy era. Another US WILPF congress was coming up, in Greeley Colorado: I asked to go and was sent to that one. US section divided up into 10,000 members. Section divided up into regions, regional representatives on US board and branch representatives. Anyone could go to the Congress – conducted business such as resolutions and voting on candidates, which the US section doesn’t do any more. MJB doesn’t know when it changed. Section membership now down to under 5000.

[09:15] Q: any particular people you met at either Congress?

At both MJB met people already knew or got to know. At Richmond greeted by name by a woman who was recruited to WILPF by MJB’s mother. Now in her 90s, still in touch. Got in touch with major players and saw them again in Greeley. Greeley was the first place that the congress did ‘open space’ – take a sticky, put it on a board, a room will be assigned, however long it lasts, what will happen is meant to happen. Very ‘loosey goosey’ but I liked it and have proposed it for something coming up next month. Much better than planned workshops! Much better than having speakers who go on interminably.

When Jean Gore was President of the section there was a plenary – 200 odd women – discussing different resolutions. Lots of different positions being taken across the room by different women and so the Chair (probably Jean Gore) looked at the ‘loudmouths’ and said

'you, you, you, you leave the room and come to something all of you can agree on'. They did. Always able to build a consensus, it was amazing.

Shortly after Greeley congress MJB left Chicago. Meeting with Edith Ballantyne [in Geneva before moving to Chicago – see part 1] about becoming a lawyer to help WILPF was a 'strong encouragement'. Edith and MJB strong friends and Edith active in the International Constitution committee previously and this year.

[13:41] London. Knew there was going to be an IEC (International Executive Committee) but now called IB (International Board). MJB changed the name to reflect it was a larger meeting. ExCom for Executive Committee.

1997. MJB moved here in April – Labour success May 1st 1997. MJB knew there was going to be the IEC meeting in London in August. Had name and phone number for Richenda Barbour and one other member. 1st August I called Richenda – her husband said she's away and discovered later she was away at the residential IEC. Follow up meeting for some international WILPF people at the [Quaker] International Centre at Byng Place, 2 minutes' walk from the flat she now lives in. 1968 my first husband and I had stayed there for several months. Got there as they were finishing breakfast. Edith was there. Connected with people. Agreed to meet whole group later for meal and jazz concert: Marianela Castillo from Chile, Maria Pagano from Argentina and Cherry Padilla from Philippines and a couple of others. Made MJB feel really connected with the international women. Every time went to Chile met with Maria etc. Chile has just resigned as a section sadly.

[18:20] After that became active in the section. Executive meetings of the UK section open to any member so went to those meetings. Sometimes were at this flat, before WILPF had the office. Fairly quickly elected to the UK executive – 'member at large'. Branch called 'London Lunch' that met in a women's centre in Holborn and then moved to Baptist church nearby. MJB went to those meetings fairly regularly. Richenda was the convenor, good speakers, very interesting but eventually petered out.

[20:23] 2002 (check but see comments at 30:00) Congress in Kungälv, Sweden [WILPF website says 2004?] First international congress MJB went to. Interesting, fun, met lots of people. Richmond congress was very hot and MJB remembers getting glass of ice and half would melt when walking to meetings. Fountains people frolicked in in the evenings.

Sweden: told Executive Meeting was going on and the IEC meeting so MJB went to both and not one to sit silently in the corner. Experiment with a different model of how WILPF would be run and it hadn't been successful: people felt very strongly about that model and others about other models. Put together an ad hoc committee that got to meet while everyone else was playing and having fun. Committee to propose for the last session of the Congress a new structure and how WILPF should operate. Former Secretary General Barbara Lochbihler was there. MJB part of that committee. People had very definite ideas that were not the same. Talked it through and talked it through and did all eventually agree. Agreed to have the structure WILPF had always had – how to sell it as something new to the congress? Triangle: ultimate authority being the Congress, then the different levels. The Executive, which reports to the IEC, which reports... Staff at the bottom of the triangle. Can't remember who presented it. Congress is what makes decisions.

[25:00] This year there's a stitch up in advance and Congress not making decisions – some of us annoyed. Woman who was from California – tall, one leg – head of a committee whose job was to identify and recruit people for different jobs to become active in WILPF. Woman named Mari Holmboe Ruge from Norway who was on the Constitution Committee and had been for donkey's years but didn't want to continue any more. Woman from California (MJB can't remember name, need to check) asked MJB if she wanted to be the convenor of the Constitution Committee, since she was a lawyer. I had sort of wanted to be Convenor of the Personnel committee but I said 'sure'.

Constitution Committee looks at the constitution and sees if it's still fit for purpose. Personnel committee in charge of staff. Kirsti Kalthoff, head of Swedish section, and in every committee, was VP at that time. She became Head of European Women's Lobby, but not representing WILPF though saying she was from WILPF. That was why people wouldn't vote for MJB to be on the board.

IEC or Congress had to appoint me officially. I went around the room finding people from every region of the world and recruiting them to be on the Constitution Committee as I felt we needed a big committee and diversity. Some became active, some did nothing. Byelaws said sections could submit amendments, but the committee couldn't.

[30:00] Sent proposals to the sections hoping they would submit them before congress in Bolivia (2005?) They cherry picked. Chose one that Congress could empower the constitution committee to make amendments on its own. That was passed. As a member of the UK section I could not get the UK section to submit everything. But not everything submitted or passed so constitution has had holes in it since Bolivia.

Few amendments submitted at Costa Rica congress. At the IB meeting that empowered the constitution committee they also passed that all standing committees should have 7 members as the Finance committee had 7 members and that worked. MJB not convenor then. Constitution committee did a fudge – didn't count the convenors, the liaison etc. Added observers. If some of the ExCom members knew who was the most active.... It was good to have the observers. Two active members: Edith and Lyn Lane, plus the observers.

[35:00] Before recent IB meeting, solicited comments from sections and individuals and if got new comments would take those comments and assign a colour and a font (as not everyone has colour printers). All comments put into main document, but visible. Cannot send track changes. GoToMeeting and MJB had screen and did editing together. MJB had decided to ask if Lynn would take it all and clean it up, and she was going to volunteer anyway. That's all in the last few months. Just sent off committee report and not quite final draft to sections and IB members. Look at closely and committee will look at comments if agree with them, if don't agree, put them in in red, italics, square brackets and vote on those at Congress. MJB does not want to go through constitution article by article, vote on it as one package.

[38:17] Q: what would be your hopes for the success and outcomes of the congress in April / May?

Congenial, good Executive elected, from the very first meeting understand to work as a team. Everyone in different countries so work through email or GoToMeeting.

First got email before Microsoft had Windows. More phone calls before email. English is the operating language. Some interpretation at the Congress.

[40:00] What other campaigning or paid work have you done since 1997 in the UK?

Done some work with Malcolm (current husband), MJB more computer literate than him. Have a legal partnership with him as both lawyers so can both run things by each other and not breach confidentiality. Consulted by a previous international president and gave legal advice. Most of what I do or have done is related to WILPF. Women's National Commission – International Working Group – represented WILPF there and people got to know WILPF through that and some joined. CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) members said 'have to have special kind of permission from UN': 'WILPF had the first permission as a women's organisation from the UN!'.

Represented WILPF at the Assembly of State Parties at the ICC (international criminal court) and before ICC came into being on PrepComms for WILPF about crimes. UK Race and Europe Network and MJB is representative from WILPF and no one else wants to do it so she keeps doing that.

MJB and Malcolm recently joined and become somewhat active in the UK Labour Party. And joined a different synagogue and become active in their social action work. Multi-faith work. In winter run a night shelter with six churches. Cooks for the shelter.

Q: Lobbying in UK?

[44:02] if there are issues important to WILPF I phone my MP – lucky enough to have one who agrees with everything – he's retiring and hope next one will be as good or better. International initiative working towards international binding norm on violence against women from domestic violence to FGM, forced marriage. MJB involved in Europe team for that. With WILPF hat on.

Not entirely sure what I will be doing from April. No one asked me to stand for re-election, suddenly feeling sad no one did! Will still be involved as a member – depends on what the Section wants here, what the new international ExCom want me to do.

Q: is there anything in the last 15 years you would have done differently / reflected on / changed in anyway?

I wish I didn't cry so easily. I wish I didn't take some things so seriously and personally and get really excited about things. It gets in the way. A few years ago the UK Section used to be much stronger. We had a new Executive and hired someone from the Quakers to run a one day thing for us all to work together as things had become broken. [Deep sigh]

[47:34] The person who was facilitating it started broad and narrowed to individual. In last section... we were asked to pair up in twos. Be honest with ourselves and about ourselves, say what we did and be self-critical. Sheila came over and wanted to work with me – my heart sank. Have you heard Sheila is 'controversial'? We sat down and I started: very honest about this and that. Then her turn and she said 'Well I know I speak a lot at meetings but everything I say is very important'. MJB then in tears. Reconciliation failed. The Section has gone through some difficult things and not really recovered from them. Lorraine Mirham who used to be very active and then stood back. MJB contacted her once she was International

VP and asked if she wanted to be an international board member. She became active and been very very good. Then elected as international VP. MJB wanted her to become President but not nominated by the Section.

AGM: don't have a president or VP, Anne Scott the secretary won't want to continue, don't know what's going to happen to the UK section. MJB has said no for now to being involved with UK section.

Q: where do you want WILPF to go for the next 100 years, in international terms?

[51:17] WILPF to continue to press on issues. WILPF Executive and Board to keep reminding the Secretary General and Staff this is a membership organisation and to keep the membership more involved. I would like if conflicts in the world remain a flashpoint we look again at our foremothers who put together delegations who went to Heads of State. A few years ago before an IEC meeting in New Zealand, Edel from Norway spoke to the UK section – after 9/11, Iraq war. MJB and Edel decided WILPF should reinstate this [delegations to Heads of State]. Referred it to the IEC meeting and nothing was done: told it was not a resolution it was a programme idea and then it died right there.

[53:51] I'd like to see more younger women become stronger and more active. Younger women are at university or are working and have some time but not much, then they may be married and have children and have less time, then once children are grown have time again. That's a challenge for WILPF keeping women active.

Q: Any aspirations or tips for the UK section and London branch from a UK perspective? What were the successes in your time and what could you build upon?

The UK section needs a lot of stuff. I haven't been so active in it once international VP. Needs to be more coherent on programme, on campaigns. Accept and value the WILPF Trust and trustees. MJB set up the Trust – trying to raise money, so required to be a registered charity. Set up the Trust as a registered charity, modelled after Amnesty International. Checked with Charities Commission. Give as You Live: if you buy anything online as a WILPF supporter and sign up, certain percentage goes to WILPF. Only 15 women have signed up.

Q: anything particular you want to put down for the archive?

Hope the Congress is a success and wish there was more time. Congress is a time when members have time to look at things and be with other members. Swedish congress had speakers to inspire, uninspired, challenge. Congress has no time for political work. Sometimes they forget to put together a programme.