

Bette Lee

SR 11258, Oral History, by Sandy Polishuk

2014 June 17 and December 29



LEE: Bette Lee

SP: Sandy Polishuk

Transcribed by: Jenny Howell, 2015

Audit/edit by: Patricia Hogan, 2015; Sara Stroman, 2015

Reviewed by: Sandy Polishuk and Bette Lee, 2015

Session 1

2014 June 17

SP: Starting, yes. We are on.

LEE: The green light is on.

SP: So let me just quickly, I don't want to wear these, but it is recording and that is the important thing. So I just wanted to check. You never know when you might mess it up. So you kind of indicated that you especially didn't want to talk about personal stuff so much, but I would like to know what got you into photography and how you started doing this work.

LEE: Well, I think that I have always been interested in the creative arts, being a creative person. I dabbled in creative writing and writing poetry and I also tried ceramics, and then I discovered photography by signing up for a class in a community college when I was living in California and I took to it like a duck to water or a fish to water and I just loved it. I just fell in love with it. So that is how it all started. I got really good feedback from my dear teacher, so it just went on from there.

SP: How long ago was that?

LEE: That was about 30 years ago, yes.

SP: Okay.

LEE: Then I enrolled at San Francisco State University and took photography classes, and I studied under a professor who is a very well-known photographer in the Bay Area.

SP: Who was that?

LEE: I think his name was Don White. He was mainly photographing cactus, and the photographers that he emulated were the old-school photographers like Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, Minor White, so they were all doing some abstract, abstract images of still life, and I was like, where are all the people? Because I love to photograph people, and I thought, Ed Weston, he already photographed a pepper, a green bell pepper, maybe it was red, I don't know. He photographed in black and white so, and he probably did the best image anyone could possibly do of a pepper, so why should I? I would just be wasting my time trying, trying to imitate him, and I would never be as good as he was, and anyway, that is not what I was interested in, I was interested in photographing people. So I basically kind of dropped out of school and started photographing on my own and the streets were my classrooms. I hit the streets, and I have been photographing in the streets ever since. So that's how I started.

SP: And when the work I am familiar with...

LEE: If you ever see it, is the demonstrations and political events.

SP: Right. Is that, am I only seeing one part of it, or is that the main focus?

LEE: That's the main focus. Shortly after I arrived in San Francisco, I became involved in the Livermore Action Group, LAG. They were an anti-nuclear group but it was a motley crew. There was hundreds of people and it was quite the movement at the time, and I got involved in affinity groups; that was the beginning of the whole affinity group, the consensus, the process that included consensus, so it was kind of a precursor of a lot of the tactics that were used later on [in Occupy] and so on. And my affinity group was appropriately called, I thought, Overthrow; So it was the most radical group in LAG, and I met all kinds of people and it really helped me to educate myself about the realities of the world and how power works, and the struggle for justice. So, very quickly, I became aware that I could use the camera as a tool to document what was going on at that time.

SP: Was this after you had already dropped out of school?

LEE: It kind of coincided with that, yes, and I thought well, I have a lot more to learn being involved with political activism, involved in the struggle and being on the streets than in the classroom looking at green peppers. So yes, that is how it started, and I think I have always wanted to do something, I have always wanted to live my life in a meaningful way. And not be just a mindless consumer and I have always been interested

in social [and] political realities, and the struggle for justice, really. I know it's, people say that all the time, but I think [there's] real meaning in that.

SP: I understand that.

LEE: For me it was a very fortuitous combination of photography and my beliefs, and so I have been doing that for the last 30 years. I see my work as a historical documentation of the peoples' struggle for justice, what they, that the actions they take or are taking or have taken. What they said, what they did, to try and make this world a better place. I think that's what it's all about.

SP: So how have you used the photographs that you have taken to do that?

LEE: Well, first of all, I make them available to the people who are the activists themselves, the people who are, the people whom I have photographed, and let them use them in whatever ways they see fit. They have been printed in newsletters and magazines like Labor Notes and even Z Magazine. I have tried to get shows on at Portland State University or areas that are accessible to people and not just lah-di-dah art galleries or museums and things like that. They have been used on flyers and postcards and posters, whatever people, and I am talking about the activist community, whatever they see fit, I've make the photos available to them. And I guess this is a continuation, if this gets published in the Oregon Historical Journal, hopefully more people will be, will know of what I have done.

SP: So, what came after Livermore?

LEE: What came after Livermore? Well...

SP: How long did that, were you with them?

LEE: Probably in the early 1980s. I also became an activist against U.S. aggression. That was when Reagan was president, and also what the U.S. did in Grenada and gosh, Nicaragua, supporting the Contras in [Nicaragua] and supporting the death squads and the dictators, like Duarte. So, instead of just being - I guess I expanded my horizons instead of just protesting against the use of nuclear weapons in the arms race. I became aware that there are many, many more issues that are involved, but they are all interconnected. I started connecting the dots.

So that led to me protesting against wars, against occupations, against people like Kissinger. When he came to San Francisco, [there] was a huge protest that I was a part of. And then we - also against US militarism, the whole military industrial complex, and I remember that was a protest that I was a part of. We actually went down to Vandenberg to the military base itself and some members of my affinity group were involved in civil disobedience there and most of them were arrested, and I was running back and forth photographing them being arrested. I will have to show you a photo of it, a couple of photos. So those were pretty heavy, exciting days.

SP: So after Livermore, why did that end, did that end or...

LEE: I don't think it ended. I think it kind of petered out for whatever reason. I am not quite sure why movements burst onto the scene and then they seem to fade, just like

what happened to Occupy. So I will leave that to the historians and the analysts. But, at that time, I also had my son, so I kind of took a break from all of the activism to take care of him. But then, and then, we moved to, away from, my husband and I [and] my son, we moved away from the Bay Area and moved to Portland and then that is when I started to become involved again.

SP: So what year did you come here?

LEE: 1989. I think that was right before the First Gulf War. That is when the elder Bush was president. So I became involved mainly in the anti-war movement at that time. But as you know, there are just so many injustices and problems going on, like racism and discrimination and poverty and [homelessness], and it is not just wars; So, and corporate power, and corruption; the list is too long.

SP: So did you get involved with an organization when you got here, or did you just go out to the demonstrations with your camera or both or what?

LEE: Yes, I did both. There were some groups that I was involved in. Like anti-war groups and groups against police violence, the Portland Alliance and Indie Media. So yes, there have been groups that I have been involved in with the Portland Alliance that I volunteered for gosh, I don't know, 20 years or something, and I was on that board for a couple of years and I wrote articles and volunteered articles and photos.

SP: Did you go to things that you wouldn't have gone to on your own because you were working for the Alliance? I mean, did they give you assignments or did you...

LEE: No.

SP: You just did what you wanted.

LEE: Exactly. Or sometimes they would say that we need someone to cover this. Are you available? But it was always up to me. They gave everybody a lot of freedom, yes. And the Alliance, unfortunately, seems to have disappeared, so...

SP: Yes, I don't know if they are online or not, but...

LEE: Yes, I think nowadays the Internet has really replaced a lot of the older networks and the older newspapers and media, unfortunately.

SP: So, did you take pictures – are the photos, we will look at them in a minute, but are they mainly of demonstrations and marches and that sort of thing, or are there other things that you take, that you point that camera at?

LEE: Well, I try to show the passion, the emotions of people involved in the struggle, their commitment to social change. For example, recently I photographed the high school kids rallying in support of the teachers at Cleveland High School and Jefferson High School. And it was just so exciting and so invigorating to see this [younger] generation of people, of this generation of young people waking up to the call so to speak and

standing up and fighting for their rights. I mean, one of their rights was they don't want to be tested. They don't want to take part in these mandated tests to determine whether or not they succeed in their education, so I thought that was a really good thing. And these kids were just, you could just see the joy and the excitement and the determination in their faces, and so that is what I try to capture.

And I try to photograph people marching, taking action, civil disobedience. I also try to record the victories that we have had, the few, the victories are always good. But I also try to document things like police violence, police [attacking] demonstrators, and also the reactions of the bystanders as we walked past, how they would respond to our message. Sometimes, for example, when the First Gulf War started, there were demonstrations in support of the war, so I tried to show both sides, because I believed that people feel very strongly. When they feel very strongly, they act on their beliefs, and I think that is important to show both sides whenever possible so in that case I was able to do that, but in many cases it is very difficult, even if you are there 24/7.

SP: Do you go to things like hearings and that sort of stuff?

LEE: Yes, yes I do. Now, photographically, they are not very exciting. Somebody speaking for half an hour or an hour, their expression really doesn't change that much. What I do, I try to document them. I tried to document Ralph Nader when he came, the rallies and political rallies.

SP: I guess I was thinking of they had a hearing last week, I think it was, for the oil terminal in Vancouver, that like 100 people testified. They went to one in the morning. So I wondered, that is not something...

LEE: Yes, I have done that, like when the Homeless Right to Survive, I have gone to their camps and tried to document that. So, when they testified before the City Council, not recently, but maybe a few years ago, I tried to document that. That is mainly just for them to use on their websites or their Facebook or what have you. It is not for any sort of well, yes, it is mainly for their needs, rather than having, trying to make a compelling image.

SP: Anything else before we start looking at pictures?

LEE: No, not really. I pretty much [have] said everything. Yes. There is a quote that I would like to share with you and that's, I really believe that Howard Zinn was right when he said that the problem isn't civil disobedience, it's civil obedience. And I truly believe that it's only when people rise up and fight for justice that real change can occur, breathe and grow, and I think it is a waste of time for us to entreat corporations, politicians, who are, who I think are very corrupt most of the time, and to try to use moral persuasion to get them to do the right thing, I think is just a waste of time. I think people have to take effective and meaningful direct action for real change to occur.

SP: Okay. Let's look at some pictures

LEE: All right.

Ok, so maybe I should just start with the anti-war thing, the anti-war photos. I was telling you about how I [tried] to show both sides of the issue. So this was a show that was, it was shown at the White Gallery at Portland State University, and on one side of the wall, it is actually just like a passageway in Smith Center. And on one side of the wall I

had the anti-war photos, and they directly confronted [their opposites] on the other side of the war. So here you have a young girl, probably 11 years old. She was holding up a big sign saying “U.S. out,” and she was directly looking, confronting another young girl who was supporting the war and holding up a sign saying “I support my dad.”



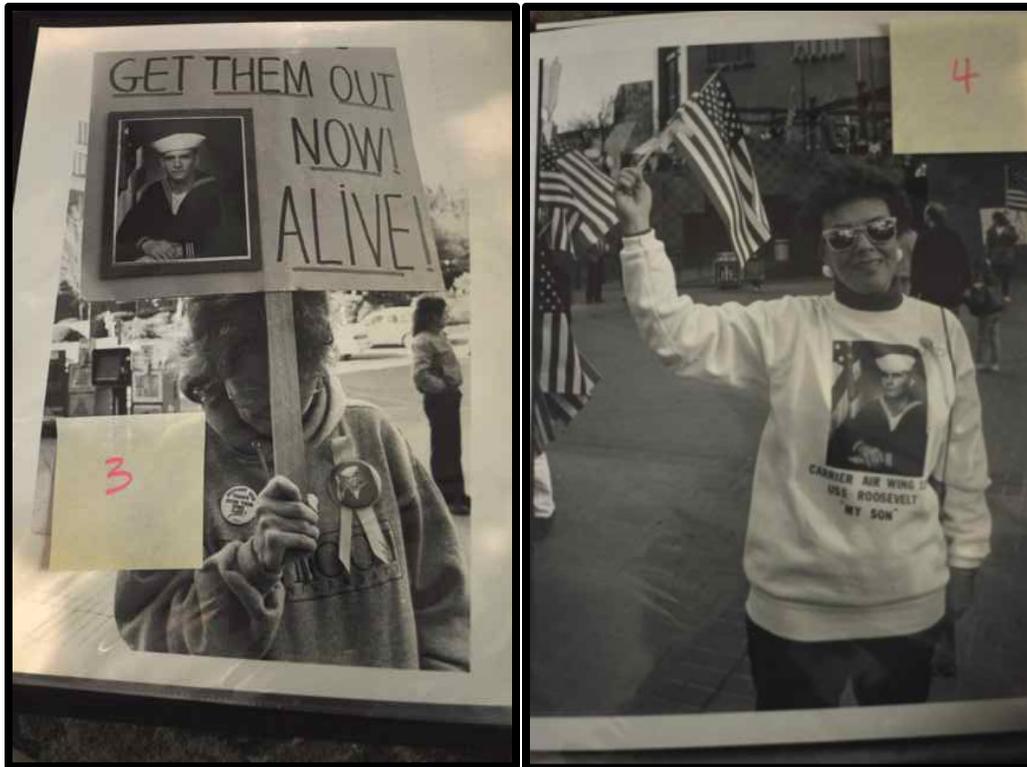
SP: He looks like a Marine.

LEE: Yes.

SP: Yes. Are these photos that have gone to O.H.S. [Oregon Historical Society]?

LEE: No. Well, maybe, I'm not sure. We can check with them.

Here you have a mother who is against the war. She wants her son to come back alive, and here's one who supports her son and she is happily waving the U.S. flag, and look at the photos of the son.



SP: They could be the same man.

LEE: Exactly. They are both in the Navy.

SP: Both in the Navy, identical everything. Boy, yeah.

LEE: But you know, I mean, I guess she has got very strong reasons to support her son. And, [the other mother] has equally strong reasons to support her son too, but in a different way. She wants to get him out of harm's way...

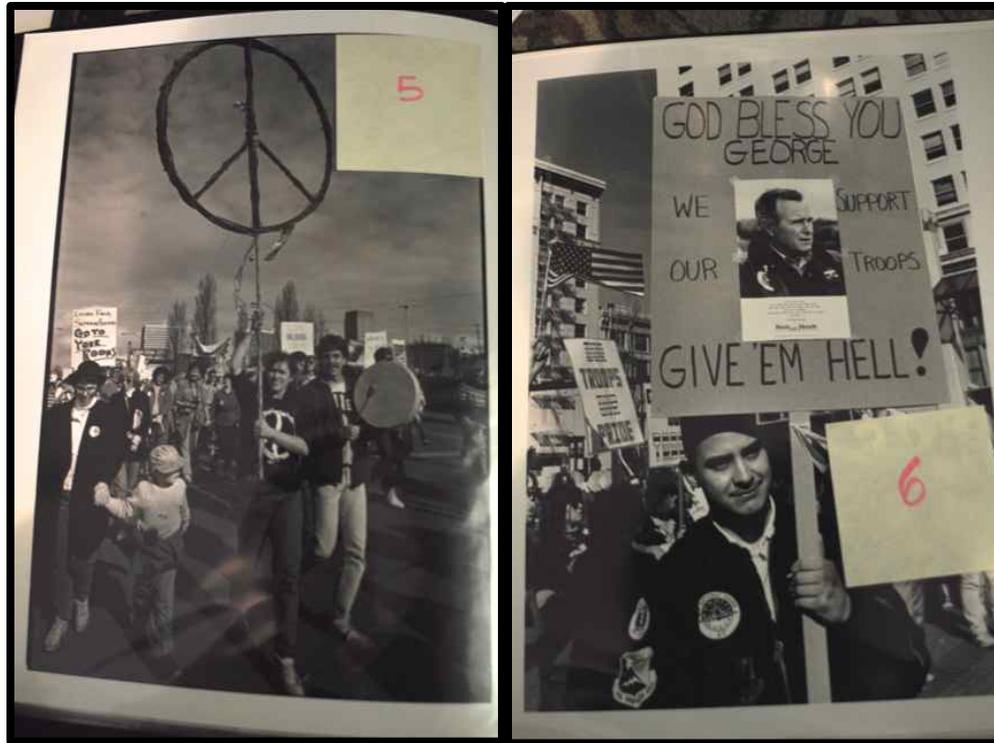
SP: She has got that button. "Support our troops. Bring them home alive." Boy.

LEE: So I thought that was much more interesting than just presenting one point of view.

SP: These are both on the streets of Portland...

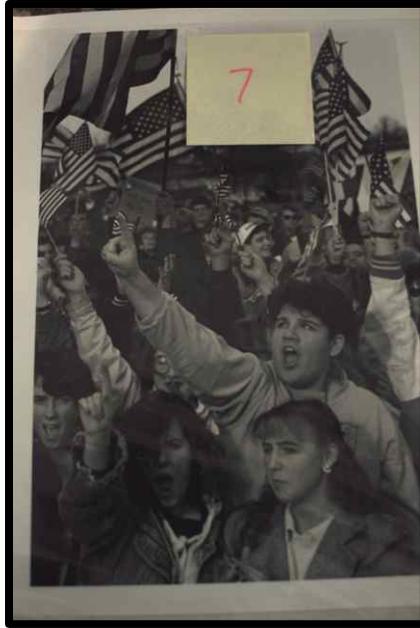
LEE: Oh, yes. This is Pioneer Square, as you can see in the background, and then the symbols that are used are very powerful. This is the peace sign, of course, and here of course is the U.S. flag, the nationalism and patriotism that prop up the ideology that America is always doing the right thing, even when it attacks defenseless countries that didn't do anything to us.

SP: This one says "George Bush, Saddam Hussein, go to your rooms," and then this one says "Support Bush."



LEE: Exactly. Yes.

I think there is more, but here again, "U.S.A., U.S.A. Number 1." Patriotism at work there. And here, these were Vietnam veterans.



SP: Vets.

LEE: Who are mourning the suicide of one of their colleagues, which shows that the tragedy of the war and the effects of war are ongoing, years after the war itself has ended. You know, the suicides, the alcoholism, the drug abuse, the sufferings still continue.

SP: The one at the mic looks like he's about to cry, doesn't he?



LEE: Oh, yes. And then here, on the other side – actually this one, the opposite one was I am not sure _____ [Inaudible].

SP: It looks like there is another picture under there.

LEE: Oh, is that them? Yes, I think this might have been the match to that...

SP: The flag waving.

LEE: You know, the sort of mindless patriotism that doesn't take into account the suffering of the victims, including the American soldiers themselves who fight in unjust wars. And then here, this was at Pioneer Square. I think that there were over 10,000 people there. I think the signs clearly articulate the messages.

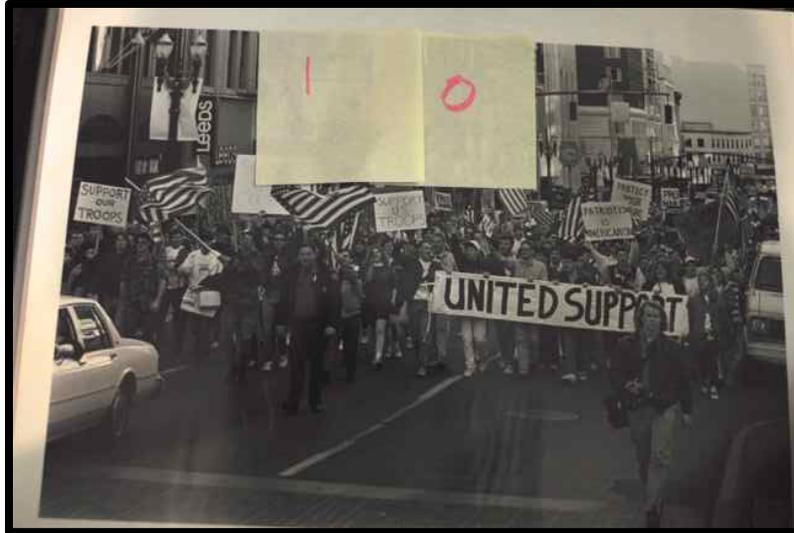


SP: I like the ones that the organizers must have made to bring the troops home, the well-printed ones, but then, there are always the little homemade ones. "Bush your a fascist swine." "You're" [is] misspelled. "Let's not win one for the Gipper." You can say it.

LEE: Ok, fuck war.

SP: But these two are both...

LEE: This one is pro-war. Can you imagine somebody actually [say pro-war] is [pro-America]? That says it all. This is pro-war.

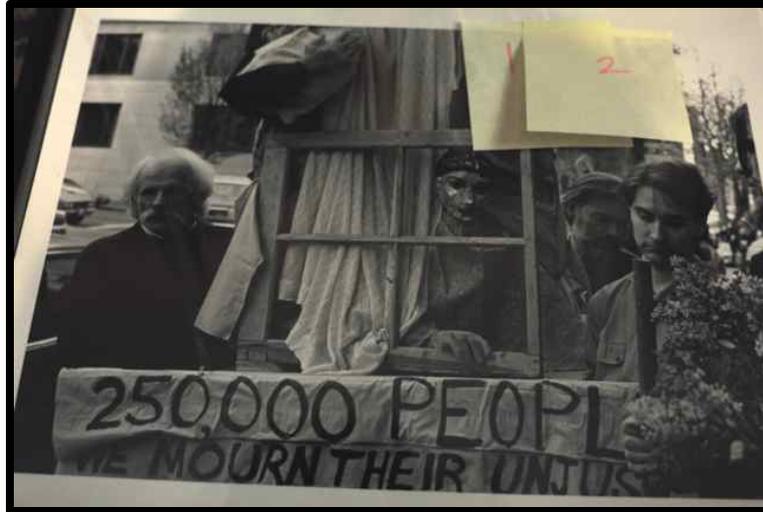


That to me was very scary. And this one was scary, too.



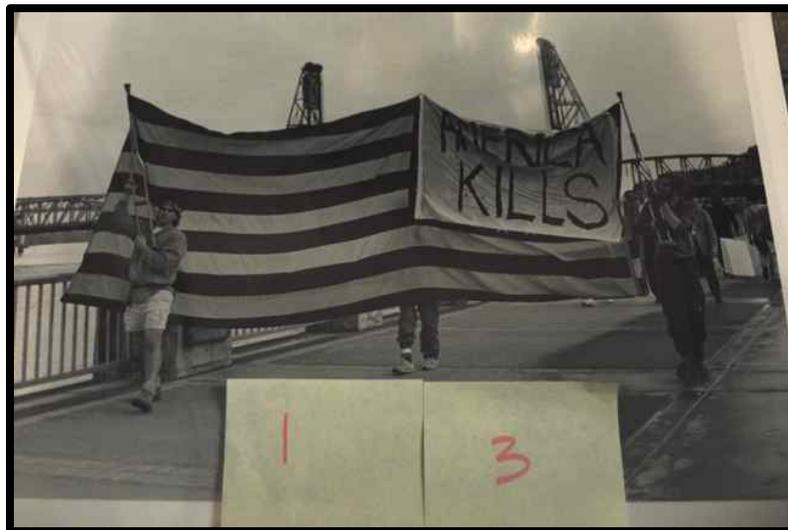
SP: "Nuke Iraq." And you certainly got the passion in his face.

LEE: Yes, look at that clenched fist. Here is another fist. And then here they are mourning the death of 250,000 Iraqis.



SP: Oh, that is the poet Carlos Reyes.

LEE: Yes, and then the use of the flag that's when America kills.



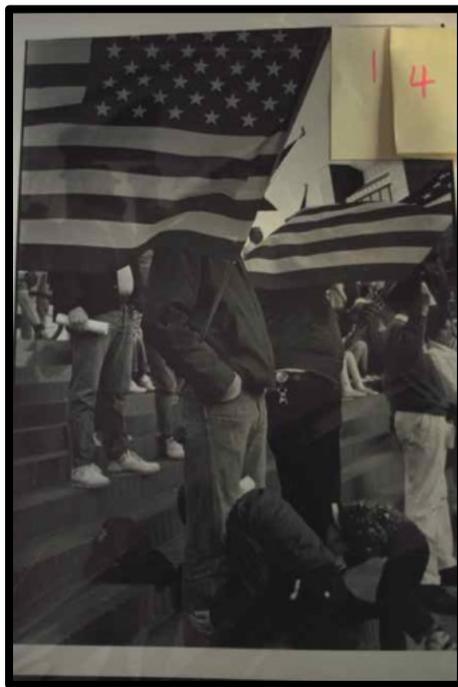
SP: Covering the stars, that is really something.

[Interruption inaudible]

LEE: On crutches, you know and “America is crippled.” Oh yes, the crutches.

SP: Then the purge, echoing them.

LEE: And then here is the use of the American flag again. This [was] at a pro-war rally but I think that this really turned out to be an anti-war image in my mind.



SP: Because the flag is flipped?

LEE: No, because the flag hides the faces of the people. So it is like the flag obliterates the ability to think for yourself, because people are [brainwashed] by the ideology of patriotism and nationalism.

SP: It's interesting, these children in the foreground. They are also hiding their faces.

LEE: Right, it's like this ideology is passed on from father to son.

SP: Right, exactly.

LEE: And that is why wars, that is why people sign up to, I believe that is why many people, men, many men, sign up to fight in wars, because they have been brainwashed to think that it is their patriotic duty.

SP: It's a family tradition.

LEE: Exactly, that is what it means to be an American. When your country tells you to go fight, you go fight. You don't ask why. So these are, this is the, I think this might have been the Second Gulf War, so you know the Veterans for Peace were very active, of course.

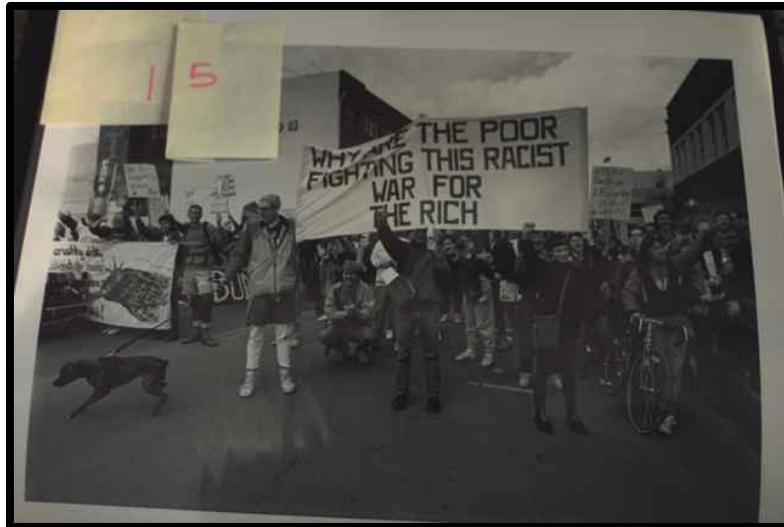
SP: Probably is later because there is a website on that sign

LEE: Exactly. These are the Vietnam veterans, you know.

SP: Oh, these are both the same side.

LEE: Yes. This was the First Gulf War, and I really like this sign. It is very, very...

SP: “Why are the poor fighting this racist war for the rich?”



LEE: I think that is a very profound message. Because when you think about it, most of the men who enlist are poor. It is almost like an economic conscription. It is one of the few choices that they have left other than trying to get a job at McDonald's.

And here, the dog of war on the leash. This is the Second Gulf War, and here now, we have the confrontation with the police in riot gear. I think that dissents [have] become more and more criminalized and repressed. So that's, well, there are others that show how people get pepper sprayed.

And this is May Day, and this was [about] the war again.

SP: Was that the first big May Day one that turned into such a riot? Do you know?

LEE: No, this was the second one. Actually, I am not sure. It could be the first one. I'm not sure. I am not sure.

SP: This is really interesting, these mirrors.

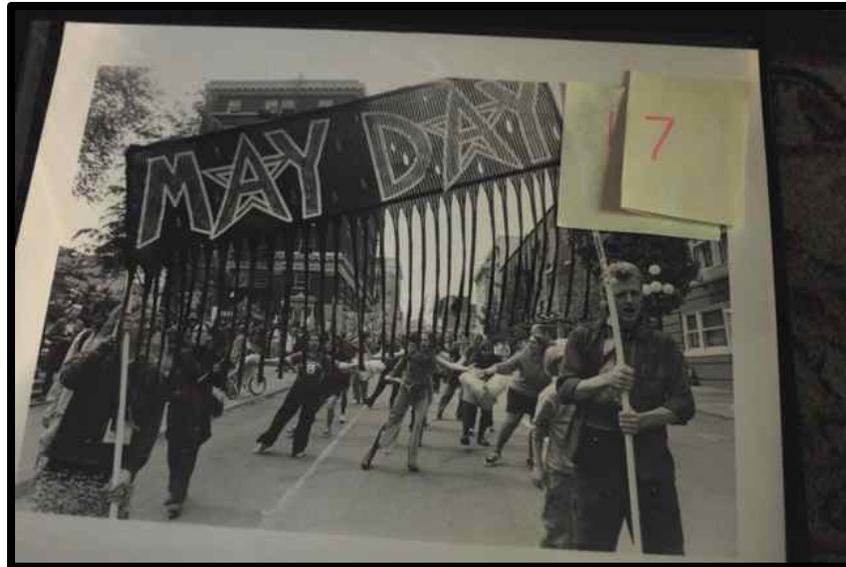
LEE: Yes. I think that that they liberated them from the streets.



SP: That is from where?

LEE: The streets. It is May Day again.

SP: That is a fabulous photo, those streamers, the dancers behind. Wow.



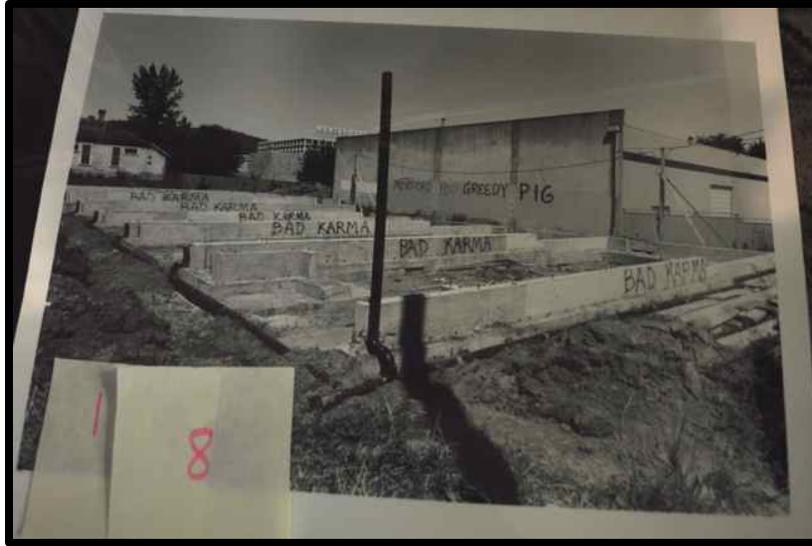
LEE: I think that these are the radical cheerleaders. They are still around, not the very, not the same people, but the group itself that has survived. They are still doing fabulous things. This was in Northwest. You might have heard of Philip [J.] Morford.

SP: Absolutely. So is this then back in the 1980s?

LEE: 1989.

SP: That's - alright. I am going to talk to you about that later. Alright.

LEE: And he bought a lot of old houses, these beautiful old houses that [were] demolished, and [Morford] built these really horrible and very expensive condos that yuppies live in and what have you. Somebody broke into the construction site and wrote this, and I was just walking around and I thought wow, that is great. That is very effective direct action. And this says "Morford, you greedy pig."



SP: And Montgomery Ward in the, well...

LEE: I guess I can't really see it.

SP: No, but it places it so well, you know exactly where it is.

LEE: And here was a strike. O.P.E.U. [Oregon Public Employees Union]? I don't know if you remember that or not, I think that was 1990 something, 1990s.



SP: It's such a mob scene with all those signs.

LEE: They knew how to get the slogans.

SP: You know how to get in the right spot. That is very clear, too.

LEE: I thought this picture really kind of summarized what was at stake in the Gulf War, the

Second Gulf War, you know, and then the Chevron, and then here it says "Fuck Chevron."



SP: And the burned flag.

LEE: Yes.

SP: So did you photoshop this to get this, these effects in the green?

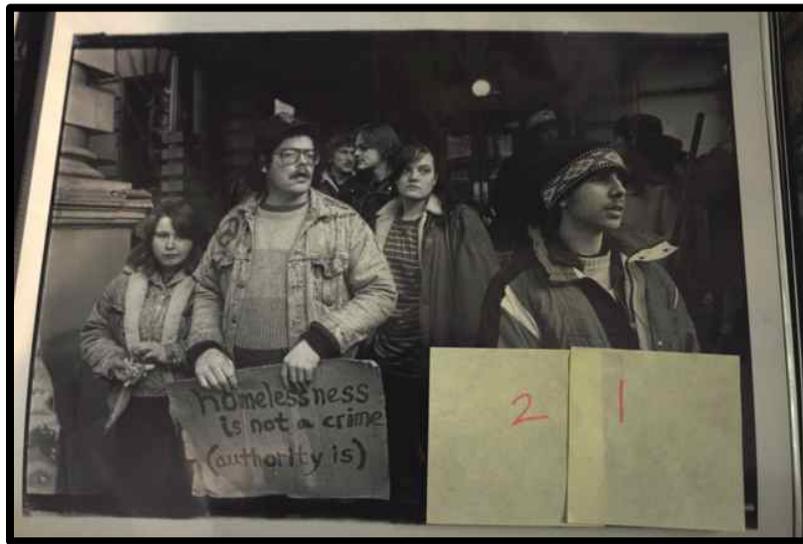
LEE: Yes. I thought I would play around...

SP: No, no, I think it is very effective. I am just curious if it places it later, so it is the Second Gulf War.

LEE: And there are the homeless, mainly the young homeless people.

SP: At City Hall.

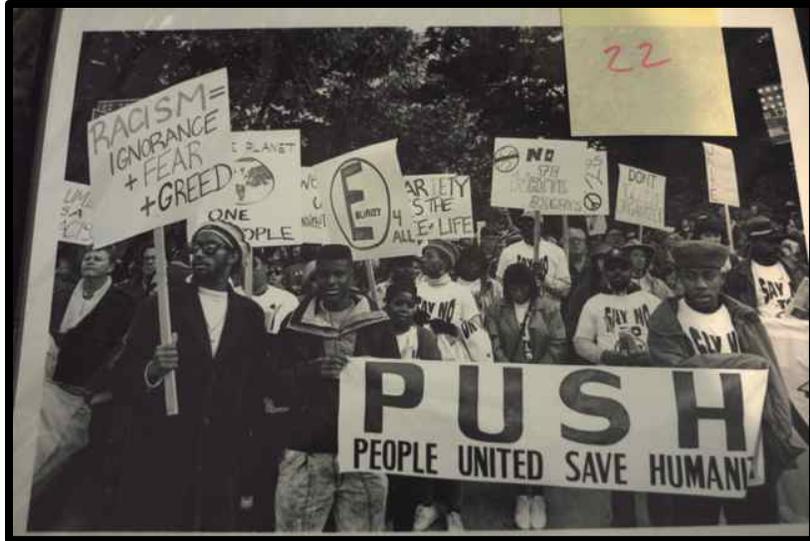
LEE: Yes. This was [the] 1990s, so they are not really demonstrating - they were occupying the steps of City Hall, but I like this sign. It is "Homelessness is not a crime. Authority is." And this was when Mulugeta Seraw was beaten to death by white supremacists.



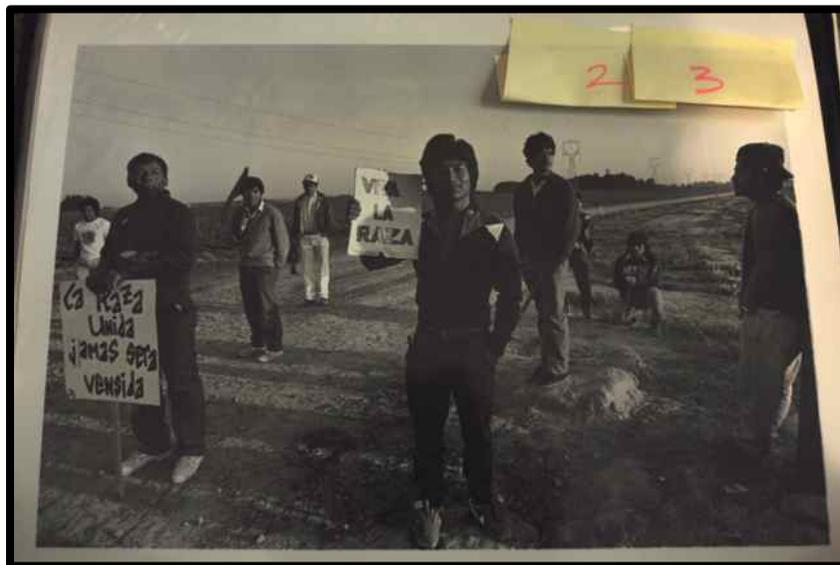
SP: Yes. I didn't realize that we had...

LEE: Supremacists. Right, and then there was a huge demonstration to condemn his murder.

SP: I didn't realize that we had an organization named PUSH [People United To Save Humanity] in Oregon.



LEE: I didn't either. I was glad to be part of that action that day. And then this was the very first farm workers' strike in, I guess was it Mount Angel?



SP: Is this the strawberry one?

LEE: No. The strawberry one was in California.

SP: No, no we had one in Oregon.

LEE: Anyway, according to PCUN [Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste] it was the first ever strike on a farm.

SP: And was it part of PCUN?

LEE: Yes. PCUN organized it. They were trying to stop the scabs, and it was hard bringing in scabs to work in the fields. These are the workers themselves. And this is where they lived, so I [had] asked for permission to go and photograph them.

SP: So you took these for PCUN?

LEE: For PCUN and for the Alliance and part of the historical documentation, because this is an ongoing problem.

SP: Definitely. I have never been inside their housing. It is kind of shocking to see, pretty miserable. It kind of reminds me of the concentration camps.

LEE: Yes. And they just cram as many men, I think that they were all men, into this windowless, kind of trailer-like place. I can't imagine, it is not very uplifting.

SP: No.

LEE: No. One says "sold."

SP: I wonder if that movie poster is there for privacy as much as the sexy picture.

LEE: I don't know. Maybe it is just escapism.

LEE: So this was back in the San Francisco days. This was when...

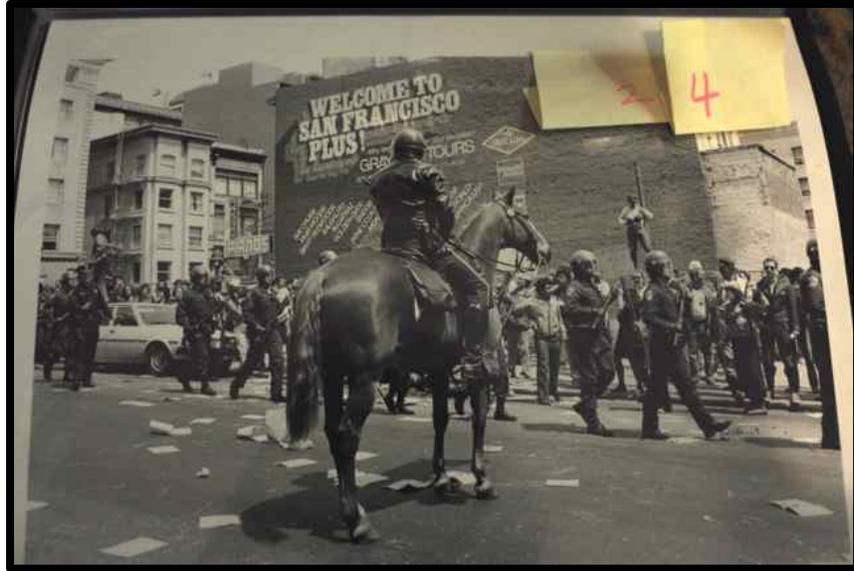
SP: A new book.

LEE: Kissinger came to town. There was a huge demonstration against him, and of course, they brought in the riot cops.

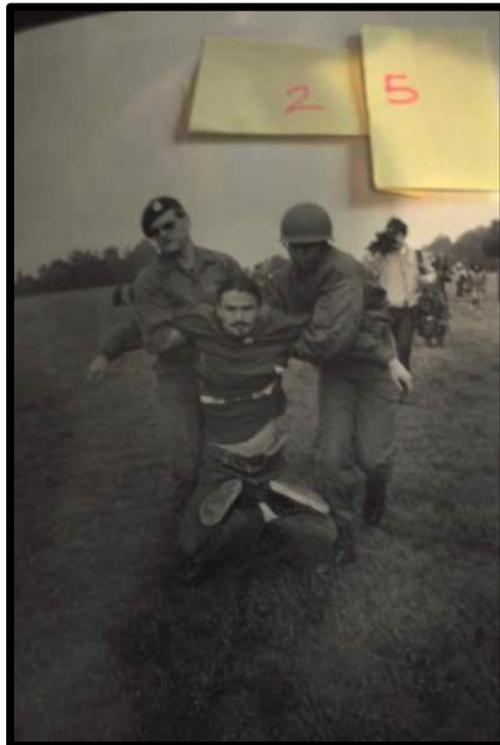
SP: Equestrian.

LEE: But I like that. Look at that. You would see that it was a...

SP: "Welcome to San Francisco Plus!"



LEE: Yes, and get your head bashed in by the cops. This was at the Vandenberg Air Force Base. Here, the Marines arresting a protestor, a Yogi protestor.



SP: That is great.

LEE: And here are some high school kids getting arrested in front of Livermore Lab.



SP: So this is back from the 1980s, now?

LEE: Right. This is when I first started.

SP: When you were still in California.

LEE: And this is more of Portland.

SP: What is this?

LEE: This is right in front of Nordstrom, when they were bringing in all of the riot cops to...

SP: Is this war? Do we know what it is?

LEE: Yes, I think so, and it was also against corporate power. This was right around the time of the W.T.O. [World Trade Organization] protest, or shortly after.

SP: So it is sort of - is Pioneer Square right across from Nordstrom's there?

LEE: Yes.

SP: So it is kind of spilling out of Pioneer Square.

LEE: That is right, and then you have this is the anti-war again.

SP: With the coffin.

LEE: The flag covered coffin.

SP: I know her, too. What is that saying from?

LEE: Oh, yes That is Cherry. She is wonderful. I love her.

SP: What is her sign saying?

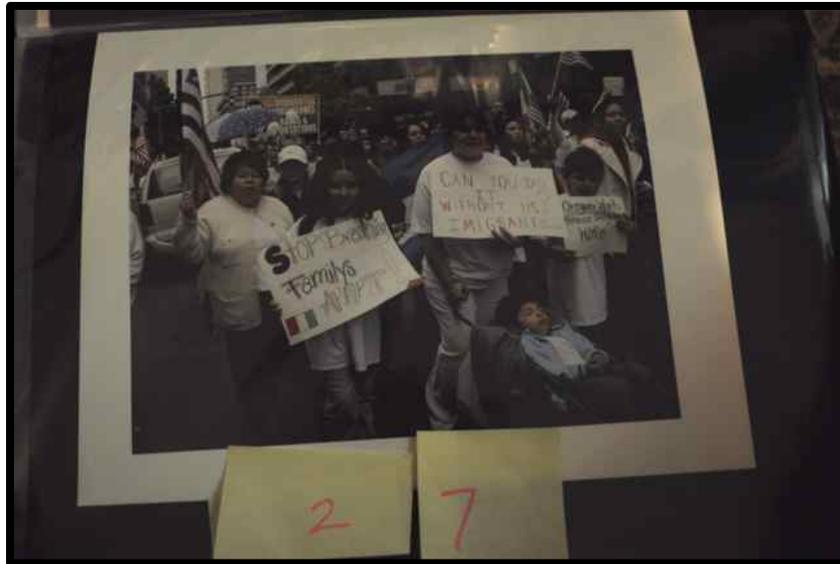
LEE: She is holding up – these represent tombstones or the thing on the tombstone. What do you call that? It has the name of the soldier and his age.

SP: Oh, I see. Right. So there are a bunch of them, carrying, yes. I get it now.

LEE: Exactly. And then these are Mexican-Americans fighting for their rights, because they are always under attack.

SP: Is this when Chiapas was going on? Or just in general immigration?

LEE: General. This was May Day. I think this was when they passed that horrendous law in Arizona, the HBS70 or something like that. You've seen that. Okay. You saw these, right. Then so try to go to some of the big ones like the W.T.O. So, this was taken at the W.T.O. protest.



SP: In Seattle, okay.

LEE: That was so inspiring to many of us. Wasn't it?

SP: Yes, it was, it was amazing.

LEE: It was so inspiring. I would consider that one of our victories. We succeeded in shutting down the W.T.O. meetings, and, also making millions of people aware what the W.T.O. stood for, the evils of corporate power. This was anarchists at the W.T.O.

SP: With their gas masks.

LEE: Right, they came prepared. And then right after that was the I.M.F. [International Monetary Fund] World Bank protests in Washington, D.C.? So I went there.

SP: Pennsylvania Avenue. Yes.

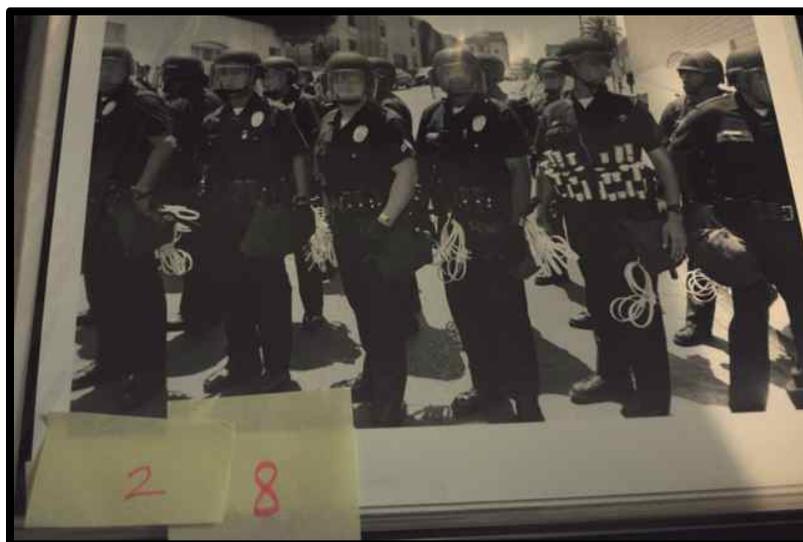
LEE: And they used the same tactics that they did at the W.T.O., where they would lock themselves into these things that were really difficult for the police to...

SP: This is a pipe?

LEE: Something like that, yes. P.V.C. [Polyvinyl Chloride].

SP: The right pipe at the right weight.

LEE: Then there [were] the two thousand protestors at the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, so this is the L.A.P.D. [Los Angeles Police Department] all prepared.



SP: Is this – I can't believe...

LEE: Those are tear gas.

SP: They are tear gas. My God. He has like a couple of dozen...

LEE: They were ready to smash us to smithereens.

SP: Kind of scary.

LEE: It was. Cops are always scary.

SP: These are handcuffs. Plastic handcuffs.

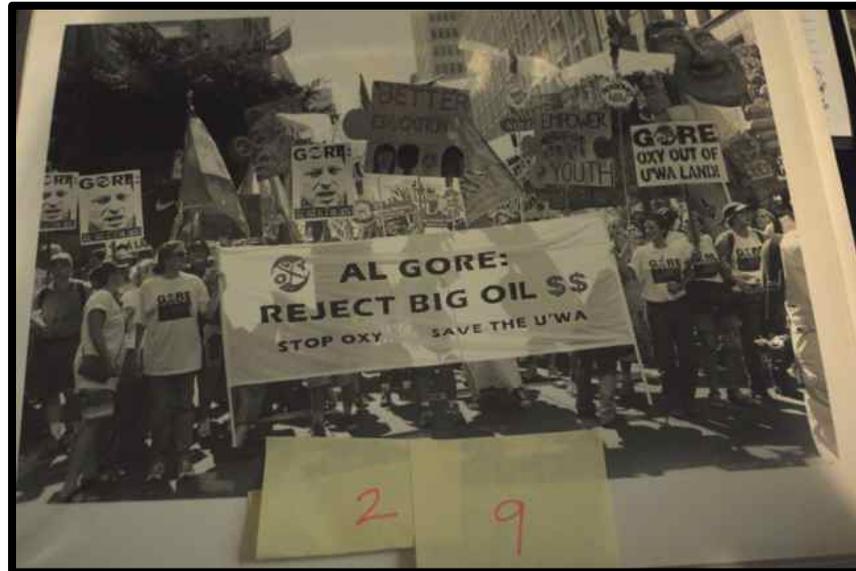
LEE: Right.

And this was at the _____ in L.A. [Los Angeles], the same protest. I thought that was pretty...

SP: And then there's Bush, yes.

LEE: Or Gore.

And then here it is pointing out that Gore owned stock in what was it, Oxy [Occidental Petroleum], or the U'wa in Colombia, they were being oppressed and driven off their land, the U'wa land, because of the oil companies.

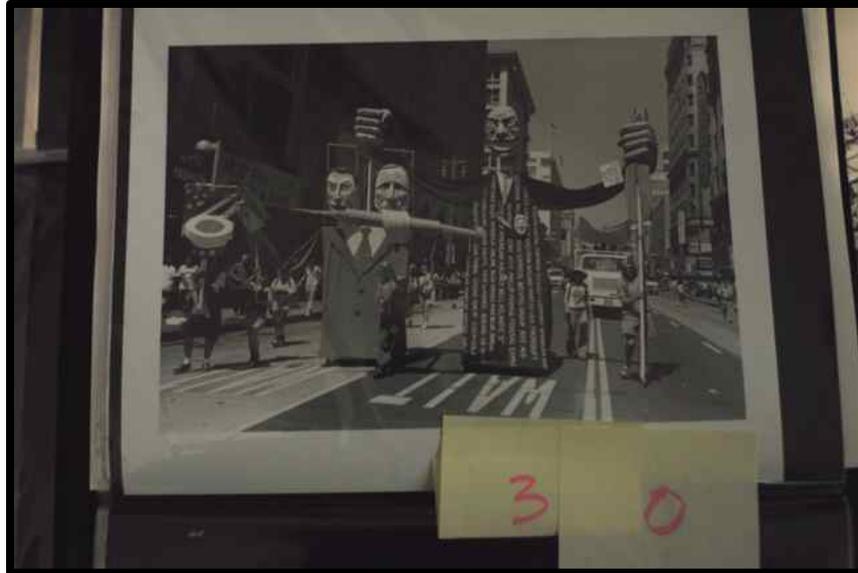


SP: Whatever Oxy was.

LEE: And Gore owned stock in that company. It just shows what a hypocrite Gore and the Democrats are.

SP: This was L.A.? It is wonderful puppetry.

LEE: Yes. Love those puppets. This is L.A.



SP: “Shut down the prison industrial complex?”

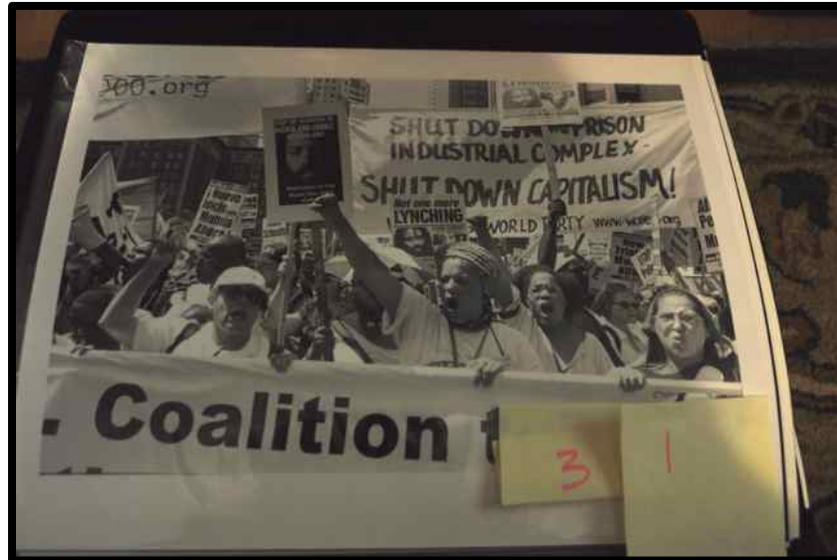
LEE: Right.

SP: So this is specifically, or _____? [Inaudible]

LEE: It is against racism.

SP: Against racism in the prison. Imprisonment of Mumia.

LEE: Mumia Abu-Jama. It is also against the prison industrial complex.



SP: Is this the same?

LEE: Yes. No, this is a different protest, but...

SP: The reason I said is this one also says Mumia, but this is about police brutality obviously.

LEE: Like I said, people connect the dots and the police...

SP: Is this L.A.?

LEE: Yes. The police always did repress us, you know.

And then this is the same photo, but just to show the racism and the plight of undocumented workers from Mexico trying to enter the U.S. and how many of them don't make it. They die on the way or they die after they get here.



SP: Is that what the crosses are about? On their bodies?

LEE: Yes.

SP: And this is L.A.? You are still, is this whole book L.A., do you think?

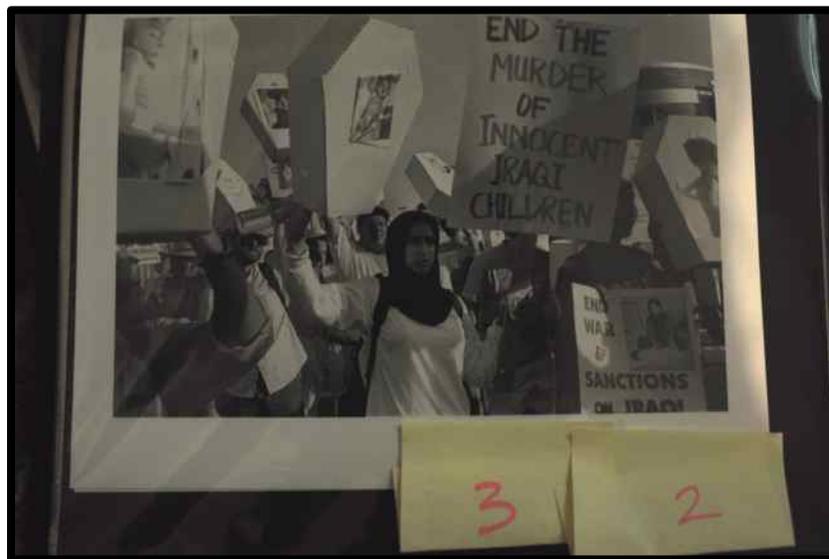
LEE: No.

SP: No, okay, just for now.

LEE: This is L.A. This is L.A.

SP: The rock.

LEE: This is, this shows what the sanctions, ten years of sanctions under Clinton have done to Iraq.



SP: Killing children.

LEE: Half a million children. Remember that famous interview with Madeline Albright who was secretary of state under Clinton?

SP: I don't remember.

LEE: I think it was Leslie Stahl or one of those corporate journalists who asked her, well what do you think about the deaths of half a million Iraqi children under the sanctions of the Clinton Administration? Do you think it was worth it? And she said yes.

SP: So this is in response to that or...

LEE: Yes.

SP: Yes, okay. _____ cardboard coffins.

LEE: And sanctions. It is not just war that kills. It can be sanctions, too. I thought that that was an important message to get across.

SP: And all of these people with the bandanas over their faces.

LEE: The anarchists. They are always targeted by the police.

SP: You don't know what - do you know what this is about in particular?

LEE: They were probably demonstrating against the wars and also against police brutality.

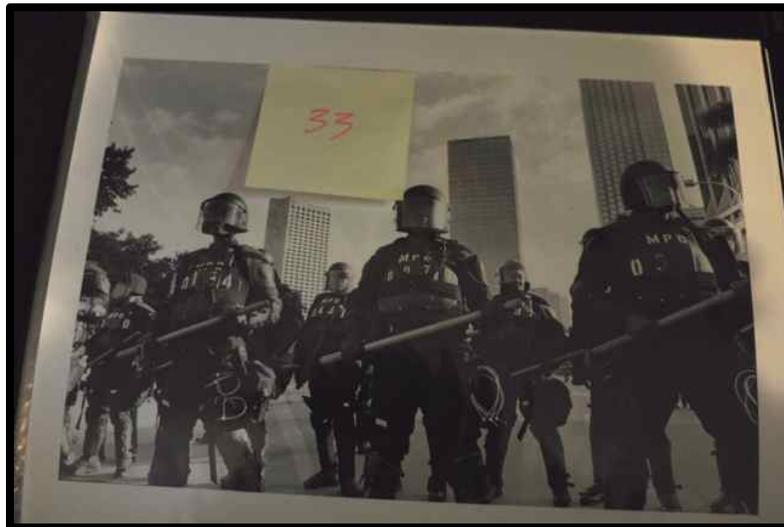
SP: Oh, there is something here about Bush and Gore there, right?

LEE: And capitalism.

This was in Miami at the big protest against the F.T.A.A. [Free Trade Area of the Americas].

SP: [Inaudible]

LEE: This hotel in the background, Intercontinental, [is] where are the big shots were meeting to discuss how to do more evil in the world.



SP: You are very low for this photo, right?

LEE: Yes.

SP: Do you do that a lot, crouch down like that for an angle? It's very powerful.

LEE: Sometimes when I feel – it just shows how the cops and - I think this question is very...

SP: It makes them loom.

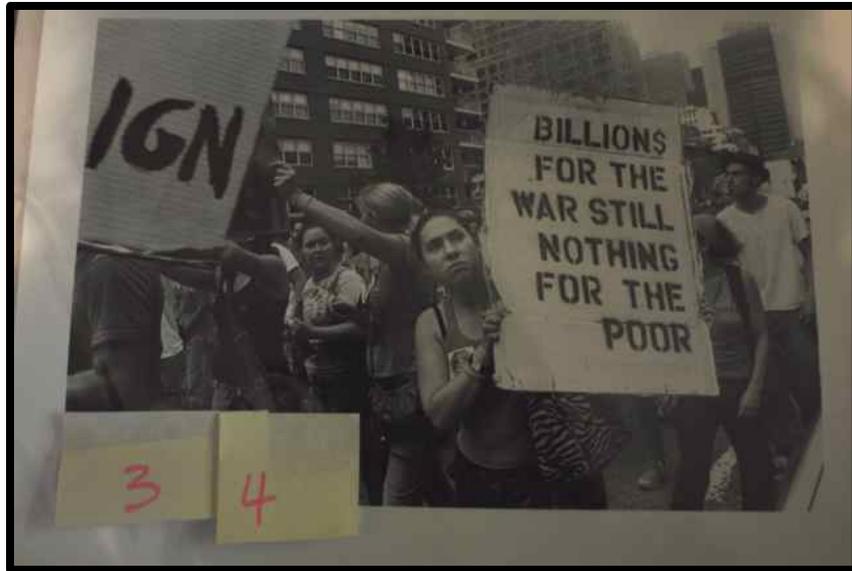
LEE: This question is very pertinent. Who do [the police] serve and protect? Well, here is your answer. They don't serve and protect us, the citizens. They serve and protect the corporate power, the ruling elites.

This was in New York at the 2004 Republican Convention, which we nominated Bush for the next four years.

SP: For reelection.

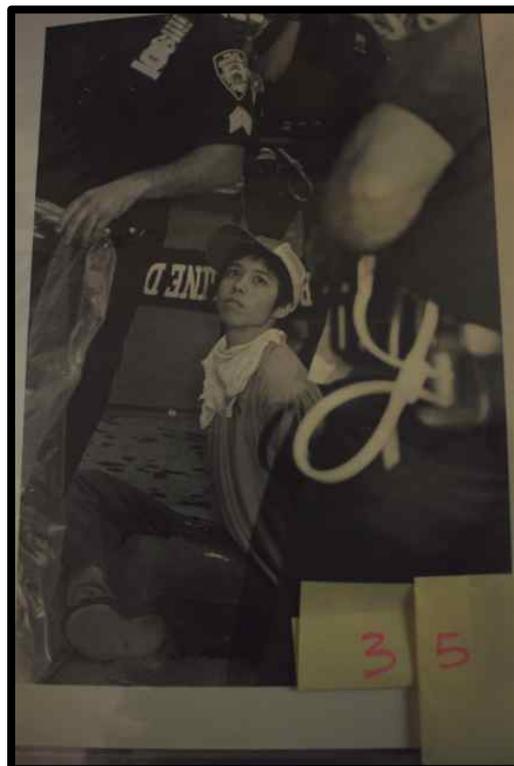
LEE: For reelection, yes.

SP: "Billions for war, still nothing for the poor."



LEE: Isn't that something? Still the truth.

And here was the young protestor being arrested, protesting against Bush and all that. I thought the look on her face was quite telling.



SP: It is. It is. Especially with this big cop with his handcuffs right in front of her, and that arm kind of looming above her. Yes.

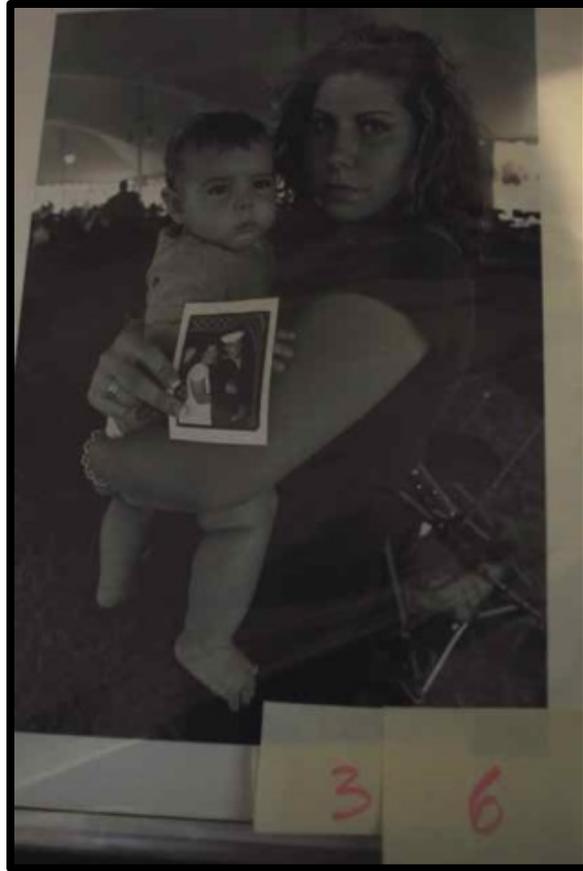
LEE: And these young kids are the enemy? And they are violent? I don't think so...

SP: It's such an innocent looking face.

LEE: I don't think so. It's these guys in uniforms who are violent. This was at Camp Casey. Remember good old Cindy Sheehan?

SP: Oh yes, right, right.

LEE: The mother that rocked Bush and just burst on - so I went to Camp Casey to support her cause. This was a young widow, her husband was killed in the Gulf War and he never got to see his baby boy. So she allowed me to photograph her holding their wedding picture, and I thought that that was very poignant.



SP: So she is joined _____.....

LEE: To speak out against the war

SP: So she is camping out there as well, demonstrating there.

LEE: Yes. There were so many people there that it was really a wonderful camp out for peace. Cindy named it Camp Casey.

SP: For her son.

LEE: It was in Crawford where Bush Junior had his country home. And he was there for the summer on vacation, so we were all camped just miles away, protesting against the war and the policies of the Bush Administration. The Iraq Veterans Against the War were very much involved.

SP: Is this at Camp Casey as well?

LEE: Yes. No, following that there was a big demonstration in Washington D.C. against the war, and these were the same [people]. He was at Camp Casey, Tomas Young is his name. I don't even know if he is [still] alive. But what happened to him, it is a very powerful and moving story. He signed up for the war because he believed in all of the lies. He thought that he was fighting Al Qaeda. Then he found out that he had been lied to, and then he suffered a tremendous injury during an attack and he was paralyzed, basically from the neck down or from the waist down, I am not quite sure.



SP: Well, he has use of this hand, at least. To hold the flag.

LEE: I mean, he was in pain all the time and he had to urinate in a bag, and his wife had to take care of him and his mother had to take care of him 24/7, and this young man was barely 25. And his whole life had been shattered. But, he had the courage to turn it around and use what happened to him as a way to protest against the war and to warn other young men not to suffer the same fate. He was a wonderful, I thought that he was a wonderful soul, and you can see in his eyes, his sincerity, and also the suffering. And, I think lately I went on a website and heard that he is kind of dying. So...

SP: How long ago is this, do you think?

LEE: This was 2005, so he could be dying. They made a documentary about him. These are the unspoken heroes of the movement. This was...

SP: That's quite a _____.

LEE: In Sacramento.

SP: The Sacramento Police Department. 17 year old equipment. The same riot equipment.



LEE: That is right. They start looking the same, don't they in every American city?

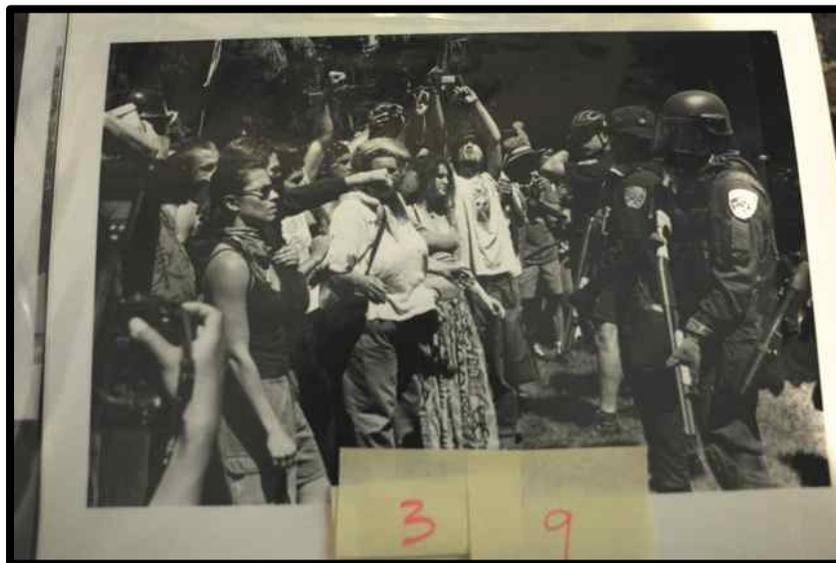
I don't know if you know of her, this woman here. What was her name again? She is a big figure in the anti-war movement. Starhawk.

SP: Oh, Starhawk.

LEE: In California. She is from the Bay Area.

SP: I knew what she looked like.

LEE: She is a very strong woman. You can't see her face through that fist in front of it, but...



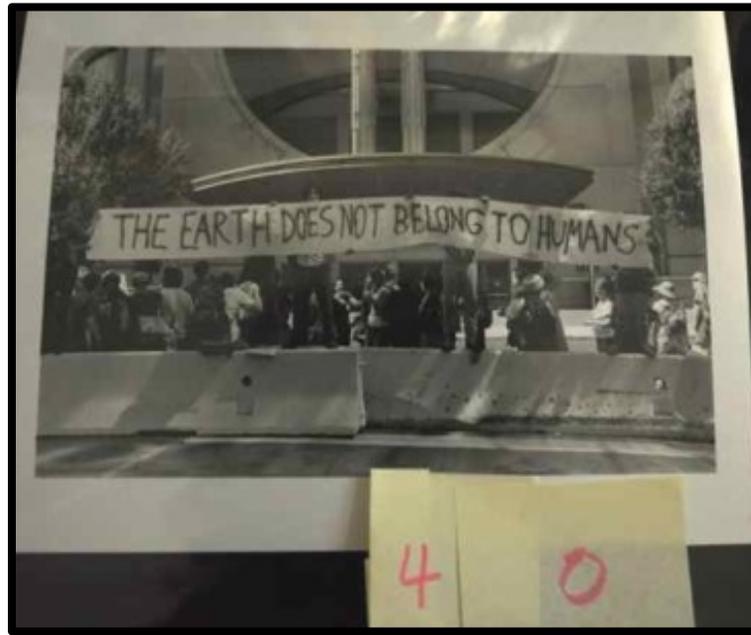
SP: So where did you say that this was? Sacramento?

LEE: Yes.

SP: So it is an anti-war?

LEE: Anti-war, anti-capitalism, anti-W.T.O. And, she is also pro-environment.

SP: Yeah. I was going to say that Starhawk I thought was an environmental activist.
“The earth does not belong to humans.”



LEE: This is in Sacramento. I thought that was such a powerful sign.

SP: Sacramento. Ok. There you can see Sacramento and organic...

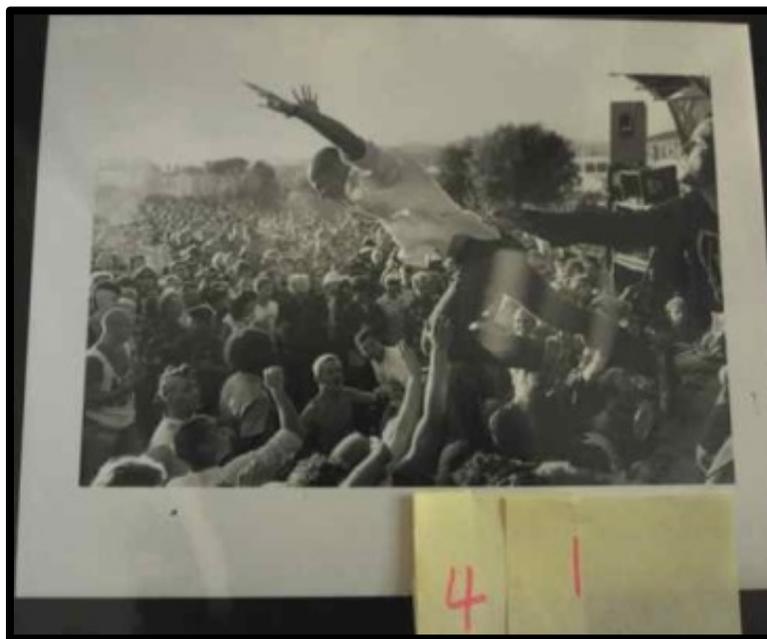
LEE: Organic. So it was all for sustainable lifestyles, sustainable food and all that to make sure that the Earth, the planet, the Earth is safe for all of us and not just humans. And this is back in the good old anti-Reagan protests with the Dead Kennedys and the _____.

SP: And where is this?

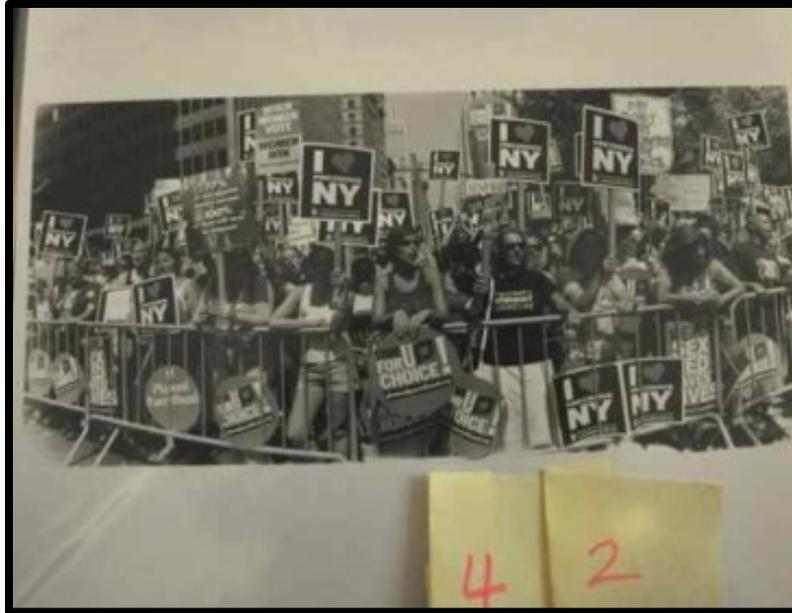
LEE: This is in San Francisco. We are kind of jumping back and forth now.

SP: That man in the white shirt, that's...

LEE: That is what the punks did back then. And that is Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys. So he can have fun, too, while protesting, a leap of faith.



This was at the anti-Republican Convention in New York City, so and these women were protesting to support women's rights to choose. And the Republicans [are] always trying to take away, overturn Roe v. Wade and take away women's right to choose, so this was a huge demonstration, and I thought that it was really, really cool.



SP: This is what a feminist looks like. So have we seen any of the pictures that you have given to O.H.S.?

LEE: I am not even sure what I gave them.

SP: They may send me back with them, because they want things of - this is great. I'm...

LEE: Okay. We can always take new pictures.

SP: Or I could send them.

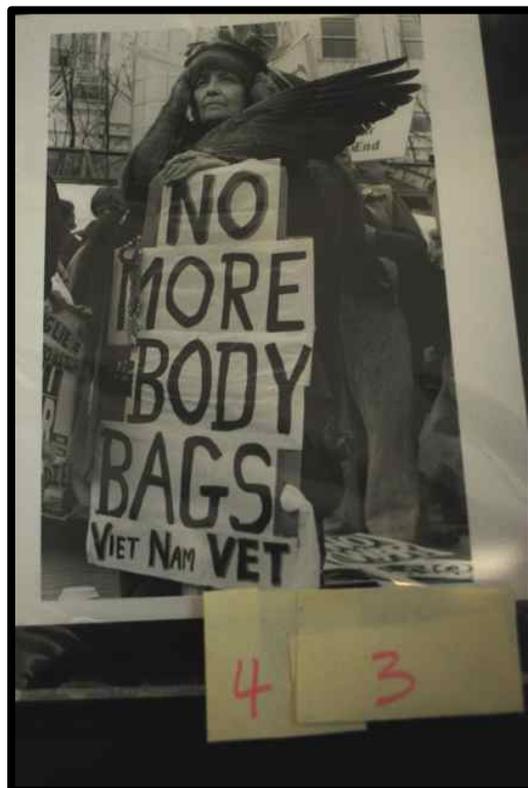
LEE: I mean, whatever you think is...

SP: I think that the photos that they are going to publish are they would want you saying things about the actual photos, but this is great. This is anti-war. This is Portland?

LEE: She's a Vietnam vet. She is an American Indian, Native American.

SP: That is how she gets to have that wing.

LEE: Yes. I thought that that was wonderful.



SP: It is beautiful, and it is...

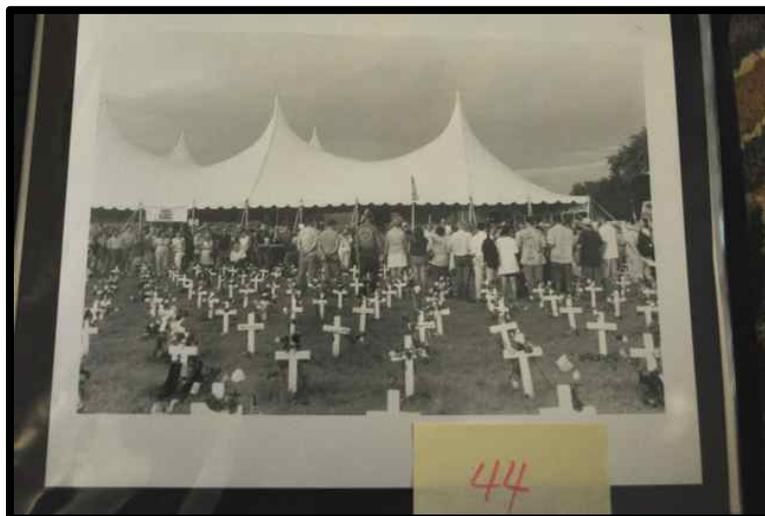
LEE: "No More Body Bags."

SP: That is somebody else's. She is a Vietnam vet.

LEE: So, a lot of anti-war pictures. Oh, I know why I wanted to show you this. Look at those big guns.

SP: Oh, my God. Now that is another one you photoshopped.

LEE: Yes. I solarized it. This is, I wanted to show you this because of Camp Casey. So this was Cindy Sheehan and this is Camp Casey and they built this makeshift grave and there's names of many soldiers who have died. One of them was Casey Sheehan who was the son of...



SP: Every one of those crosses has a name. They are all for somebody, and where was...

LEE: This is the camp itself in Crawford, Texas.

SP: Where was this flag burning?

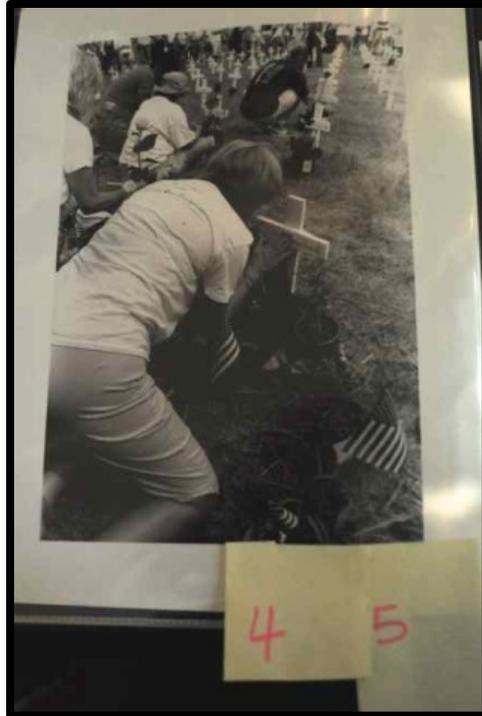
LEE: Gosh. This was at some anti-war demonstration. I don't even remember where. Must have been the Park Blocks. Looks like the trees in the background.

SP: In Portland?

LEE: Yes.

SP: I don't think that I have ever seen that happen, myself, at a demonstration.

LEE: This is Cindy Sheehan, and she's at [Camp] Casey, and she's at Casey, and she's at her son's marker. She was a very courageous woman.



SP: So, they are all at this grave.

LEE: Right. These are all parents who...

SP: Parents all putting flowers on their kids'...

LEE: Right, and here is Cindy again, surrounded by the media. And I think it says "Peace is Priceless." You saw the...

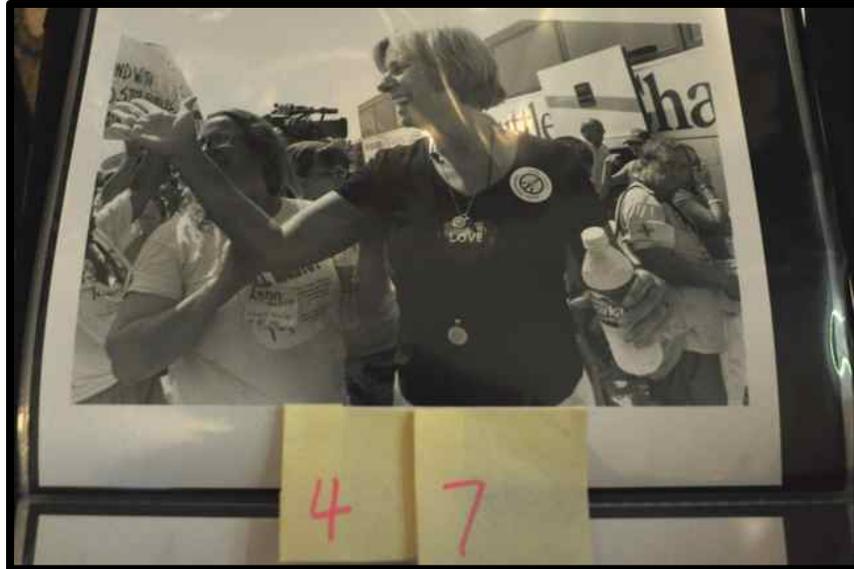


SP: I saw that. I didn't see that one though.

LEE: Her son is in Iraq and she came to support the anti-war cause.

SP: So this is also a tent at Casey.

LEE: Camp Casey, and here is Cindy. She is greeting thousands of visitors [who] came every day, people came in busloads, and here she is speaking out. She is a good speaker; very dynamic person. And then she went on this bus to tour the country. And actually this is when Katrina happened in New Orleans. They actually stopped there and helped people who had been stricken by the, Katrina, hurricane Katrina. This was an art show that I was part of, and what I did was I combined an image of an Iraqi holding his, the broken body of his young daughter with Casey Sheehan who died fighting in that war. So Cindy held it up.



SP: The art show was where?

LEE: Oh gosh, it was in downtown Portland. I think it was called the Faces of War.

SP: And Cindy came?

LEE: Yes. She came for it. We wanted to show the victims of the war, both Iraqi and American.

SP: So who is we?

LEE: The artists and the people who organized the show.

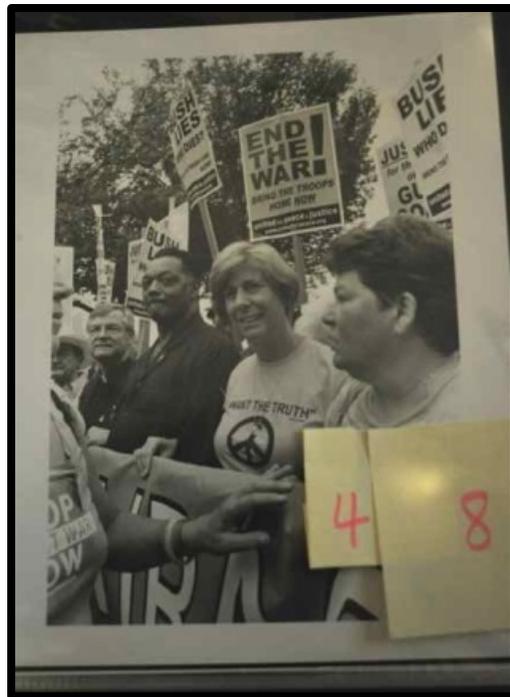
SP: I mean, there were a bunch of artists?

LEE: Yes.

SP: Is there an organization?

LEE: Yes, but I can't remember what their name is. It was several years ago.

This was 2005, and that is Jesse Jackson. This was in New York.



SP: Jesse Jackson. Do you know who the minister is?

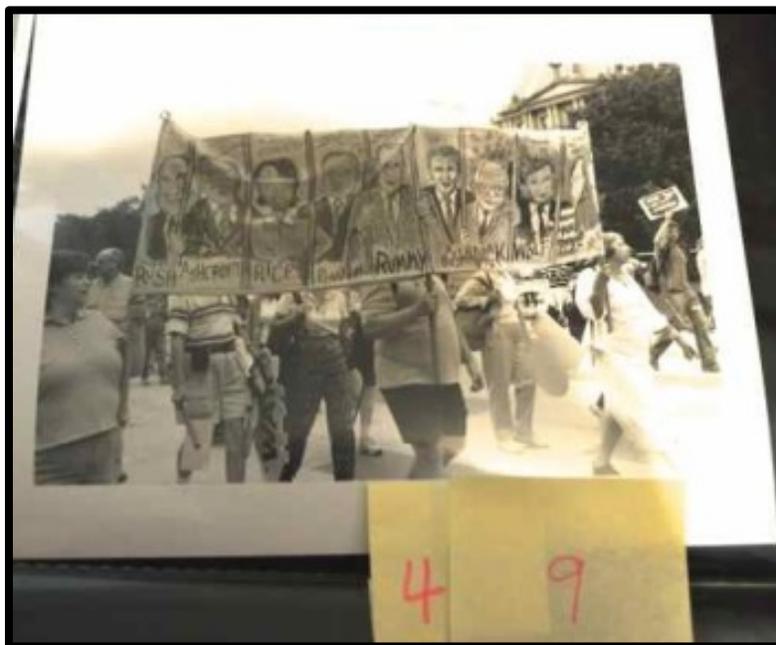
LEE: I don't know. That is the fathers who lost their sons there. This is - you saw that picture there?

SP: Yes.

LEE: Here are all the villains.

SP: The whole, or is that the whole Cabinet? Bush's Cabinet or...

LEE: Rummy [Rumsfeld], Powell, Rice, Ashcroft, Bush, Dick Cheney, the wolf, Karl Rove, the evil brain. And this was the protest in front of the White House.



SP: Morning dew. He just has, is wearing that

LEE: Civil disobedience, getting arrested. These you saw. These are small.

Oh dear. Okay, one last one.

SP: One last one.

LEE: This is the first Bush.

SP: Is this Portland?

LEE: Yes.

SP: Oh yes, you can see our own bus shelter. That is a great puppet head.

LEE: I like that. It says "More Coke Bush?" because there were all these rumors about all first George Bush indulging in the use of cocaine.



SP: So, are they burning...

LEE: Actually, not that. I think he - somehow they attributed that the dealing of cocaine in the exchange for, was it supporting the Contras because wasn't he vice president under Reagan?

[Interruption]

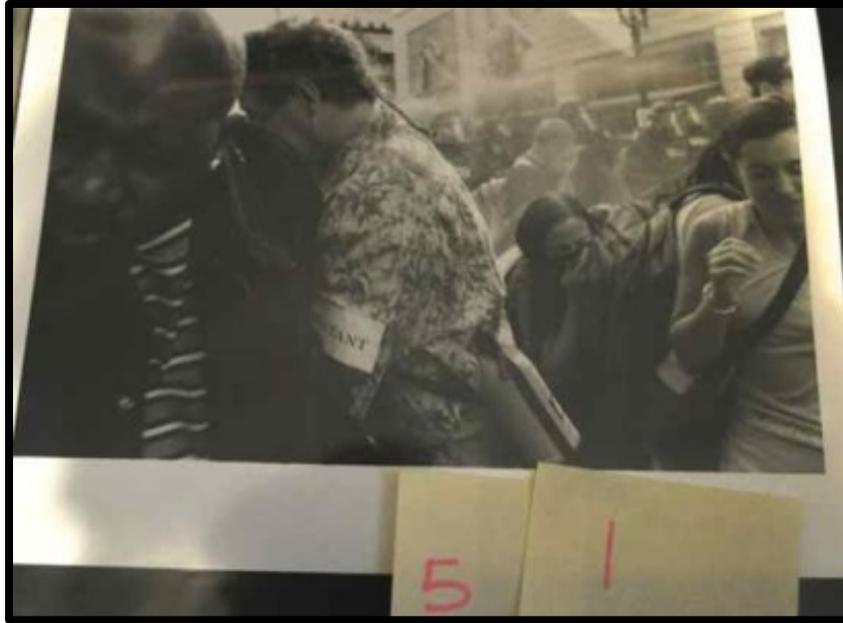
SP: So this is first Bush.

LEE: This is the first Bush.

SP: Are they burning the puppet itself?

LEE: Yes they are, and the American flags.

Getting pepper sprayed.

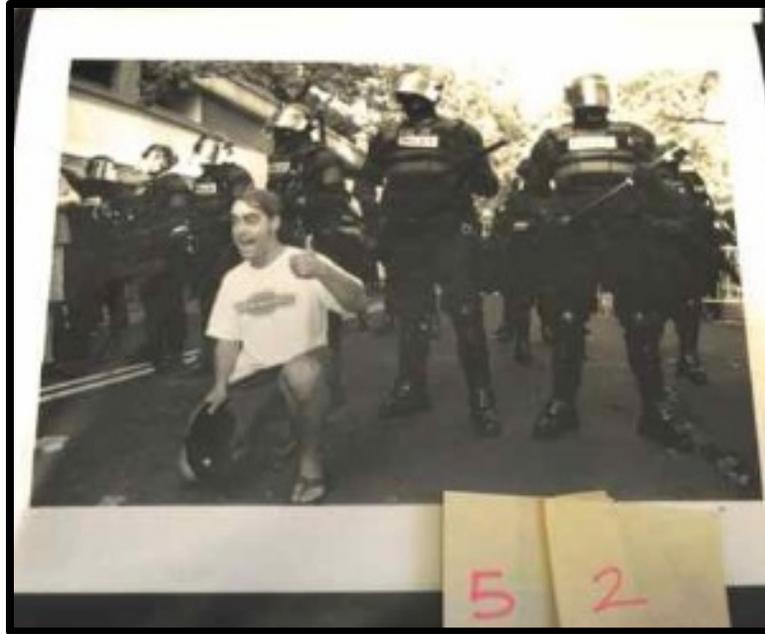


SP: Ooh, you actually got the spray in there. Wow.

LEE: Very nasty stuff.

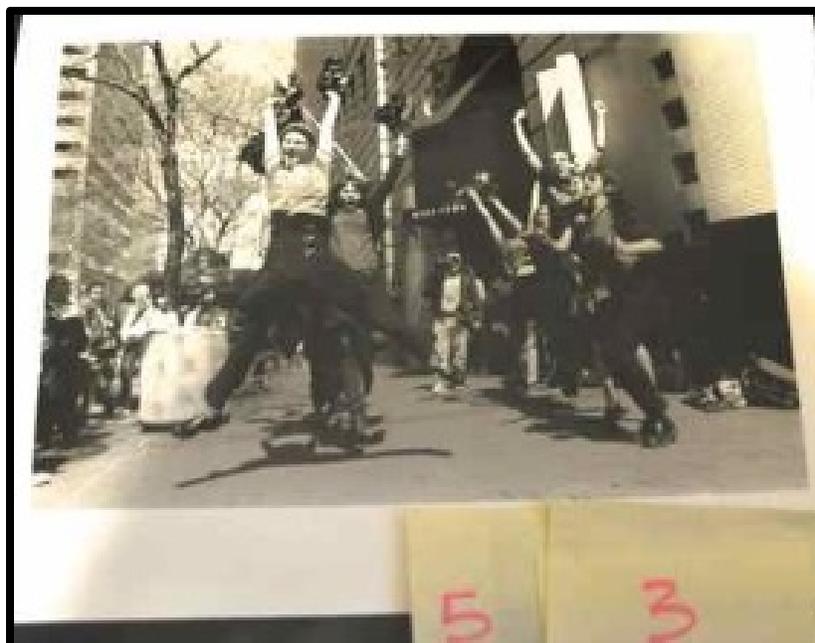
SP: Did it get you?

LEE: A little bit. I wasn't right there. I mean, these people got it full blast. I was a few bodies behind. It is just to show the, like I said, the emotions, the faces, the people, and this one I thought was funny. There is a lot of humor involved too, which I think is wonderful, just to break the tension [and] the scariness of being there, especially when the riot police...



SP: Such an unscary person in front of them.

LEE: Yes, I thought that the caption should be “Join the struggle for justice,” or “Join the struggle against the war. You too can make new friends.” This is the anti-Nike sweat shop. This one is from the Radical Cheerleaders.



SP: The Radical Cheerleaders at Nike.

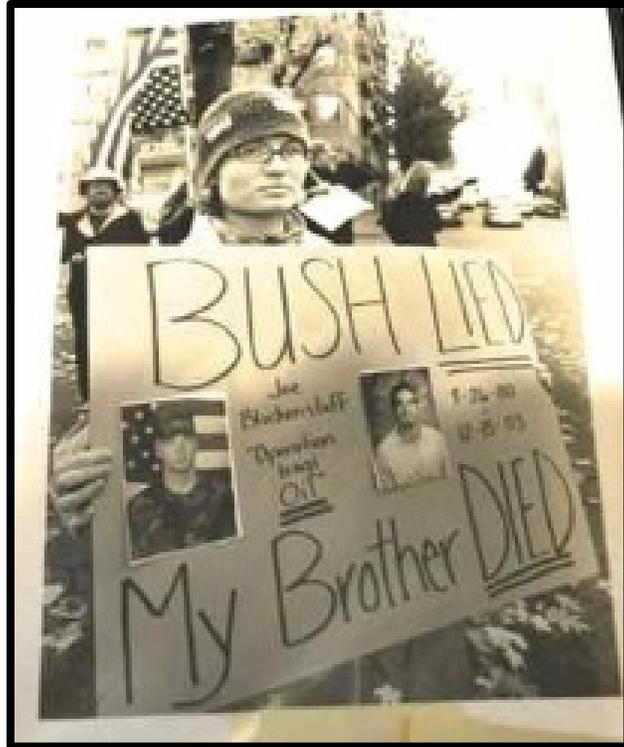
LEE: That is still Nike.

SP: They are not...

LEE: This one is calling for a boycott for Nike shoes and products, so the Bush thing again.

SP: "Bush lied, my brother died." Ooh, colored

LEE: That is when I switched to digital.



SP: Then you went to color?

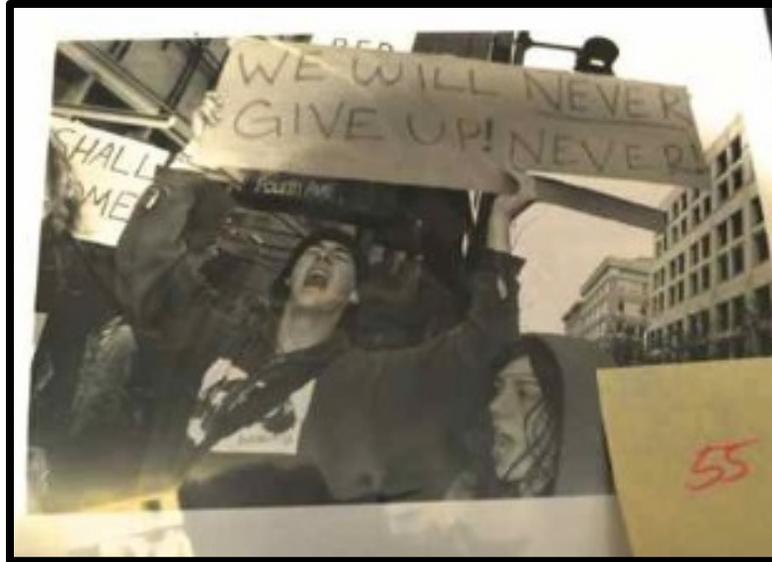
LEE: Yes.

SP: Do you sometimes still do it black and white?

LEE: No, all color. I like this sign.

SP: "We will never, we will never give up. Never."

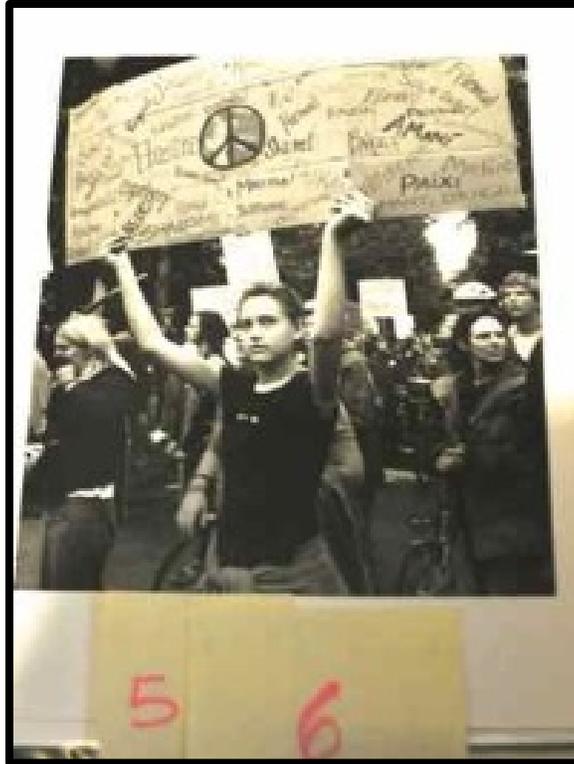
LEE: This was when Bush was reelected. A lot of people were feeling very depressed.



SP: And this was Portland here?

LEE: And this is peace in all, many different languages. I like that. A homemade sign and she

took the trouble to look up peace in all of these different languages. I thought that was so cool.



SP: And it was really just a box that has been opened out.

LEE: That's right. This was about health care. No more.

SP: "Yes we can."



LEE: This is an old picture about immigrant workers, "Support workers' rights." That's Cindy. You might know her.

SP: So this is local. Does it say - what is it?

LEE: U.F.C.W. [United Food and Commercial Workers].

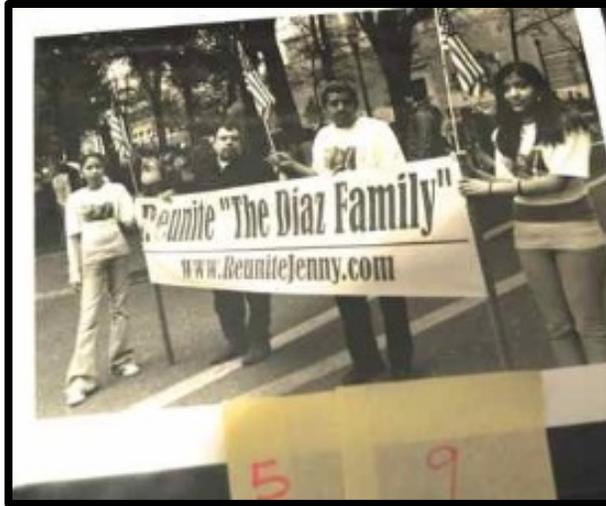


SP: I am looking below. Is it something county?

LEE: I don't know.

SP: "Win with Gordon Smith?" Oh, "Down with Gordon Smith." When he was still senator.

LEE: Yes, this was when the Mexicans were protesting against that –. They were trying to send families back to Mexico, remember that?

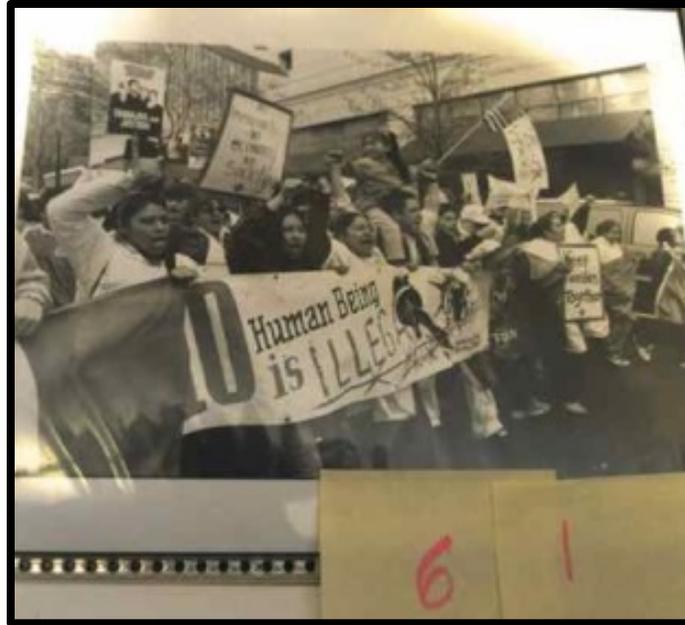


SP: Well, they are still doing it, but this is a while ago.

LEE: When it started. I like that.

SP: "Can you do it without us immigrants?" That is certainly a family.

LEE: Think of all of the work that they do. These are undocumented workers. They have the corner and they stand there and they hope to get hired for the day. And here are two of them. Not an easy life. "No human being is illegal."



SP: And this is "Jobs with Justice?"

LEE: Yes.

SP: In downtown Portland?

LEE: Right. I think that is pretty much it. There is probably enough.

SP: No, it's great. Boy, it was wonderful. My own private show. I enjoyed it.

LEE: Oh good. I am glad

SP: So I didn't see anything of Occupy.

LEE: Oh, yes, because they're on the website. I mean, I didn't get prints because my printer died. Wait, I do have one. I did print one up for an art show, for an art show for a way to get the message across without being rhetorical; You don't want to beat people on the head with your message. You want some to see it and react to it in a very positive way.

Okay, so this is Occupy.

SP: Oh, wow. And these will be all be in Portland, right? Occupy was...

LEE: This was in New York City.

SP: This was in New York City, the big one, Wall Street.

LEE: I felt like I had to be there. This is where it was all happening, this was the gravity of the new resistance because...

SP: That is an amazing picture.

LEE: Because for a while, nothing was happening, really. The anti-war movement kind of went poof.

SP: That is wonderful.

LEE: Yes, I thought that was great.

SP: “Work, consume, be silent, die. I rely on your apathy. It’s costing the earth.” Wow, ok.

LEE: And he’s got a gas mask on. I love the little white gloves.

SP: And the flag is very intriguing. I wish I could see the whole thing.

LEE: Yes, that is – I think that is for the planet Earth, the rainbow colors...

SP: It is beautiful.

LEE: Then I went to Chicago for the anti-NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] protest that was I think last year or a couple of years ago. Cops were not very nice. The Chicago police do not have a good reputation.

SP: That is pretty scary with all of those horse hoofs practically in his face.

LEE: And last, but not least, here's the puppets.



SP: Oh, the puppets

LEE: Aren't they wonderful?

SP: They are. Is this New York?

LEE: No, this is L.A. So you've got Bush and Gore, and then here is the corporate master.

SP: I see in there, he is their master.

LEE: Yes, and he is squeezing the poor little guy.

SP: I didn't even see the little guy there.

LEE: And then he has got Clinton in his pocket.

This is so funny. When these puppets walked down the street, even the L.A.P.D. were impressed. And you know how they were standing, they were standing blocking the side streets, because they didn't want the anarchists to go berserk. So they abandoned their post. They were supposed to block the side streets, and yet they came running in front of the puppets so that they could take photos. Because they were so impressed by these puppets and some of them were posing right in front of the puppets giving the thumbs up, and I thought it was funny. I think I've got some photos of it buried somewhere.

SP: That is wonderful. So, you travel a lot...

LEE: Here are all the names of all of the corporations, Bechtel.

SP: Reminds me of that flag that with the corporations instead of stars.

LEE: The corporate logos on it.

SP: What is this?

LEE: That is Uncle Sam, I think.

SP: Oh, it's a hat. I see.

LEE: Asking for handouts of course. From the little people, right? Take from the poor and give to the rich.

SP: It looked like a roll of duct tape.

LEE: Or a toilet bowl or something.

SP: Yes, it definitely could be that, too. So, do you want to sit down again?

LEE: Not really, no. I've been sitting for a while.

SP: So, I have no idea that you traveled around the country so much. So, you go there specifically, travel specifically to take pictures?

LEE: Yes, and also to support the causes, to support the people who are involved in the action. This is a show that I was involved in recently, so...

SP: Here [in Portland]?

LEE: Yes.

SP: Do they have this, or are you giving me this for them, or is this - you've got it on a file, right? Or not?

LEE: It kind of summarizes, if you want to say these are my works have been shown.

SP: No, I would like to give this to them.

LEE: Oh, okay maybe you can make a copy. Then just give me back the thing and I am sorry, oops, I hope I didn't mess that up for you. The tape has a little thing about ____.

SP: No, I am sure that they would like to have it. Maybe I will try. Do you have a file you could send to me of this work, of this, or did you...

LEE: Yes, I guess I could do that.

SP: That would be easiest.

LEE: Ok, I will do that.

SP: So do you just finance all this travel on your own?

LEE: Yes

SP: Do you get help from people?

LEE: No. Most everybody I know is poor, too. Now, this one when I went to L.A., you know how you get a lot of information on the Internet, and I found out that there was this bus that was coming from Seattle and it is run by Pastors for Peace. Have you ever heard of them?

SP: Yes.

LEE: They go to Cuba every year.

SP: Exactly. That is that's what they take _____.

LEE: They've got this huge bus, so they have got this huge bus, and so they decided that they were going to go to LA for the big demonstration, so somebody told me about

them, so I emailed them and I said how much would it cost me to go to LA with you guys and they said \$50 round trip. I was like oh, my God. How could you turn that down, right? And I am very lucky because back in the day, maybe not so much now, but back in the day, there were people who would open up their homes. People involved in the demonstrations and people who were activists, they [would] open up their homes and take in guests. And since I am a single, older woman, they felt very safe taking me in. So it didn't cost me anything to stay there, and then for food, "I love Food, not Bombs." They always fed us, so all I would spend money on was film.

SP: Does that happen often on these trips, like then you go to New York City?

LEE: All of them.

SP: Different people put you up.

LEE: Exactly. On all of them, except for maybe Miami. Miami, I didn't know anybody there, nobody knew anybody there, so I was forced to share a hotel room. But it was a cheap hotel so it wasn't much, but every other place I've been to...

SP: You have your own contacts.

LEE: At Camp Casey, heck, I brought my sleeping bag and found a little place for myself and people donated food every day. So I ate there well. Same thing with Occupy

in New York City. There was a communal kitchen and they cooked food for hundreds of people.

SP: Same thing here. But somebody put you up. In New York, that's a real problem.

LEE: Exactly. I had a friend, bless her heart, and she let me stay at her place, because I've tried staying at Occupy, but there were just too many people there. There were like five hundred people. So I figured well, and also I was worried that my cameras would get wet and always fearful that the cops were going to bust us in the middle of the night and break all of my camera equipment and I would really be up shit creek. And, plus I am getting old. If I sleep on concrete, the next day it is hard for me to move.

SP: So have you held down jobs during this time?

LEE: Yes. I have had to hold down a day job, a steady job because you certainly...

SP: You're not making money. Do you suffer sometimes?

LEE: Once in a while, yes. People are interested, but I'm not pushy about it.

SP: So what kind of work did you do all of these years?

LEE: I was an office worker at P.S.U. [Portland State University] for many years, and then I became a tutor. I tutored in the middle schools, and now I am a substitute teacher, but it is mainly...

[Cat interrupts]

It helps to pay the bills. It also helps that my husband works full time. And if you kind of clean up your lifestyle and don't consume, consume, consume, really, you need less money to live on. Yes, and then you know being on a, sometimes I get free trips from being on a mileage plan of an airline, get free trips to, so yes, I have been pretty lucky. It has worked out well.

SP: So is there anything else that you wanted to put in your record here?

LEE: Well, I mean, are we going to meet again?

SP: I don't know. I want to talk to them and find out if what the folk - I know they want something about the actual photos that they have, and I don't know what you gave them. And it sounds like you don't remember.

LEE: I think that I showed them some of those photos, and then I gave them a C.D. of the photos of Occupy, so they don't have any of the earlier anti-war. I know that they don't have some of the more compelling images.

SP: Right. But the images they do have are the ones that they are going to want you talking about.

LEE: Really? That wasn't my impression.

SP: It was mine. I'll have to talk to them. Because I think, I think what they were thinking, I am going to turn this off.

LEE: I mean, I hope it is kind of a more brief version of this where I say my work, I see my work as an historical documentation of the people's struggle for justice. My work is also a tribute to the spirit of resistance in people against injustice, war, police violence, racism, corporate power, and exploitation. And, I see my work as a tribute – oh, I already said that, didn't I?

SP: Yes, but we need this so that they will have it.

LEE: So I want to pay tribute to the people who are in my photographs. They are the main actors. They are the ones who go out there and do the protesting, the organization, I mean, the organizing. So then I end up by saying it's been a privilege for me to stand with them in the streets of Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, Miami, Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York City, and elsewhere. My photographs are a record of what we saw, felt, and did to make this world a better place. I would like to have...

SP: That is why I want you to send it to me, because I will include it.

LEE: Okay.

SP: Okay, great.

[End of Session 1]

Session 2, Part 1
2014 December 29

SP: It is December 29, and I am with Bette Lee, we are meeting at her home in Portland Oregon in 2014 and we are going to look at some pictures. First one says - oh, it's Bush.

LEE: I think that [documentary photography] can be a very powerful tool for social change, and I believe that the struggle for justice is the greatest narrative in our history, and that is why I have been documenting the struggle for justice, for racial justice and human rights and civil rights for over 25 years, and it has kept me going. It has inspired me and millions more to keep fighting for it, because in a world without justice, all of us suffocate. All of us are hungry [for justice], and many are killed unjustly.

So I think the theme that is nice in my work for over 25 years is the struggle for justice, and I think that we won't stop, like so many people before us, until we win the struggle, and I would just like to respond with a quote from Martin Luther King, who said the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice. M-U-L-U-G-E-T...

SP: I know who you are talking about. [Mulugeta] Seraw.

LEE: He is well-known, and there is even a book written about him. Have you talked about how this essay for the essay starts with in college in America and in 1989 how he began with the with the killing of a black man so by three white supremacists.

SP: I really thought that was important.

LEE: Seraw was only 28 years old and I thought that it was interesting to show how important history is.

SP: So let's move on to this one.

LEE: Oh, Morford. Our favorite enemy.

SP: I just did a history program about that.

LEE: Good for you

SP: There is so much. There seems to be a theme going down today with good houses being torn down and a lot of the people working on it now didn't know about this.

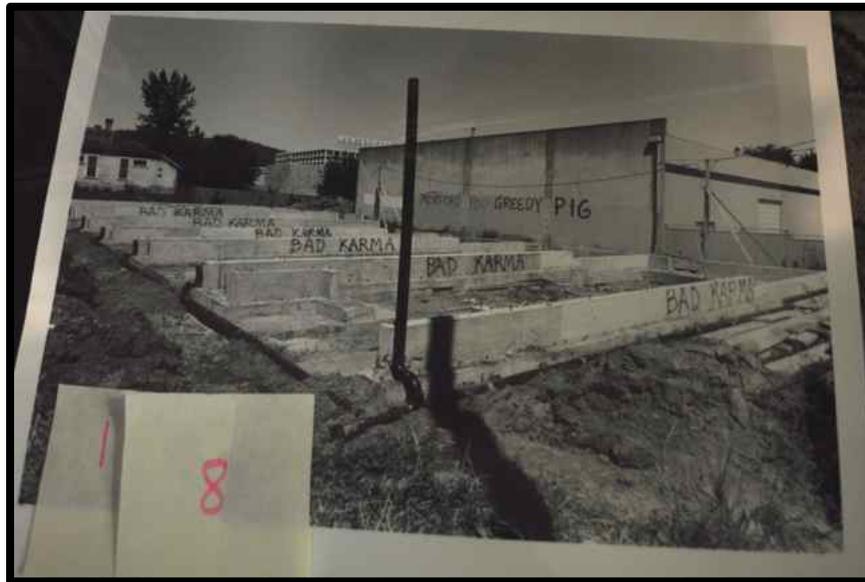
LEE: Exactly.

SP: So this is wonderful. I wish I had known that you had had this picture. We could have used it.

LEE: It was from 30 years ago.

SP: I think actually 25.

LEE: 25. Exactly right, 1989. Real social change. “Morford you greedy pig.” I thought it would be helpful to provide a little bit of historical information as background, to help viewers in context.



So this image is about gentrification, which happened in Portland about four decades ago. It is a problem that impacts several, many major cities in the U.S., and Portland was not exempt. So what happened was in 1989, Philip Morford, a developer, made millions from demolishing these beautiful, vintage, old houses, and building town houses for the very affluent.

So, this activated a lot of residents in Northwest Portland, as well as people who were against gentrification, because they read the writing on the wall, what it would do, the disastrous impact that it would have on their communities, and also on their ability to live in the neighborhoods that they loved. So, they started to fight back and it even involved an act of arson against eight construction sites in Northwest Portland.

Now, this image I think is a great example of a civil disobedience act using a lot of imagination, and the message clearly is “Greed is bad karma.” So that’s it.

Then I wanted to say something about how gentrification impacts many people, but it has impacted the African-American community the most. And the census data showed that there was a drop. Oh, that African-American population declined from 31% in 1990 to 15% in 2014.

SP: In Portland? In Oregon? What?

LEE: I think that this was in Portland.

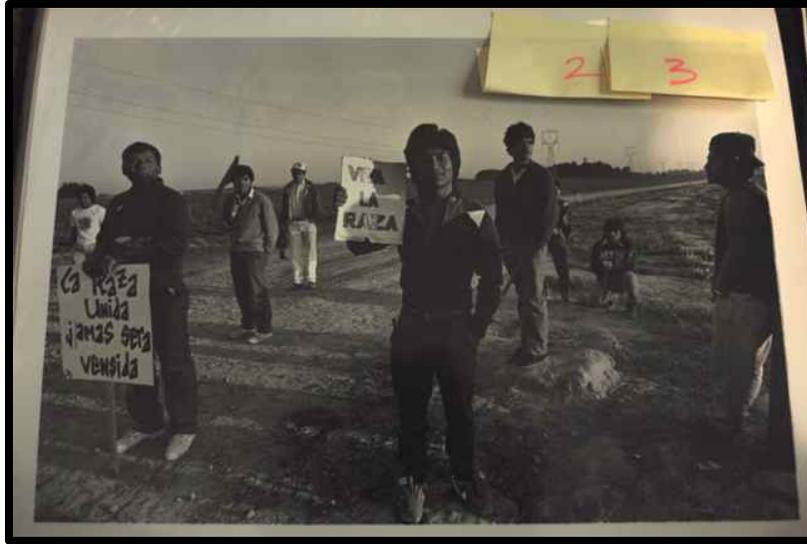
SP: Really? People actually left?

LEE: Well, yes, they are now in Gresham. Gresham and where is that other place? Not Beaverton, but...

SP: Somewhere else? Eastport? East?

LEE: So that is that.

This one, this is the farm worker strike.



SP: Is this PCUN?

LEE: Yes, it is 1991 at Kramer Farm in Woodburn, Oregon. And it was organized by PCUN and it was the first union organized farm workers' strike in the state of Oregon. And the workers were fighting to improve working conditions, which were horrible, and for - also against poor wages, because they were being paid below the minimum wage. So the strike had significant coverage by national media, including *USA Today* and National Public Radio.

SP: And did you spend a lot of time out there?

LEE: I was there for one full day. I was there from like five in the morning till 10PM at night, so I was there for the whole day. I saw a lot.

SP: So at night, that is when you saw the living conditions?

LEE: Well, I was allowed to enter the housing units where the workers were living and they were just bare bones, where many workers were just jammed in there.

SP: Was it families or just...

LEE: Bunk beds, and it just looked like a huge garage with no windows. And the workers were all men. They were separated from their families. And a lot of them were complaining how out of their salary, even though they were being paid such a minimum salary, they had to pay for the lousy housing that they were in. They had to pay for the buses that drove them from their housing to the farms and back. They had to pay for the horrible food they were eating, so at the end of the day, what little was left from a hard day's work was just pitiful.

SP: And their lives sound pitiful.

LEE: Yes, and you can see from their faces that they have been through some hard times.

SP: They look mostly pretty young.

LEE: It is hard work on a farm. Okay, so this was the O.P.E.U. strike in 1995, and O.P.E.U. stands for Oregon Public Employees Union.



SP: These are great.

LEE: Yes, so the state workers went on strike and they went shut down the state of Oregon for almost a week. 90% of Oregon's 17 thousand state workers went on strike, and it was O.P.E.U.'s first statewide strike.

SP: So what kind of jobs do O.P.E.U. do? I mean because there are other public employee

unions in the state. Which ones are they?

LEE: They are the ones that work in the government offices and universities, the secretaries, the clerical staff, the janitors. And, I am sure that they worked in other areas as well. Could do some more research about it.

SP: Oh, no, I was just curious. It's interesting. I'm not sure which of these photos I like better, because there are so many wonderful faces in this one, but all of these wonderful signs are pretty great too.

LEE: Speaking about signs, one really popular sign that I particularly liked said "Kicking ass for the working class."

SP: "Tiernan the Terrible." I don't know who Tiernan was.

LEE: I think that he was a government official who really came down hard on the workers, and calling them parasites and leeches and what have you.

SP: Well, yes. Maybe he was the one doing the negotiation for the state?

LEE: Well, he was definitely on the side of the business.

SP: So is this a rally in Salem?

LEE: This was a rally outside the State Capitol in Salem and I think that there were over ten thousand people there that day. So it was pretty impressive. I like the signs that says "I work hard for Oregon," and "Oregon works because we do."

SP: “Stop police employee” - I can’t read the last word. It’s way in the back.

LEE: It says: “Support your working class humans.” But I can’t see that. “Kicking ass with the working class.”

SP: There is a lot. There’s a lot. Oh.

LEE: These are May Day photos. I’ve been going to May Day for the past 25 years.

SP: So do you know which years these are?

LEE: I am not sure. I think one was 2006, and one may have been 2002.



SP: They are very different.

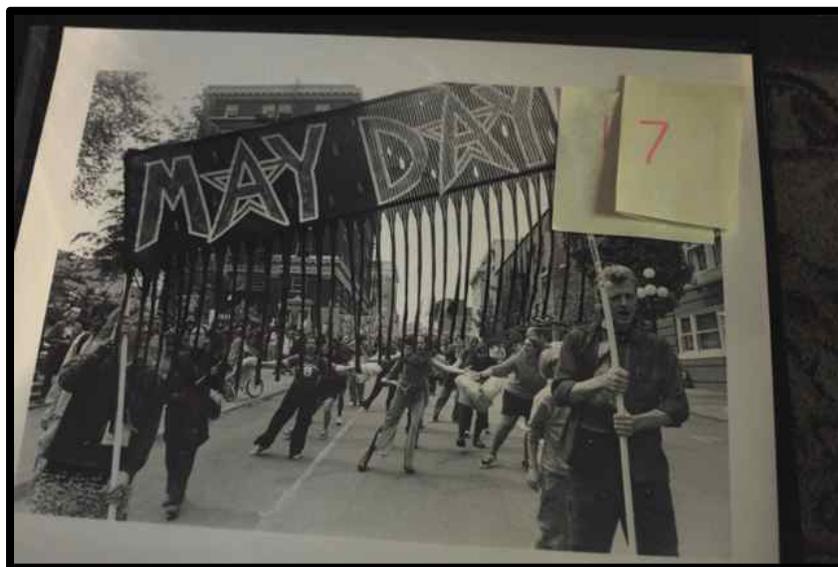
LEE: Yes, they are. Yes.

So May Day of course is traditionally a global celebration of the International Worker's Day and it highlights the ongoing struggle for worker's rights and justice. But during the last few years, the May Day protests have also supported immigrant rights, which is really a worker's issue as well because most people who come here from Mexico and Central America, they come here so they can work. They are not here to go to Disneyland.

SP: So these people, at first I thought that they were skating, the way that they were moving their bodies together. It's really interesting.

LEE: They are a group called the Radical Cheerleaders.

SP: Oh, ok. So it's almost like dance.



LEE: Yes, they were dancing. So they had choreographed a dance, and with the pompoms and the chants and they were singing songs and so they were a very lively spectacle.

SP: So do you go every May Day?

LEE: Yes, pretty much. I think I missed one last year. That was the only one I missed.

SP: But it is part of your regular calendar.

LEE: Yes, I love May Day.

SP: And do you march with them, or are you on the side taking photos?

LEE: No, I do both. I weave in and out.

SP: So this is quite a contrast with this other photo, which has a very, very different feel.

LEE: Oh, what feel is that?

SP: Well, this one, the first one is kind of joyous, and they are dancing and there is this very pretty May Day banner; very attractive. And this one, they are anarchists I presume, and they've got their faces partially covered and they are all in black. And then they've got these shields that are reflective so you see this pretty, I guess it's the back of somebody in front of them. At first I thought it was a menacing policeman, but it has a menacing feel to the photo, and this one has a pretty celebratory kind of feel.

LEE: It is a good contrast.

SP: It's a wonderful contrast. Is there anything in particular you want to say about the photos themselves?

LEE: Well, I think that May Day incorporates a lot of different themes and issues and it [is], of course, attended by so many different people with very different agendas. So this group called themselves the Infernal Noise Brigade and they are an anarchist group, and they actually play very interesting eclectic music. They were at the W.T.O. protest.

SP: I see that this one has cymbals. I didn't realize that they were musicians. And is this some kind of an instrument?



LEE: That is a toy rifle.

SP: Oh, it is, I wasn't sure. You sure wouldn't do that today.

LEE: No.

SP: You'd be dead

LEE: This was before 9/11, so that is right. So they look like they are the Partisan Peoples' Militia, marching for justice.

SP: Yes and this one has got almost like a Communist hat on with that star on it.

LEE: That's true.

SP: Here is this one too.

LEE: Who knows what that star symbolizes.

SP: I just think of Chinese and Soviet soldiers whatever, with their stars on their caps, too.

LEE: Of course that is reemphasized by her Asian looks and her Asian clothes, but who really knows what it means. That is the thing about these huge protests where thousands and thousands of people participate.

SP: So would you say these are, I think, from different years?

LEE: Yes.

SP: But would you say that that kind of diversity of spirit, message, whatever costume, is pretty much a regular thing at all of the May Days?

LEE: Yes, definitely. I think that makes it interesting, although some people would argue that it diffuses the message, since there are so many issues competing for our attention. I think the reality is that we are confronted with so many social issues that need to be [fixed], and that is because the system is broken. The system is broken, and it

cannot be fixed. And the result are all of these social and economic problems, which drives people to go out there and do something about it, including protesting.

SP: Better than silence, right?

LEE: Exactly.

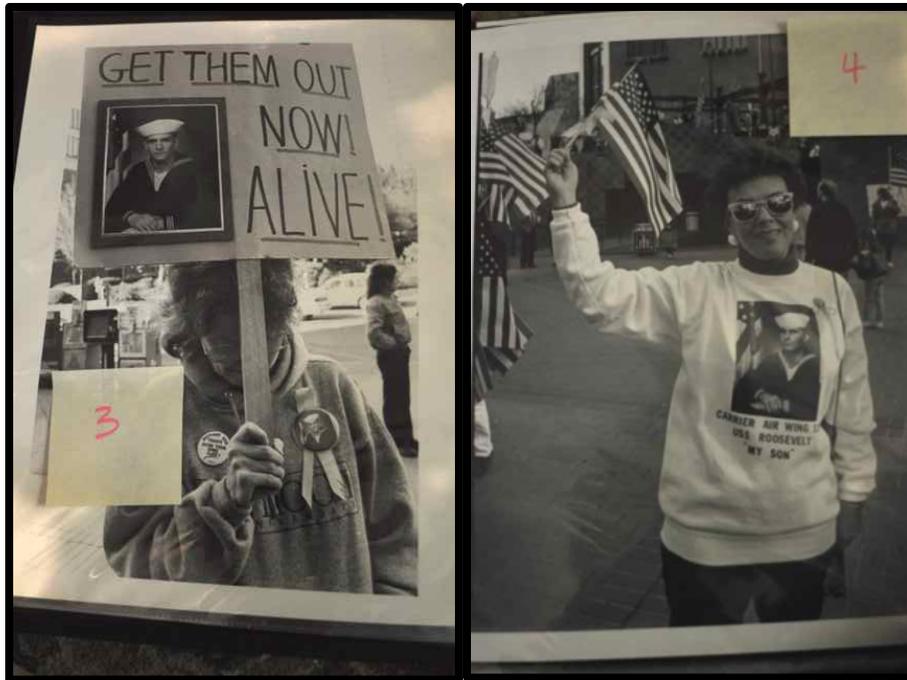
So in 1991, under President Bush the Senior, America attacked Iraq during the Gulf War, 1991. And I guess the justification for that war was that Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, had invaded Kuwait, and these horrible Iraqis were tossing babies out of incubators, which turned out to be a lie. But, it was a very short war, and it did bring thousands of people out to protest, as well as thousands more who came out to support the war.

So for me, America is a very interesting country because it is so diverse. It is one of the most diverse countries in the world, and I think diversity is a huge advantage. But at the same time, it can also create tremendous conflicts and cracks in society. And war is one of those conflicts. So I thought it would be interesting to go to both protests, the ones that were against the war and the ones that support the war, and try to understand or at least document the differences or maybe even similarities between these two groups who were so passionate about their beliefs.

SP: So tell me about these two pictures in particular.

LEE: I thought that this was a good example of the ideological differences in both groups. So both of them are mothers with sons in the U.S. military fighting in Iraq. The first mother is weeping, and her sign says "Bring my son home, and get them out now alive," and contrast that with the other mother who is waving a U.S. flag.

SP: Literally flag waving.



LEE: And she is smiling proudly because she believes that her son is a great patriot fighting for his country. I think that it is very interesting because they both have images of their sons on their clothing and on the signs, and the sons look so similar, they almost look like twins.

SP: They are dressed identically.

LEE: Exactly. They have the same uniforms exactly, and I guess that they are both in the Navy because it says U.S.S. Roosevelt. It's on a carrier, an American carrier.

SP: And she has got a U.S. Navy pin on here.

LEE: In yellow. And she has one, too. They both have the yellow ribbons with the pins.

SP: It is quite a pair of photos. Are both of these at Pioneer Square?

LEE: Yes.

SP: On different days?

LEE: Yes. Downtown. Yes, different days.

SP: But the same war.

LEE: The same war.

So fast forward to 2003 and now we have the Second Gulf War under President Bush, the Junior. Oh, I'm sorry. This one was also taken in 1991. We are not done with it yet.

SP: And this is also huge flags.

LEE: These are huge American flags, and it was actually at a rally supporting the war, and I was quite appalled to see many people carrying signs that said "Pro-War." It is one thing to support the troops. It is another thing to say that you are pro-war.

SP: That you like a war.

LEE: Exactly. That is how I interpreted it. So this was at a pro-war rally, but I think that it actually is a very strong anti-war image.



SP: In the way that maybe those German films that what's her name?

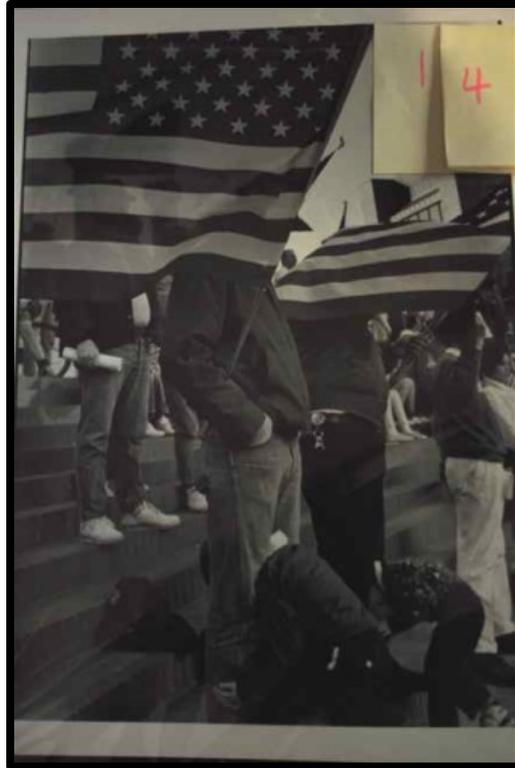
LEE: Leni Reifenstahl?

SP: They are so horrifying.

LEE: "The Triumph of the Will."

SP: Yes, exactly.

LEE: And then you end up horrified by this fascistic, militaristic drive of thousands of people. I think that what this image shows is that these huge flags are blocking the heads of the men carrying them: you don't see anybody's head. You see many people in this image, but no one's head is clearly seen. They are either blocked or obscured, and I think that what it symbolizes is that ideology blocks critical thinking and clarity, and that leads to people being easily brainwashed and manipulated into supporting things like war, which in reality are really against their own self-interest. And, I think that the two little sons, who are probably really bored at the rally were just goofing off and they stuck their heads between the knees of their fathers, and that is when I made the photo and I thought that, symbolically, [it] shows how ideology is passed down from generation to generation. Especially from fathers to sons in [a] patriarchal society.

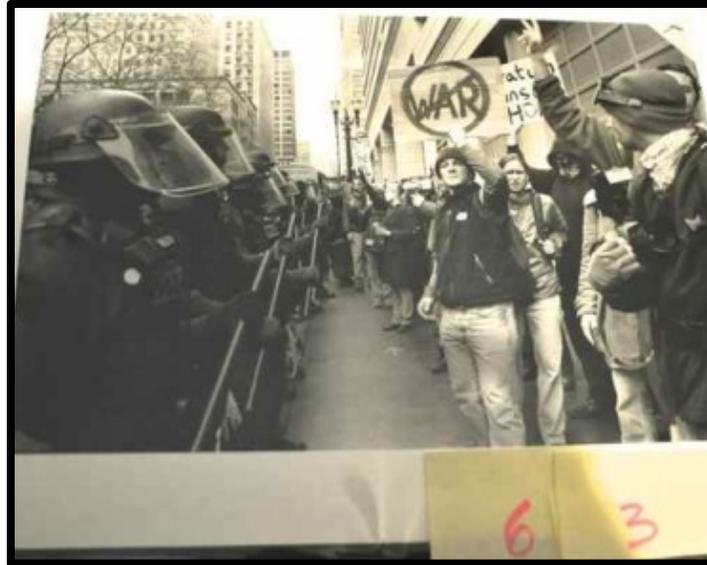


So, fast forward to 2003, and we have another war against Iraq. That is 2003 under President Bush the Junior, and again the justification for this war was based on lies. I remember over 30 thousand people protested against the war before it broke out, and there were many, many protests over the years against this war which as far as I know, is still ongoing.

Isn't the U.S. still there? Aren't they fighting ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] now, or God knows who they're fighting.

SP: Endless war.

So this is the first picture in here, I think, where we see the police.



LEE: Yes, and I am glad that you mentioned that, because throughout the years what I have noticed with fear and trepidation is that the police has become increasingly militarized as dissent has become more and more criminalized. So back in the day, you could go out in the streets and protest, but now, a lot of times when you do so, you are putting yourself in danger because the police, it seems that their attitude is to see us as potential terrorists or criminals. And their uniforms are much scarier, their weapons are much more lethal and damaging. So I think that says a lot about [the erosion of] democracy and our civil rights.

SP: To me, I am also _____. I mean, here they've got these big shields over their faces, as if they are expecting to be attacked.

LEE: That is right, because they see us as the enemy. We are not just out there [as] Americans, civilians, citizens who are concerned about social political issues and exercising our first amendment rights - what is it, our fifth amendment?

SP: First amendment is speech. I would say first.

LEE: Yes, so we are enemies of the state. Like I said, dissent has become more and more criminalized.

SP: I am just thinking back to like the Vietnam War when I had babies and I would march with them. I wasn't worried. I wasn't nervous. I never remembered the police looking like that and those huge batons they have.

LEE: They do not hesitate to attack you when the orders are given. That is not to say many protests have [not] been peaceful. I would say non-violent and people would still bring their children and their babies to protests. But [there have] been many, many protests where the police have just gone berserk and attacked people.

SP: So are they in front of the Justice Center?

LEE: I want to say that this is 6th Avenue. It is near the Hilton Hotel. I think that is near where Bush or somebody like that, maybe it was Cheney was staying or where the staff was meeting.

SP: Oh, this is the hotel.

LEE: I think so.

SP: That one first.

LEE: Immigration. Welcome digital, goodbye to the old. I switched to technology using a digital camera.

SP: You like it?

LEE: Well, I have to admit that I do because it has freed me from being in prison in my darkroom for hours and hours, inhaling toxic chemicals.

SP: Do you find that you shoot more photos?

LEE: That's true. That is the downside. You do tend to end up with hundreds and hundreds of photos and then it takes forever to edit them, and most of them should not have even been made in the first place.

SP: But, do you think you end up with more good photos than when you were shooting on film, when you can take more?

LEE: I think so. It's really a totally different experience, yes.

SP: Ok, so let's talk about these photos.

LEE: Well, these photos highlight the immigration issue because as you know the people from the Mexican and Latino communities were, and still are, under attack because some of them are here illegally, and others are perceived to be here taking jobs away from Americans. So, and like I said, a lot of human rights groups and workers groups in Oregon support the immigrant workers' rights to come here and work in America. So, it's basically, it is a human rights and a workers' rights issue as much as it is an immigration issue.

SP: So both of these photos, they are mothers and children.



LEE: Exactly.

SP: Were you specifically looking for that when you were shooting?

LEE: Yes, because I wanted to show that these people are not a threat to Americans. They are a very hard working people. They are here to work hard and raise their families. They are not terrorists. They are not criminals. They are not dangerous people. They are actually very peaceful and law-abiding citizens, and as the sign said, "Can we do it without them"?

SP: I like this one that is next to that one. "Oregon works because immigrants work."

LEE: Exactly. It is like that O.P.E.U. picture "Oregon works because we do." It is always about on the backs of workers that everything works.

SP: So I don't know if you want to talk about this, but you yourself are an immigrant.

LEE: That is right. I am myself an immigrant. My sympathies and empathies are with immigrants. I know how hard their lives were and can be, and still are, and the enormous challenges that we face, and I don't really think that I am a success story.

SP: Are you glad you did come?

LEE: Well, yes, because I don't think I would have survived long in a repressive authoritarian country like Singapore.

SP: Singapore. Okay. I'm not sure I knew that you were from Singapore. I mean I knew that you were from China. From some reason I thought that you might be from Hong Kong, but no, Singapore, I know, is very repressive.

Do you want to talk about that at all? I mean, how old you were or anything?

LEE: No, not really.

SP: No, okay. Any more about these?

LEE: I think that their stories are much more compelling.

SP: Why is that?

LEE: Because most of them came from dirt poor families. I mean, they had to cross the deserts and overcome physical hardships just to get to this country. So I think that I had it easy compared to them.

SP: I don't know your story, and I know that some people coming from Asia don't have it easy.

LEE: That is true, so, I would rather give voice to their stories.

That is pretty much it. I mean, these are sort of - this was against the passing of the Arizona bill SB-170.

SP: And that did what?

LEE: That targeted the Mexican and Latino communities, and so it just lit a fire across the U.S. and the Mexicans and the people were targeted. I mean, the Mexican community everywhere rose up against it because...

SP: They were targeted for deportation, or what?

LEE: Yes, they were targeted for deportation. I don't remember the specifics of the bill.

SP: Do you remember about when it was?

LEE: It was in 2010.

SP: Oh, not so long ago.

LEE: Yes, 2010. But, it was a very vicious bill, as I recall.

SP: Yes, I remember it as well, but I wanted you to talk about it. This second one is very compelling to me.

LEE: Well, you recognize the effigy.

SP: Is that Bush? Okay.

LEE: They were burning an effigy of Bush the Elder, the first President Bush.

SP: Oh, the Elder, okay. But they also seem to be burning flags.

LEE: That is right. And they are burning American flags, and this was again in response to the

First Gulf War.

SP: Oh, so we have gone back a little. Okay.

LEE: This is probably 1991, and there was a rumor floating around that George Bush the Elder used cocaine. So one of the signs said, "More coke, George?"



SP: Wow, so this is a demonstration. I see a bus.

LEE: It is on Sixth Avenue.

SP: On Sixth, that is the bus mall.

LEE: The bus mall, exactly.

SP: And that is a shelter, a bus shelter there, so they are in the street.

LEE: Right. I think that some of the earlier protests were more, shall we say, more lively and more theatrical, I guess is the word.

SP: Creative.

LEE: More creative, yes. I mean, certainly, that culminated in the W.T.O. protests. I mean, part of it was just like a carnival. It was so amazing, the huge puppets and the street performances, and music and the signs; it was just this outpouring of creative, creativity and imagination, all for the cause of justice, which made it so great.

SP: So it clearly makes the demonstration more enjoyable. Do you think that it makes it more effective?

LEE: For me, it does. I mean, other people I am sure would disagree, because they will think oh, it wasn't serious enough, or it is just street theatre. It is just a spectacle, but I think that the spectacle can be used very effectively to promote your causes or causes, done in the right way. I think basically it comes down to my belief that art can be a very, very powerful tool for social change, and I think that people are more open to message if it is presented in a creative, imaginative, or funny or a fun way. You know, you don't feel like you are being preached to. You don't feel like someone is trying to shove the message down your throat. It is presented in a very pretty creative and sometimes funny way, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't have impact. It is just presented in a different package.

SP: So this, the first one with the Hispanic people in it.

LEE: That was in Salem.

SP: This is in Salem and they got a sign that "We are not terrorists."



LEE: That is right, because they were being deported, many of them, and...

SP: And it is after 9/11.

LEE: And I think the Arizona bill...

SP: Oh, the Arizona bill, I am sorry. Yes of course, right.

LEE: That really targeted them as if they were terrorists.

SP: I am sorry, I forgot and got distracted by this flag-burning and the fire in his head. It is really quite amazing. And this upside-down flag.

LEE: Yes, I think that back in the day, a lot more flags were burned by protesters, but since 9/11, it has become less and less. And again, I think that that is a lot more fear in America since 9/11.

SP: Yes, I think you're right. To be unpatriotic is dangerous.

LEE: Yes, exactly. Especially when the dissent became more and more criminalized, a lot of people have become more and more afraid that they will be perceived or branded as terrorists.

SP: Okay. You want to move on?

LEE: Sure, so now we can look at the pictures on the back in the day in 2006, 8 thousand people participated in the May Day march.

SP: Here in Portland?

LEE: And another eight thousand in Salem. There were two marches on the same day. One in the morning, and one in the afternoon, but it seems that the numbers have decreased over the years, which is unfortunate. I don't know why. Maybe fear again, over the years, fear has been a factor.

SP: So at what point did it become more about immigrants?

LEE: That is a very good question.

SP: Originally it was about workers.

LEE: Exactly. I think it became maybe, I want to say 2009. Ever since then, the immigration issue is a prominent issue in the May Day protests.

SP: So has the attendance by non-Hispanic people gone down?

LEE: Yes, and also the Hispanic people as well. I don't know why.

SP: I mean, before 2009, I don't think there were very many Hispanics who came at all, right?

LEE: Right. I think the numbers culminated in 2006 with the 8 thousand in Portland. But since then, the numbers have decreased steadily and I don't know what the reasons are. I would suspect that fear is a big factor and so...

SP: It's interesting to me that it's made this migration from being focused on workers' rights and move to being about immigrant rights, even though of course they are still workers, but the focus has changed so much.

LEE: That's right, the focus has changed.

SP: Internationally, historically it's the workers' day.

LEE: Right.

SP: Ok, do you want to move to the computer?

LEE: Sure. Occupy Portland, now I'll just bring them both up. And these were actually chosen by Eliza [Canty-Jones]. If you don't like them, go tell Eliza.

SP: Is this the same day as that other one that is in the notebook with the police facing the protesters?



LEE: No, that was anti-war, earlier. This, we're talking about 2011.

SP: Wow, they look so much alike.

LEE: Well, like I said the police have just become more and more militarized and they've been wearing Darth Vader type uniforms for the past few years. These are the riot police.

SP: So they seem to be protecting the Chase Bank?

LEE: Yes. Right. So, do I just start with my thing?

SP: Tell me what you want to tell me.

LEE: So, moving on, 2011, Occupy Wall Street was a massive grass roots resistance against unprecedented and unfettered corporate power and greed, and a corrupt system which supports and perpetrates it. So when the Wall Street gamblers and the big banks were bailed out by the US government, many people realized whose side the government is really on.

So Occupy Wall Street was a people's movement, and the rallying cry was "We are the 99% against the 1%". So, Occupy camps spread everywhere, including Portland, but they didn't last long and they were shut down in many cities, sometimes, in many cases, brutally and violently by the police. So Occupy Portland organized several large protests in Portland during its existence and even beyond. So this was a protest and the message was "Occupy the banks" and this was into, I think, November. Was it November? Well it was sometime in 2011. The intent was to blockade the banks so that they were, to force them to close for that day. So there was no business as usual. Act of civil disobedience.

SP: Were they successful? Did they come back to the bank?

LEE: No. They were not. Because they were allowed to blockade the entrances to the banks for a few hours or maybe less, but the riot cops appeared in force and people were evicted, and in other cases the police were there guarding the banks before we even got there.

SP: Because they knew.

LEE: Because they knew. They know who they serve and protect.

SP: So what did you like about this photo?

LEE: I like it, too, because I think the police, well they look very menacing. They are almost this indistinguishable mass and you don't see them as individuals or as individual human beings, they are just this dark force.

SP: Because...

LEE: Because of the way they are dressed and the way they - the composition, the seamy-ness of this menacing, dark force ready to attack.

SP: And you can't see their faces.

LEE: And you can't see their faces. So they are this faceless, dark force.

But thanks to the creativity and ingenuity of the protesters, somebody managed to get up there and put a sign up there right in the front of the Chase Bank's entrance and it

says “End corporate rule, we want democracy.” And that’s what Occupy, I think, that’s what one of the main objectives or demands that Occupy...

SP: So, in this one?

LEE: This one shows the eviction of Occupy at Chapman Square in downtown Portland.

SP: Eviction. I thought that happened at night.



LEE: No, they came by and told them they had to pack up and leave. And so many of them did. But some of them refused. Some of them refused to move and that was a big demonstration all day, well, especially at night.

SP: Right, right. So, this is earlier that day.

LEE: Right, this is earlier that day and at night the police actually backed off because there were thousands and thousands of people out in the streets and the police called in the riot cops. There were hundreds of policemen, the whole place just looked like a war zone in a way. Then, in the wee, I was there, I think I was there until 6 in the morning. Everyone was so tired from being out there all night. Many people left. I recall that around 8 or 9, [the cops] went into what was left of the Occupy camp and then brutally arrested or evicted the remaining people.

SP: Let's talk about this picture because the police don't look menacing in this one at all.

LEE: No, they don't. They usually look menacing at night or when, when the cameras from the media aren't around. But that's because - another reason is that these are not the riot cops. These are the cops on the street, whereas, [in] this picture they are riot cops.

SP: But this guy's got that helmet.

LEE: But he doesn't have that uniform, see that? These are riot cops. You see that kind of rubberized, padded uniform, that's riot cops. Just, you know, the ordinary cops. I mean this is the whole thing of velvet glove and iron fist.

SP: I know, but it is a contrast because we haven't seen a lot of police so far in your photos and I think this is the first one today that, where the police look friendly and this one in the front almost looks sympathetic.

LEE: And sometimes they can be. The police are not dumb, they play this good cop, bad cop game with us.

SP: I just wanted to hear what your feeling was about this photo. Why you took it and...

LEE: Some cops try to do their job the way it's supposed to be done. But other cops don't and I've seen many instances where cops are the ones who are the perpetrators of violence and they don't hesitate to hurt people.

SP: But that's not what's happening here.

LEE: No...

SP: So, why did you take this photo?

LEE: I think it's important to document the entire picture, not just show cops always in a bad light. Sometimes, like I said, they do their jobs and really, in the final analysis, they are just workers who are following the orders of their bosses. Just like any other worker.

SP: There is a sign over here that says that "The cops are part of the 99%."

LEE: Exactly, that's right. They are workers. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that all cops are evil and menacing and a threat. I think some cops might have been more sympathetic towards Occupy because they've seen their wages being attacked and they know about budget cuts.

SP: Yes, and what about this woman? Young woman.

LEE: Well, a lot of the Occupiers were young. And Occupy attracted a lot of young people, which for me is a good thing because we need more and more young activists if the struggle is going to keep moving forward. We need new blood so to speak. I think it's much healthier and so much more inspiring when young people become involved in social issues and social protests rather than playing video games or shopping in malls.

SP: I'm trying to read this sign. It's upside down. Does that say "soup"?

LEE: I don't know. I'm not sure. I'm not sure what it says.

SP: So, shall we move on?

LEE: Sure. So Occupy is no more, but hopefully the spirit of resistance lives on. It does, right?

SP: Yeah.

LEE: So okay, Occupy.

So the next one is homeless, an issue that I feel is very, very important. You may have heard of a group called Right To Dream 2. It's an advocacy group that was started by people who were formerly houseless, as they describe themselves. Every year they organize an annual protest called "Pitch A Tent" to protest against the city ordinance that allows people to camp out overnight in downtown Portland the day before the Rose Parade. For the rest of the year, homeless people are - it's illegal for homeless people to camp overnight in the same streets of Portland. All the other nights of the year.

SP: So this is during the Rose Parade, this picture.



LEE: So this picture was during the Rose Parade, and what is significant about it is that it focuses, or it informs the public that between the - that so many veterans are homeless and there's a National Coalition for the Homeless published their findings that between - wait a minute, I wrote it down somewhere. 130 to 200 thousand veterans are homeless.

SP: So it that why you took the picture at this point in the parade?

LEE: Yeah, and this was then the army was marching down the streets during the Rose Parade and this protester was confronting them with the sign focusing on the fact that so many veterans are homeless.

SP: So this is kind of an aside. I haven't been to the Rose Parade in many years and I thought that there would be a lot more people on the sidewalk watching.

LEE: I mean they are on both sides.

SP: It seems pretty sparse...

LEE: Yeah, but it goes up blocks and blocks all the way from...

SP: So you come down and find a place to see well.

LEE: Yeah, me too.

SP: I'm surprised.

LEE: Well maybe the attendance was not that good that year.

SP: I was thinking it was towards the end of the parade?

LEE: Well, I'm not sure but if you go down few more streets, you'll see a lot more crowds. And here: "The Right to Dream and to Survive." Someone wrote that in chalk on the street. There's the troops, marching. Do you want to...

SP: That's fine.

LEE: Shall we go to the next one?

SP: Sure.



LEE: Ok, so this, for me it was really good to see hundreds of students protesting to support their teachers and also standing up to fight for their right to a good quality

education. So this was, actually this was this year, 2014. And this was during the contract negotiations between the public school teachers and the Portland Public School Board. And the teachers were sick and tired. Well the teachers wanted - the teachers were challenging the standardized testing and the overcrowded classes. So they wanted better working conditions. So it wasn't just about pay, it was really about the issue of education itself.

The students were standing up not only just for their teachers, but they were also standing up for themselves because they felt that the quality of their education and their right to a decent education was compromised and that the school board didn't really care. And also the students from Jefferson High School, their grievance was that the quality of education has really gone downhill for a school like Jefferson that is primarily attended by the poor, the low income and students of color, in this case African-Americans.

SP: So they had walked out of class that day?

LEE: That's right. The students walked out of class, hundreds of them, and then they marched around for hours and then that same night they attended a School Board meeting and they disrupted the meeting when it became clear to them that the School Board was not going to consider their grievances in any significant way. So when they disrupted the meeting with their chants and their banners, all the School Board members walked out. So that was quite interesting.

But I guess the outcome of this, of these protests, was that the School Board did in the end compromise and did grant teachers some of their, to meet their demands. So, I guess you could say it was a partial victory. But the students and the teachers - another grievance of the students at Jefferson was no more racist school closures because they felt Jefferson has always been targeted by the School Board for closure.

SP: Did you spend a lot of time there that day?

LEE: Me? All day.

SP: Really?

LEE: Well, I guess the march started around noon, or the rally and then the march and we walked for hours. And then the School Board meeting was at six or seven that night.

SP: So what point of the day is this picture taken in?

LEE: Probably, I think that was at the end of the march, so probably around four.

SP: So they marched back to their school.

LEE: Right, right. And they were still full of energy, as you can tell from the picture. Oh, my goodness.

SP: Youth, youth.

LEE: Yeah, really. That fire in the belly.

SP: Yes, there is a lot of energy in that photo.

LEE: All right, so I think we're coming to the end. Yeah, so this is the last photo.

SP: Whew.

LEE: This was taken in 2014, maybe just a month ago and it was a grass roots protest led by many black activists in response to the killing of Michael Brown, an 18 year old, unarmed black teenager in Ferguson, Missouri.



SP: So, is this after the grand jury didn't indict the policeman?

LEE: Exactly.

SP: So, it's a very recent one.

LEE: Yes

SP: And I was - is this the one that...

LEE: Right

SP: So, it's dark. Is this the end of the march coming back?

LEE: I think so.

SP: Because I know that it went on later but with kind of less, not, authorized by the Albina

Ministerial Alliance - this is still the main march?

LEE: Yes, that's still the main march.

SP: Ok. So do you want to say anything about the photo itself?

LEE: Well, I think the message says it all, "Hands up, don't shoot." It's carried by an African- American woman and that refers to the details of the killing of Michael Brown. Apparently he had his hands up and he was shot eight times by a white cop.

Of course, the killing of Michael Brown is not an isolated incident. Black people have been murdered by the police, racist police, for years and years and years. And I think that's a report that came out, or research that had been done that how that a black person is killed every 28 hours by either the police, vigilante groups, or a racist group. So that's...

SP: So that's in the U.S.?

LEE: In the U.S., yes. So I think there's a look of determination on her face, intensity and determination because black people, for good reason, feel that they are targets. They never know when it's their turn to get shot down for little or no justification. And then behind her is a black man carrying a sign saying "Am I next?" and then the sign behind him says "Black is not a crime."

Yeah, so I think the message is pretty clear. Black lives matter and this kind of unjustified [killings] by racist police not only against black people but homeless people and people of color. It has to end, it has to stop and these police need to be held accountable. Being set free, and being able to kill again and again with impunity.

SP: So, you are a person of color living in a city, for large cities on the coasts, with a pretty small percentage of people of color. I don't know if you want to say anything about what that means. Earlier you talked about how great diversity was and this isn't a very diverse city.

LEE: No, it's not.

SP: It's heartening to me that so many people came out for this.

LEE: Exactly, yes.

SP: But I don't know if you just wanted to say anything about that at all. I don't know.

LEE: What? About?

SP: About living in a city that isn't very diverse.

LEE: Well, I certainly would prefer to live in a city that's more diverse because I'm a very curious person and I'm - I think people are great. A lot of people, not everyone obviously, cultures, diverse cultures are very interesting to explore. I feel like they have a lot to teach us and have a lot to share with us, so I miss that a lot. Plus the fact that there isn't even a decent Chinese restaurant in Portland.

This is going to be the last photo in my photo documentary essay. So it begins with a killing.

[End of Session 2, Part 1]

Session 2, Part 2
2014 December 29

SP: ...Bette Lee, speaking in her home to Sandy Polishuk on December 29th, 2014 almost 2015.

LEE: Ok, so the way that I see myself is an activist with a camera and I think that art can a powerful tool for social change. And I believe that the struggle for justice is the greatest narrative in our history and that's why I've been documenting the struggle for justice for over 25 years and it's kept me going. It's inspired me and millions more to keep fighting for it because in a world without justice, all of us suffocate, just cannot breathe. And many are killed, unjustly. So I think the theme that runs throughout my work for over 25 years is the struggle for justice. And I think that's - wait. So we won't stop like so many before us until we win the struggle and I would just like to end with a quote from Martin Luther King who said, "The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice". The end.

SP: I was going to ask you repeat just in case we didn't get it, that thing about the beginning and the end. That you talked about how this photo essay starts with...you talked about it how it began with the killing of the black man. So if you wouldn't mind because I'm afraid I might not have gotten it. That's all. And I thought that was important.

LEE: So, after giving it much thought, I decided to begin my photographic essay with an image pertaining to the killing of a black man [Mulugeta] Seraw in Portland and to end it with the killing of another black man, Michael Brown, in 2014. And I think it's significant because it shows that if we don't learn from history, these sorts of crimes will repeat

themselves in history. The social problems of injustice, racism, police violence, social inequality. If they are not addressed and resolved in a meaningful way that brings real social change, these [problems] and the destruction of lives and of communities will continue.

[End of Session 2, Part 2]

[End of Interview]