Jane Jacobs

An Oral History Interview

Conducted for the GVSHP Preservation Archives

by

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ABSTRACT

Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was an urban planner, author, and activist. In this oral history, Jacobs discusses various preservation battles she participated in while she was living in Greenwich Village.

She begins the interview by discussing the fight to prevent Robert Moses from expanding a roadway through Washington Square Park. In this portion of the interview Jacobs talks about the role of Ray Rubinow and his Joint Emergency Committee (JEC) in this fight, as well as this committee's influence upon subsequent preservation battles in the Village. In particular, she reflects on the way the JEC effectively leveraged the political landscape to support its position. Jacobs also discusses the decision by the committee to advocate initially for only a temporary closure to the park and the effect of the closure upon the community. Finally, Jacobs talks about issues related to the design of the park after its permanent closing to traffic. Individuals referenced in this section of the interview include Edith Lyons, Shirley Hayes, Raymond Rubinow, Norman Redlich, and Carmine DeSapio.

Jacobs continues the interview by discussing the effort in the early 1960s to challenge the City's proposed urban renewal plan for the West Village—a plan which, if implemented, would have demolished a large section of the West Village. She reflects upon the formation of the Committee to Save the West Village, detailing the strategies it employed in its successful fight against the proposed plan. Jacobs also discusses the transformation of the committee afterwards into the West Village Committee and its subsequent efforts to add housing to abandoned areas.

Jacobs then discusses her role in the battle against the proposed Lower Manhattan Expressway. She talks about how she became involved in this fight through the urging of the pastor of a local church, Fr. Lamountain, and the effects that local politics (such as infighting between the Village Independent Democrats and Carmine DeSapio's political machine) had upon this effort.

Jacobs concludes the interview by reminiscing about her move to the Village in the thirties, as well as briefly discussing other activities, such as the Greenwich Village Study in the 1950s, Save the Village, and the unsuccessful fight with NYU over the construction of Bobst Library near Washington Square Park.

INTERVIEWEE: Jane Jacobs
INTERVIEWER: Leticia Kent
LOCATION: Toronto, Canada
DATE: October 1997

JACOBS: What was significant about the battle over Washington Square? There were several things that were significant—not only in the battle, but in a much wider sense—affecting other things. I would like to mention three of those that affected all the other Village battles and battles in some other places too, and one that particularly affected a different area of the Village. So let's take them up in order.

One was the umbrella organization that Ray Rubinow devised. In retrospect, it seems so sensible, so obvious, so natural, and yet it didn't exist before he thought it out, invented it and actually got it working. After that, it became the model for practically every successful fight we had to wage in Greenwich Village.

KENT: Explain what the organization was.

JACOBS: The organization was this: Let me backtrack. In previous issues and battles in Greenwich Village a kind of bureaucratic approach had been taken. If you wanted to get other people on side, besides whatever organization—and it was always at that time an existing organization—had recognized the crisis, the ongoing crisis, or the need for a fight for it, about it. Whatever others you wanted to bring in, you thought of them as organizations. So that the issue had to be presented to them, and maybe with speakers, and so on and so on. And then whatever their practices were—like a steering committee or the semi-annual meeting or whatever it was—had to approve this with resolutions, and then what action would they take. Well, you know, things in real life move faster than that kind of bureaucratic approach, and it wasn't very effective. Furthermore, to gain one inch of effective support it took such enormous amounts of speeches, engagements, whatever.

Now Ray Rubinow made this—again, it seems so obvious, but it was really brilliant at the time he did it—he made this observation that lots of individual people who were active civically and members of these organizations, believed in this or that cause and battle and would be perfectly willing to join in on it, would be enthusiastic about it and delighted to give their energy and their efforts and their talents to it, without all this guff in between.

So what he did was think about this problem and how to overcome the friction of civic bureaucracy. That's what he was thinking about. I don't know what he called it, but that's exactly what he was trying to counter. His solution, which was wonderfully practical, was to have an umbrella organization that was only about this particular issue. In this case, in Washington Square, it was the Joint Emergency Committee to Close Washington Square to All but Emergency Traffic. Which seems to outsiders like a cumbersome kind of name, and why couldn't you have something catchier. This was exactly suited to the problem. We weren't trying to embrace all kinds of points of view about the Village, all kinds of political groups, all kinds of anything. We were trying to collect and concentrate on this issue, the people who felt as we did on that issue. In order to dramatize this and clarify this, a name like that was necessary, not something like "The Such-and-Such Association"—you know?

So that's the reason that Greenwich Village also developed these strange and wonderful names, like "The Committee to Get the Clock Started on the Jefferson Market Courthouse." People knew what they were getting into. They weren't getting into an ideology. They weren't committing themselves to things they might think of as "Oh my god, I don't believe in that." They were getting into a particular thing, and that's what we mean by an "umbrella" organization.

But back to Washington Square. All right. Washington Square was notable not only for using the umbrella organization—"The Joint Emergency Committee" it became known as for short—but that did set a pattern of a way to address realities

and join people who believed in a particular thing and might disagree enormously on other things.

That leads into the next thing that I think that battle had a great effect on. Normally, in Greenwich Village—and I think this was true in New York as a whole—it was part of the tragedy that was occurring in New York at the time and later—was that elections, which ought to help make the politicians responsive to what their constituents want and ought to clarify issues, were obfuscating and were confusing. You know, it was almost like imperial politics. Divide and conquer, setting people apart from each other.

A civic election in New York was always a time of enormous danger to any cause that you were trying to push because here people would collect who believed in a certain thing, like the umbrella organization that I was just referring to. And lo and behold the election campaign starts and of course it turns out that they don't all agree—and why should they—on who should be elected or on whether they're Democrats or Republicans or Liberals or whatever was going at the time. Why should they?

So here people who were united on a particular issue and being effective on it would all of a sudden disintegrate and begin fighting each other and drop the issue and go in for who should win the election. People who had been allies a few weeks before would become bitter enemies. Not only did this hold up whatever progress was being made, it also took a long time to rebuild alliances after these kinds of bitter battles. Most important of all, it meant that elections were not being used to reinforce democracy and to get constituents what they wanted, but were being used in the very opposite way, to undermine.

KENT: What did this have to do with Washington Square?

JACOBS: To my understanding—I may be wrong about this—but as far as I know this was the first instance in which a citizens group, a citizens' movement,

deliberately and—some people thought cold-bloodedly—used an election for their purposes and their cause, instead of letting the election divide and shatter them. I can speak to this, I think maybe better than almost anybody. All right, I'll say outright: I can speak to this better than anybody because I was in on the very birth of this idea. One night I went off to sleep, but my husband, Bob, stayed awake worrying about Washington Square and thinking what to do about it, and sometime in the middle of the night he woke me up and he told me, "Here's what we have to do. We have to insist that the people in power do what we want before the election."

Now, let me explain about the dynamics of this election. That will clarify how he thought it out. It was an election in the city in which the chief protagonists were: Bill Passanante, who was part of the Carmine DeSapio, old Democratic, Tammany machine; and the Republican who was running—I think he was a Republican—Whitney North Seymour Jr. They were opposed to each other for State Assemblyman.

Now State Assemblyman is not an earth-shattering job, but there was more to this than meets the eye because this was a question of whether Passanante, meaning the DeSapio machine, was to continue supreme in our district or not. Passanante—these are nice guys, both of them—but Passanante had been equivocal on these questions because at the time—this was not true later, I believe—he was a good machine politician who took his orders from the party line, you might call it, of the machine. Mike Seymour was more independent-minded and he had been in favor of closing Washington Square Park to all but emergency traffic for a long time. He was one of the first fighters on this. He was a very good fighter. He believed in this. He had every reason to expect and hope that he would get the support of others who felt like him. The trouble was, he was not in power. The people who were in power were DeSapio's machine.

So what Bob woke me up in the middle of the night to tell me was what we had to concentrate on. It didn't matter what Mike Seymour thought, because he had no power. He was important, no doubt about that, not only as a very nice

person and a valuable person, but he was important as an alternative, an election alternative. But the people in power were the ones we had to concentrate on as responsible.

"Look, if you're in power you can do it, and we expect you to do it, and if you don't do it we're going to consider you rascals and throw you out." We could think this way, he explained, because we did have a good alternative, Mike Seymour. So he made up a slogan right then and there in the middle of the night: Stanchions by such and such a date—and I've been trying to think what that date was. I think it was "Stanchions by July 1st."

KENT: These were stanchions to stop the buses.

JACOBS: To stop all traffic except emergency traffic. Fire trucks or ambulances or police cars could still go through, nothing else. But the stanchions would stop everything else. And the idea was that it would be a temporary thing and a triumph, and again Bob was very right about this. He said his notion was that if a trial got in and it showed how successful this was, it would become permanent. But in any case, we would have the trial.

But it had to be done then, with the understanding, delivered through Bill Passanante, that if it was not done then, that he would be thrown out. The idea would be that those in power who could do this are letting us down. We don't want them any more. We'll get somebody else. Now the alternative to that was, I mean the corollary to that was, if they do do it, they will be thanked. They will be considered as worthy of holding power. So that was our carrot. We had the carrot and the stick. And he worked all this out.

So promptly, as soon as we had our next meeting—I don't remember whether it was the next day or the day after that. We had frequent meetings and in between we were always on the telephone with each other, and so on. All of this was conveyed, and the idea of "Stanchions by . . ."—I'll say July 1st because I think I

remember that was it, but I may be wrong. Now, how could we put some muscle in this? Bob also thought of this.

You know I've gotten a lot of credit—first, last and in between—for being astute politically. But I don't think I was astute politically at all in comparison with Bob. He was very daring in these ideas. I got an awful lot of knowledge of this sort and also of a way of thinking, so that I did become astute politically, I must say, later on, but it was largely because of being taught how to think in this fashion. So he should get a lot of credit for this. He usually stayed in the background, and I don't think people realized how important he was to all the fights in Greenwich Village.

Now, the next thing he thought of was how do we show our muscle. Well, we announced that we should have a rally, and in a very few days. It doesn't matter what the rally is about. It's just about Washington Square. We don't have to think all that up. We can make that up when the time comes. It will be in a very few days, and we will publicize this very fast. We will show our muscle and we will show what a fantastic organization we have that can decide on a rally, can just plaster the Village with posters about it everywhere and can get it up in no time. To politicians and to an election campaign, that's muscle, you know?

KENT: What happened?

JACOBS: We got the kids to work. We announced the rally and in no time there were posters all over Greenwich Village about this rally. And this we did hear from the feedback that this stunned and impressed the politicians involved. Everybody knows about this rally immediately. The funny thing about this was the height of the posters. If anybody has thought of that, posters are usually up at eye level of adults, right? Maybe even above eye level. These were all below the eye level of adults. If they weren't on a storefront they were apt to be below the bottom of the showcase window. Wherever. That was about the height. We had all these little

elves, all these kids putting the posters up. Our children were putting them up, and oh, they worked for hours. They would go with paste pots and with their roll of posters, and of course they liked slopping the paste around and putting those posters up, but they were at child height. This was very appropriate for this battle because of course it was about a park—Washington Square Park—that very much belonged to the children. The children of Greenwich Village were interested in this fight. They were responsible little citizens. They often appeared at the rallies, and I don't mean just ones that their mothers brought in strollers, but older ones too. They were very concerned about it.

KENT: Okay, here comes the rally. Did any politicians show up?

JACOBS: The rally didn't matter. Before the rally ever happened we were beginning, the wheels were turning. Bill Passanante realized he had to get those stanchions up or he was going to be creamed. We had told him so. We had told him, "We will use every avenue that we have of public opinion and of explaining things." We had already told him before the rally announcement and the posters, "Unless you get those stanchions up, that's going to decide whether you get elected or not."

And this whole umbrella organization—mind you—you have to think of this as combined with Ray Rubinow's idea—was conveying this to him. This was not just Bob Jacobs telling his wife about it in bed in the middle of the night. The whole organization had been convinced that this was the way to go. Of course this made a lot of bad feeling. Bill Passanante thought this was pretty unjust to unload on him all this responsibility. We weren't unloading it all on him. We were unloading it on his organization and we were relying on him to tell the organization, "I'm going to lose the election and you're going to lose the election," in effect, "unless you get these stanchions up." And they did have the power to do it. They would never have done it otherwise, but they had the power to do it.

In the meantime, Norman Redlich was working on Carmine DeSapio. He had avenues of talking to him directly, and he was conveying the same thing. And other Village leaders, like Tony Dapolito and Ruth Wittenberg and Margot Gayle and Edith Lyons and Shirley Hayes, all these people who had been—and Ray himself—who had been fighting on this so long, were conveying the same message. But the thing that made it mandatory, that the DeSapio organization had to do something, was that they would lose the election if they didn't.

Now, Mike Seymour felt very badly treated in all this. Here he had been from the beginning a staunch adherent of closing the park. What was he being told now? He was being told, because we didn't mince words or try to be hypocritical or anything, he was being told that, "Look, if your opponent, who has the power to do it or can evoke the power to do it, shuts off that park to traffic before election, we're not going to support you for election. We're going to thank them and let people form their own conclusions about who delivers for them. This is a battle for Washington Square."

He was outraged at this. He felt it was immoral. I don't think he ever changed his mind since—that we should think that which political person up for election would actually accomplish our purpose was more important than what kind of a person they were, what they believed, what they had demonstrated of their beliefs from way back.

In fact, what we were inventing in neighborhood politics was issue-oriented politics. These were the great days of the fights between old Democrats and the Village Independent Democrats. And of course there were those who thought it was more important to get their Democratic candidate elected than it was to get Washington Square closed. In fact, they took the view that if they ousted the old Tammany group and they got the Village Independent Democrats in, utopia would arrive. Well, not really, but it would be much easier to get responsive politics, and they thought we were looking at it very short-run. We want to get that park closed. They were looking at it long-run, in their view—we want to get in a better

administration so fights like this won't arise. So there was bad feeling about that. On the other hand, most of the Village Independent Democrats really wanted to get the park closed to all but emergency traffic, so yes, there was bitterness about that. But we did get the temporary closing, and this brings up another strange thing about this battle that had or should have had a much wider effect.

KENT: So we've gotten the stanchions by the date. Passanante delivers.

JACOBS: Right.

KENT: Alright. Temporary.

JACOBS: And DeSapio was thanked. There was a ribbon tying event and he—

KENT: Was it Norman Redlich's daughter and your daughter cutting the ribbon?

JACOBS: Tying the ribbon.

KENT: Tying the ribbon.

JACOBS: Yes. And there was a ceremony in the park on a Sunday. The Borough President was there. So they had delivered and our organization delivered our part by thanking the powers that be—the ones that were in control and able to do this—that they had done the right thing.

Now this was at the time considered a temporary measure. That was okay with us. Put the stanchions up, close off the park while the committee studies the effects. So this was not a revolution, nothing radical and so on, a chance to experiment a little. They, of course—Moses and the City traffic department and all of them—had always opposed doing anything of this kind. I thought it was a

pretext, but I understand now they really believed this. They thought that if they closed off the roadway through the square there would be horrendous increases in traffic to the point of chaos around the square and in other streets. They said that. They said, "If you close off this roadway that goes through the park, you are going to be back on your knees—all the people in the Village—begging us to put that roadway back in the park because of the inundation of traffic elsewhere, and the awful tie-ups and jams that will be around the park."

We didn't believe this but we didn't know for sure. We said, "We'll try it, this is an experiment."

The amazing thing was that not only was there not the chaos, no tie-ups in traffic around the park, none of that. But actually traffic numbers declined in those areas where they had predicted chaos. Now this was very interesting. In fact if you think of it, it's the reverse of the awful impasse that has occurred for two generations now with American traffic, and Canadian too, where you put in something that is supposed to alleviate traffic, that is supposed to drain it off from where it shouldn't be—

KENT: And it attracts it.

JACOBS: And it attracts it. It not only attracts it to there—that's what was expected, that's what was done on purpose—it not only attracts it to the channel but it increases traffic everywhere else that was supposed to be relieved. That's the strange and interesting thing. Now here was the very opposite case where a channel was removed and that was supposed to back the traffic up into these other places and it didn't. Very interesting problem. You can see that the traffic people were thinking of automobiles—traffic—as if it were water. Water will go—will find its way—in the easiest channel and if you dam it off or block it off, it will find side channels or some other place to go instead. And that was the image they had—the physics you might say of traffic. They should already have been suspicious of it

because—that is not the way—making a better channel for traffic to work as I just explained. Now they had proof of the opposite. Wouldn't it have been interesting if they had looked into this? They had a rather sensational bit of information there. No. The traffic people were completely incurious about what they had done and its effects.

I'll drop that for a minute and explain. So pleasant and effective were the results of shutting off Washington Square to traffic that I don't think anybody after that, not that I remember, ever seriously suggested opening the roadway again. That "Stanchions by July"—whatever it was—had really settled it. That supposedly temporary thing had really settled the issue. The battle was won.

But to get back to this question about traffic, which still needs looking into. I was reminded of this as recently as 1996 in a battle in Toronto about changing a middle block of a street, reversing traffic flow in it to prevent it from becoming a throughway in rush hour. And the Toronto traffic department people were there, and they were explaining that—this was at the neighborhood meeting—they were explaining that if this was done it would indeed help that stretch. But the cars would go somewhere else. Of course they were trying to divide the neighborhood. The neighborhood was divided on this among the people who feared they would be victimized by this.

I explained at this meeting that I knew from experience beginning with Washington Square and I had watched this happening in other places. I knew that if you impede the convenience of traffic anywhere in a particular neighborhood the whole neighborhood benefits. There are fewer cars in the whole neighborhood. It doesn't work like water at all. And sure enough it was done in this neighborhood in Toronto and the total traffic counts went down, just the same as they went down in the Washington Square neighborhood so many years before. And still, traffic departments had not looked into this—don't understand what is happening. That's why I say this was an important early effect of the Washington Square battle that could have been taken advantage of and wasn't.

KENT: That's a lesson that applies to areas larger than Washington Square.

JACOBS: Oh, it applies to areas everywhere, not even just in North America.

KENT: I understand now. How long was it before the temporary closing became the permanent closing?

JACOBS: I don't remember. There was no crisis that I remember involving that. At some point it was just regarded as a *fait accompli*. It was so successful as a closing and successful as an improvement of traffic, not a gumming up of it. There was never any campaign to remove the temporary thing and there didn't have to be, therefore, a campaign to make it permanent. That was settled.

What wasn't settled of course were other issues of design of the park. And in the design we had talented people in the Village who were important in that. Among them were Bob Nichols, and Edgar Tafel, and my own husband, Bob Jacobs, who was involved with that, too. He was not the architect for it but he gave advice and helped in the programming and thinking.

Moses' outfit designed just a horror for the park. Oh dear, I wish I could think of the nickname for it. Well it was in fact a huge comfort station. Oh, I know. My husband called it "Moses' temple to urination." [Laughter] It was ridiculous. But going on from the fight in the park, the fight to get a decent design for what was done in the park was the next stage.

KENT: Was this pro-bono? Was everyone donating his services?

JACOBS: I don't think so, but I think a lot of people did. I think for the actual design, with the working drawings and the supervision of the building and so on . . . No, that would be under the usual arrangements. But the talk, the educated talk

with one another and with the community about it . . . Greenwich Village architects who had fought for the Square and understood how it was used. What was its part in the life of the Village? How complicated its uses were. An outsider would hardly ever have understood how complicated the uses of this park were and the multitudinous roles that it played in the life of the community. This was not just any park, you know. Maybe just any park that people love is important, but this was a really vital organ in this area and this district of New York.

KENT: It was also a college campus, wasn't it?

JACOBS: Yes, it was a college campus. It was the incubation ground for the revival of folk singing, literally it was.

KENT: Did NYU—just to go back—did NYU have any part in closing of the Square?

JACOBS: Its part was to urge putting traffic through the square. And here we come to a dismal thing about most city institutions. They are—they're blackmailed. They are so easily blackmailed because they want various things from a city. They need favors. And therefore they try to cooperate with the City, or whatever political jurisdiction they are in, to the point of the destruction of the area—and that has often happened as a result of the way institutions behave. They are not good neighbors because they are so subject to blackmail—political blackmail.

KENT: And the favors that they need, are what? Tax abatements? Zoning changes?

JACOBS: That sort of thing. But also, mostly they have to do with property. In those days they were all expanding. Later, even more so. They want variances on

what people are normally allowed to do with buildings. And they want—they even want expropriation of property of for their purposes.

KENT: There was a unique organization called the Judson Church that was helpful. Am I correct?

JACOBS: Yes. Churches are, not always, but very often are very helpful. However, universities and hospitals seem to have the idea that they are so righteous and so noble and so necessary that *anything* they want to do is justified—no matter how it hurts other people. That's my experience with them.

KENT: I've interrupted you, shall we return to the park?

JACOBS: Let's see, where were we? You know a curious thing about New York University, and its role in all this. Many of the professors in New York University were on our side, in favor of closing the park off to all but emergency traffic. We never got a one of them to come out publicly, as I remember. And it would have been very helpful if they did because the NYU administration would come out to hearings and on occasions when spokesmen were really important, in favor of traffic through the Square. I would get very angry and actually, although I tried to hide it, full of contempt—well-justified contempt.

These professors who would say, "Go to it!" Look, this was their own college campus. "Go to it! Fight them!", and so on.

"Well what about you, will you speak?"

"Well no, it wouldn't be prudent."

What a bunch of hypocrites! What a bunch of cowards! That's the way I got to feeling about them. What mice to have these beliefs and to be afraid to express them! Or maybe this was illuminating about the administration of the University.

Maybe it was an administration that was so deeply inimical to free speech that it had terrorized its professors from taking responsibility as citizens.

KENT: Except for Norman Redlich.

JACOBS: Norman Redlich was not employed at that point by New York University.

KENT: I stand corrected.

JACOBS: Yes. Norman Redlich spoke out. He was an independent person, but he was not a member of any faculty at that time in that fight.

KENT: Shall we return to the design of the park?

JACOBS: Well I think I've said what I can say about the design of the park. There are people who are much better able to speak on that than I was. Bob Nichols would be able to. Edgar Tafel. They would be very good authorities on that

[I'll] speak on one more thing with this battle for the park that had a wider effect than is generally recognized. And this has to do with a particular area of the Village—the West Village, where urban renewal threatened to wipe out the neighborhood.

But the year before that battle started, in the end of '59 or '60, not long after the Washington Square battle had been fought and won, the City decided to cut five feet off the sidewalks—of the width of the sidewalks on Hudson Street—on each side of the street, to make one more lane of traffic through the street. It was a very heavily traveled street, a major traffic street in that area. Now, the reason that the stores, and the people who lived over the stores, and the people who lived beside the stores, and the people off the side streets from Hudson, and the people who used the Abingdon Square park to cross the street and so on—the reason that we could live

with that street at all was because there were twenty foot wide sidewalks and these served as buffers—very important buffers between the traffic and the retail stores and the other uses. Not only were they buffers for this—they, of course, made it possible for pedestrians to use and enjoy the street along with the traffic. And also even for children to play on that street—for children who lived along there—and for children to travel up and down the street pretty safely, to get to the park. The cutting off of the sidewalks would not only have penalized all of these uses and users, but it would have transformed what had been a viable and valuable city street into a no-account thing.

KENT: It was also an agora, wasn't it?

JACOBS: It was what?

KENT: An agora, a place where people meet.

JACOBS: Meet? Sure, of course!

KENT: Exchange information.

JACOBS: Sure, the way any good city street with lots of pedestrians and other uses that bring people together. So this. . . It doesn't seem like much, subtracting five feet from the sidewalk on each side of the street. But reducing those sidewalks with all those uses, as well as their important buffer use, from twenty feet to fifteen would have been disastrous. And you may be sure that more would have been whittled off in subsequent years, too. Now, the people on Hudson Street and nearby were able to fight this successfully, largely because of the Washington Square battle that had just gone before it.

Several things were extremely important in this—techniques. The people on Hudson Street who had been involved in the Washington Square battle knew a lot about techniques now, including the children—maybe even especially the children who had learned all about getting petitions around, getting signatures for petitions, and responsibly delivering them. The children, in fact, were much more successful in getting petitions signed—both the Washington Square ones and then later the sidewalk ones—because of the McCarthy era. Lots of grown ups were still afraid to sign petitions. They were afraid that they would automatically be associated with dangerous radicals or something. But when you see a nice little kid who sincerely wants to save his park or his sidewalks, you know you're not in with a dangerous association. And I think that's possibly the reason—one of the reasons, anyway—why the children were such successful petition gatherers. The other reason was they believed in their cause and that came across. It's hard to resist such sincerity and idealism.

KENT: The West Village battle?

JACOBS: One morning, early in 1961—it must have been in February—I opened the *New York Times* to discover that the neighborhood—14 blocks in the neighborhood that I lived in—was being designated for what they called an urban renewal study. Now, having written about a lot of urban renewal for the *Architectural Forum*, I knew at once what that meant—that we were going to be designated to be wiped out. They called it just "designated for a study," because that's the way it always began. And the study always showed that yes, this area was susceptible to urban renewal. Furthermore, I had an idea about the scope of the thing because the study money that was asked for and granted was always a given percentage of the cost of the whole urban renewal program. I forget the figures now, and they wouldn't mean anything in today's money, anyway. But what it meant to me was the cost of the entire thing was just what you would expect for wiping out

completely these 14 blocks and putting in, probably, high rent apartments. This was an awful shock to see this.

I promptly got on the phone and so did a number of others who read this and realized its importance. To condense what we learned during the day—some of us from each others' phone calls and some of us from what we got fresh—was that we were the only ones in town—the only ones concerned. The people who lived there who didn't know about this, they…

The city and the planners, and the Planning Commission had done what Zeckendorf, in a later statement about something else to Leticia Kent called, "getting all his ducks in a row." They had gotten all their ducks in a row before this was announced. Being bureaucrats, of course, they were very much impressed by organizations. And that consisted of getting somebody from the Greenwich Village Association, somebody from our political representatives, also the political organizations, and the churches. Interestingly enough, it was only the Catholic church in the area that had been informed—St. Veronica's—and that was because the cardinal at the time worked closely with Robert Moses. And, in fact, he had replaced the pastor, the usual pastor, with another church official, a monsignor. We were told at one point, this was because the pastor would probably have sympathized with his flock rather than somebody else who didn't know them and whose mission it was to put the thing through. Then people who were very important in charitable organizations, like, I remember Barbara Reach.

KENT: Oh yes.

JACOBS: And she knew about it. All of these people and their organizations had been informed very shortly before the announcement, but with the propaganda about how marvelous it would be and how much housing they would build, and how this was a slum, and what a good thing, how sanitary [it would be] to wipe it out. You know, all the usual things. And a lot of what they were told wasn't true at all.

Wasn't in the plans. But it was the usual stuff that was used to sell urban renewal programs.

Norman Redlich, who had been one of those informed about it—and informed erroneously as to what it was—he was good enough to call a meeting of a lot of the people who had been informed and sold on this. And I went over, and I forget who else. But I believe Edith Lyons, and my husband, and a few of the people from the neighborhood, we went to this meeting. I'm sorry I'm vague about it, just where it was. But it was the very day of the announcement. It was really fast.

And Norman had also taken the trouble to call up some people who could give him inside information [from the] City. And he had verified and found out from people who really were on the inside and really knew that it was to bulldoze the place, wipe them all out, put up these high rent apartments, in one of these sterile schemes. He was shocked at this because when he had been sold on it, insofar as he was, this was not the picture that had been given him, you may be sure. So we quickly—by him telling what he had found out and by me telling what I knew from my work reporting urban renewal things. Most of the people brought on side with this—the regular community-minded people who weren't in the planning board [INAUDIBLE] that sort of thing—were disabused of their notion that this was a good thing and did not support it. I'll always also—on the opposite side of things—deplore Barbara Reach because she was so sold, somehow, on helping people abstractly—no matter what it did to them in the concrete—that she—it simply did not matter what she knew about it, what it would do...

KENT: She was associated with the Community Service Society, if I recall.

JACOBS: That's right. And she was a do-gooder in the very worst ivory tower sense. So right up to the very end she always believed it would be a good thing—because it was called something like urban renewal—because it promised housing.

What the children learned in getting Washington Square petitions was to be very, very responsible about collecting filled out petitions from stores and delivering stacks of new petitions when they were running out of them. One of my children who remembers all this was ten or eleven when this happened.

Ned has refreshed my memory that every day after school he went to all the stores that he had stocked with petitions, gathered up the ones that had been signed since the day before, delivered, checked over how many they had left and left more if need be. It was wonderful how not only he—but all the children involved in these efforts—were so responsible and indispensable really. Another thing that he refreshed my memory on was that we had not the usual format of a petition where you have what it's all about at the top of the page and then rows and rows and rows where people can sign. No. Every one of our petitions was an individual one for one signer with that one signer's address, and had the statement on each one of those pieces of paper. And that was quite deliberate because, if you have great stacks of these individual petitions, not only are they more impressive than consolidated ones, but they also say so clearly: the medium is the message. Each one of these pieces of paper is a person who cares. Each one of these pieces of paper is somebody—not quite conveyed by the medium with a form with many, many signatures—which is telling you something about mass-production thought. But these individual ones don't. They—they are just an example of the way all the people in these fights in the Village thought about all the details and made the most out of even the most simple things. I think that a lot of the secret of winning the battles was that kind of attitude.

KENT: Now you know there is something that I wanted to ask you relative to all of these battles. What do you think brought people to Greenwich Village and was it a special place?

JACOBS: Well I think, yes. It was a special place, indeed. And part of its specialness was the great diversity of people there. That's what made it different from suburbs or whatever. But it follows that—the fact of people being so diverse—they all had diverse reasons for being there. So you can't say what brought them in a generalized way.

KENT: Well, I meant the hospitable, you know, the street life and the easy ways of interacting and so on and so forth and also the... [INAUDIBLE]

JACOBS: Yes but that doesn't really account for very much, Leticia, because there were lots of people in Greenwich Village who were aloof and who, in fact, because of their work as artists or scholars or whatever, needed not to have too much many inroads made on their time and on their consciousness. And they had found a place in the city that was congenial and where they could get their work done. And was convenient. And didn't make inordinate pressures on their time and their energy. And, at that time, not on their money either. And yet, where they could live their own lives, where they didn't have a lot of other people in their hair that they didn't want in their hair. So there were all kinds of reasons why people were there, and many people who didn't know that they liked street life or these congenial attitudes, or may even have thought they didn't like the city. Who knows? When they got there and there was the opportunity, they entered into it and enjoyed it and thought, "My goodness! How lucky," they were.

There's a law of supply and demand about such areas, and if there aren't enough of them in a city, then eventually the prices go up and up and up, because more people want to be in that sort of area. Then the supply can't satisfy. Many a city has very few neighborhoods of that kind and invariably they become extremely expensive, and that has happened in Greenwich Village, too. But it's a symptom and it's a pitiful thing that there is so much demand for areas of that kind and so few areas are like that.

[Pause in recording]

KENT: Now here is some more information on sidewalks, which goes with the material [discussed earlier].

JACOBS: Because of a glitch, this was left out. The way we discovered about the sidewalks was this: There were surveyors working on the street and making their marks with chalk and with paint. The adults, naturally, all asked when they passed the surveyors, who were working over a distance of several blocks on several days, what it was all about. What this was for? And in response they got mumbles or "It's just a routine survey," or something like that. And I know I asked them and I think probably they—hundreds of people—must have asked them.

Well our son, Jimmy, coming home from school one day, he didn't ask, "What is this for?" He asked about their work. And this was not intended to find out what it was for. He was genuinely interested in surveying and what they were doing and how they did it. And they saw that and told him—showed him—this brave, inquiring little boy, how surveying was done. Then they told him the sidewalks were going to be cut off. That night when Jimmy was going to bed and I was tucking him in, he said we are going to lose our tree.

I said, "What do you mean? It's doing very well. I wouldn't worry about the tree." And he said, "No, no. They are going to cut off our sidewalks and the tree is on that part of it and we'll loose the tree."

We had planted this tree in '56 and it was the only tree on Hudson Street for many blocks. Now that's changed. There are quite a few trees on Hudson Street. I said, "How do you know that? What is this about cutting off the sidewalks?" And he explained to me about the surveyors and that five feet were to be cut off on each side of the street.

The next morning, the children and I, we wrote a petition against the cutting off of the sidewalks and took it down to the printer in the next block. It is very convenient to live in a mixed neighborhood. We asked the printer if he could do the petitions we had. He said that he had a lot of restaurant menus to do and he couldn't get to it for a couple of weeks.

So one of the children said, "Well, the sidewalks will be cut off by then. That's too late."

He said, "What sidewalks?" And when he understood that the sidewalks that we were talking about were right in front of his shop he said, "Let me see that." And he read the petition and he said, "Can you come back in an hour?" And in an hour we had great stacks of these petitions ready to use. Jimmy immediately took quite a few of them around to stores. Later on Ned did that, too. And Ned and Mary immediately set up a table in front of our house to grab passers-by on the sidewalk to sign the petitions. Of course, this was a very efficient way to get the news around also, killing two birds with one stone.

Now our petitions didn't win this battle by themselves, by any means. They were absolutely necessary to it, but here is where our connections that we had made in the Washington Square battle were very important. We now knew—way over in our more obscure neighborhood of the Village—we now knew people in other parts of the Village—and people who could accomplish things and knew their way around. One of these, a very wonderful citizen of Greenwich Village was Tony Dapolito, who had a bakery on Prince Street. It was a good bakery, too. He was a good baker, marvelous baker, and a marvelous citizen. That was a considerable way from our neighborhood of the Village—but Tony was very generous about helping other neighborhoods. And when he saw we were helping ourselves with the petitions and how concerned we were, he pitched in, too. And it was owing to Tony's help that we quickly got to the right people in the city government to talk to and to send delegations to, and actually got the scheme stopped.

[End of Tape, Side 2]

KENT: Continuation of the West Village battle

JACOBS: A lot of things happened very, very fast in the first and second days after this announcement. Ann Lye, who was very knowledgeable about real estate, her husband Len Lye, [a] very fine artist and filmmaker—they were bright people, and she had read the announcement in the paper—and she knew what it portended. We didn't know each other. She lived north of the designated area on the West Side of Greenwich Village. Her neighborhood would not have been wiped out. She had a friend, Rachele Wall, who lived just to the north of the designated area, on 11th Street. And she and Rachele promptly figured out what needed to be done in the neighborhood, immediately. These people had lots of initiative. Not only they—but it turned out that the whole neighborhood had—people with lots of initiative and good sense. In that area to the north beginning at 11th Street running up to about 14th, I believe, there was an association, a neighborhood association. Our area didn't have any neighborhood association. They were rather rare at the time, Ann and Rachele had both been active in it. The president of it was a dentist named Dr. Dodelson. They promptly got hold of him and asked him to call a meeting and to hold it down in St. Luke's Church in the designated area and invite people from the area. I can't tell you which day this occurred on but it was a very quickly after the announcement. And at that meeting, Ann suggested that—she made a motion that I be made a co-chairman of the committee because now it was embracing a much bigger area and somebody from that area should be one of the chairmen of it. This was voted on and agreed to and so I became a co-chairman of what was to become the Committee to Save the West Village, and was to devote itself for just about the next year entirely to saving the neighborhood. Already we had, you see, a sort of umbrella organization—thanks to Ann and Rachele—because promptly the people

on our borders, on the borders of our neighborhood—understood that this affected them and they joined with us.

Another thing that happened very rapidly was that Rachele got in touch with an acquaintance of hers, Mr. Lester Eisner, who happened to be the director of the regional office—the New York and New England office—of the Federal Urban Renewal Administration. That weekend we took him—Rachele and I did—took him on a tour of the West Village and showed him what kind of place it was. We went into many apartments—the expensive ones, but also the very inexpensive ones—the ones that would have been tagged as slums. And he saw what a fine neighborhood it was, how diverse it was, how neighborly the people were in it and how happy they were to live there. How they didn't feel—no matter what their ethnic origins were or no matter how poor they might be—they did not feel exploited from living in that neighborhood. They felt grateful to the neighborhood. This was no Potemkin Village expedition. He went anywhere he wanted. People were willing to let him in anyplace. He met landlords. He met tenants. We didn't say who he was. He didn't say who he was. But he was extremely helpful to us—not in any underhanded way at all—but just by telling us what the law was—important points we ought to know about the law and it was vital that we knew these things.

When you think of it, it's an outrage that people were not informed of these in a regular way—about these facets of the law—and here they were: That the area had to be proved to be a slum—if it was to be designated as ours was—by certain criteria. And he directed us to where we could get what these were. It was public knowledge, but you wouldn't have known that in New York. These criteria could be gotten from his office. They could be gotten from Washington. They had to do with noise, with dirt, with health statistics, with value of property, with percentages of buildings that were dilapidated, with abandonments, all that sort of thing. And as far as possible, since these were very bureaucratic regulations, they were to be put in the form of statistics and supported by actual data. So we learned that that was necessary to designate it.

Then he told us that the law now said—or the regulations now said—that the people of the area must participate in the planning and in the decisions about the area. And he also told us that what this meant, and the way it was interpreted, was that if we said anything about what we wanted in the area, then we were deemed to have participated and to [have] fulfilled that part of the law. Therefore, we understood that we should be extremely careful not to say, "Wouldn't it be nice if the area had such and such", or "Wouldn't it be an improvement if, blah, blah, blah".

"Ha! You participated! Now that part of the law is fulfilled."

Knowing those two things had a great deal to do with our subsequent strategy in fighting this battle. They, you might say, they set the parameters of it.

But let's go back to the first public meeting on this. At this meeting, there were representatives turned up from the City's Urban Renewal Agency. And also a group we didn't know existed in our neighborhood called MICOVE. That was an acronym for "Middle Income Co-operative Village" something—and that was kind of cute—MI-COVE—"my cove". And this is what we came to know as a puppet organization set up by the City. Its head was someone who lived in the neighborhood, sure enough. And she had been coached by them, by city planning employees and promised an apartment. So—and she had a very, very small organization. But this organization had been selected, in fact had been created by the City, to be, in effect, the representative of the citizens of the West Village. They were going to speak for us all.

That became impossible because of this meeting that was called because of the outrage expressed. Someone else who came to this meeting—several people were from the Lower East Side, and they already knew some of the tricks of the City because they had experienced them themselves—and it was from them that we learned about puppet organizations. We were getting an education very fast. Gloria Hamilton, who became extremely important in the Committee, was at that first meeting, too. The White Horse—she was the wife of one of the owners of the White

Horse Tavern and she lived over the White Horse and it was within the designated area—quite a famous literary landmark there and a favorite gathering place for people from many parts of the city. They would have been wiped out along with so many other places.

In the meantime, Bob, my husband, went over to another bar. This was, I guess just shortly before the meeting I'm telling about at St. Luke's. That bar was very near St. Veronica's Church and was a favorite with the local longshoremen. [It] wasn't the only place where they could be met but it was one place. And also Danny Laughlan who ran it had been a pillar of the church—he and his wife, Agnes, of St. Veronica's.

So Bob talked to Danny Laughlan about what this designation meant. They were smack in the middle of the designated area. Another member of the congregation of St. Veronica's became very important in this—in the Committee—because on Sunday, the very Sunday after the announcement he met people on the church steps and began telling them what was going to happen to them and what was going to happen to St. Veronica's for that matter.

And so there was a good representation of those people at the meeting and they were getting informed. All of this speedy spread of information throughout the area, sound, well-informed information, was absolutely vital.

Now knowing from Mr. Eisner what he had told us (which I just mentioned a little while ago), we knew that one big task was to document the conditions in our area and document them accurately. So that became [a] chief effort, early effort, into which we put a great deal of energy and time. I think the very next night after our first public meeting we went to an apartment over on Weehawken Street. We went there because it was the apartment of someone who had just recently moved into the neighborhood who knew how to conduct market surveys. That was his job. So therefore he knew how to conduct surveys and he would instruct people on how to do it. In the meantime, Bob, my husband, figured out what should be done about conditions of buildings and how that could be surveyed. Carey Vennema figured out

about surveys that could be done from tax records and that sort of thing. We had someone in the neighborhood who was an expert at recording and he...

KENT: He was a sound engineer?

JACOBS: He was a sound engineer and he took records of sounds throughout and also compared them with other areas that were considered to be not slums.

KENT: Well, posh areas, like Sutton Place?

JACOBS: Yes, indeed. Then there was someone else who took on the job of analyzing pollution and comparing the soot pollution in the neighborhood with the pollution in posh areas. All of this was a great deal of work, you may be sure. Oh, the…Let's get back to the people who were in the meeting about how they do surveys. Naturally everybody had to work. We all had jobs and some of us who were working mothers had two jobs, in effect. But we were, everybody was in on this. Either their second job or their third job was saving the neighborhood. I think we must have—it must have been a neighborhood that had a terrible accumulated sleep shortage by the end of the year. So much had to go on in the middle of the night, this [was] the only time people had free for this.

So I remember being present at the meeting of the people who were going to survey. What were they going to survey? The thing, in this instance, was the permanence or transience of the people in the area—their ages, various other statistical demographic information. The markets survey fellow—he had a blackboard there and here were all these people—two in the morning, I believe it was—sitting with notebooks in their laps on the floor of his apartment. Must have been about twenty people learning how to conduct a survey. He had already worked out a questionnaire that would satisfy the criteria of various things that had to be gathered door to door.

And they were learning how to do it, and what to avoid like, "Don't get on to other subjects. You have to get this questionnaire answered—that's the important thing. And we need to do it pretty rapidly." They learned from him what to do in cases of various awkwardnesses, or if there happened to be hostile people, or if people couldn't understand what it was they were doing or needed another language. This had to be a survey that was a hundred percent, not just like a poll, a representative sample. So they learned their lessons just like a classroom except the students were all sitting on the floor. There just weren't enough seats in the apartment to accommodate a classroom. But the blackboard was there, the teacher was there and the determination to learn what to do right was there. All these surveys with the various people competent to make them were carried on simultaneously and rapidly.

When we finished, we had a remarkable document profiling these fourteen blocks. I will jump ahead and say that when it became public knowledge—public information at a hearing later on—and we presented this information to defend the neighborhood, and Mr. Eisner then saw what we had—he said that it was—he told us that it was the best survey that he knew of this kind. And what we had done for nothing—free—would have cost the government, he said, at least fifty thousand dollars. Now mind you, this is back in 1961. Fifty thousand dollars was probably five hundred thousand in today's terms. He thought it was just an extraordinary job and very complete. And it showed that, by all the legal criteria, the West Village was not a slum—could not legally be designated for urban renewal. But that made no difference to the City Planning Commission. It wasn't interested in our information. It had already—they had already made up their minds; they totally disregarded it.

However, it was very good that we had this even though the City was so corrupt it paid no attention. It was important because it became known to other groups, other people. We didn't have exactly an umbrella organization but we had all kinds of allies now, especially through the rest of Greenwich Village but also in

many other parts of New York and increasingly, throughout the whole country. We were news just because we were Greenwich Village and newspapers and magazines elsewhere began to take notice that here was an area that didn't meet the criteria of a slum at all—and look, the federal bulldozers were coming after it anyway. That survey that we did—whatever it was worth—whether it was worth a half a million in today's money or whatever—to us it proved worth its weight in gold for showing what kind of an area it was.

Now the other important thing that we had learned very early on about not participating in planning … This was very difficult for us in many ways because we had to keep saying, "No. No. No. Remove this designation from our area."

"Well what do you want?" The people of the Planning Commission and other agencies of the City would keep asking us seductively.

And we had to keep answering, "We'll tell you when you remove the designation." Because otherwise, we would have fallen into this trap, into this ambush. And this in the end proved our strongest defense—that we had never participated in planning, or discussions of planning, of the area. If we had forgotten that piece of information, we would likely have been lost.

I think it's an outrage that this was not general public knowledge. We informed as many people as we could but the idea was so—the city government was so slimy—that they would ask you to make suggestions and then use the very fact you had given the suggestions to stick a knife in you. It was hard for people to believe. Was it hard for us to believe? We had to keep reminding ourselves at every single meeting that we did not offer any constructive cooperation to the City about our area—and why—or we would have been done in.

We had to keep telling other people why we were so apparently negative. The newspapers were always castigating us one way and another for being negative—these negative people. Well, the system had set up—been set up, as I explained—that you had to be. But we were not really negative people, and we were planning for ourselves and what we would do when we got the designation removed. We were

doing a lot of work on that. It was just that we wouldn't have anything to do with the City on it.

There was a long strip of vacant land where there had been a railroad, running north and south to some of the warehouses. In fact, it was rather picturesque. The railroad ran right into and out of some of the warehouses. It was elevated, and it had not been used for quite a long time. And it was being abandoned. It was because of the abandonment of this railroad—this was one reason—that our area was designated. It struck somebody that here was already a vacant strip of land. It was on Eleventh Avenue, uptown. It was at Washington Street in our area, and it was of the depth of—well, you know how railroad track is—about a third of the block deep—not a great deal of the area.

KENT: It almost terminated at Westbeth, didn't it?

JACOBS: Yes. I think it did. No, it went right through the area.

KENT: Oh, did it?

JACOBS: Yes. But you know I had forgotten that. We had—I had—some maps. I've sent them to Boston College which has the archive of my papers. Well, it was our dream that when the designation was removed—and we didn't have this ax over our heads—we would plan to augment the neighborhood by filling in the houses, filling in the area with new houses, and that this would accomplish quite a number of things simultaneously. It would show the whole city how you could add housing without dislocating anybody or any businesses.

KENT: Didn't you have a motto? "Not even a sparrow—"

JACOBS: Yes, but that didn't come quite yet…Without anybody being moved or dislocated. This would also be very important economically because . . . Think how much farther the housing money of all the public agencies would extend if could be used that way to add, rather than to subtract, and to increase the diversity of a place?

KENT: Excuse me. Don't I recall that when all the units were projected were added up that they were less, in fact, then what had been there?

JACOBS: Oh, yes. Near the end of my second book, *The Economy of Cities*, I have something about the cost of this under the City's plan and how many dwelling units would be added. And how many under the West Village Committee plan. And economically, our method was so superior. It would have been the greatest boon to New York. And we would have done the most enormous service that you could imagine citizens doing for their city—by showing them how to do this. And we, in fact, had that idea all along.

The architects that we hired for this—Perkins and Will—a very good architectural firm with offices in White Plains—they calculated the kinds of plans—floor plans—for this that could be used in various combinations in all kinds of vacant lots. So there would be economies of scale in doing this, just as surely as there are certain economies of scale in those sterile urban renewal schemes, or public housing schemes.

But these would be in-fill housing. I think this was the first instance—that I know of anyway—of in-fill planning for cities. This is very popular now. It's used many places—in Europe, in Canada—and it's considered very advanced. I don't think it's used in any systematic way in New York, even to this day. And New York could have led the world in this important planning technique. We had a motto in any planning that we did—in anything sponsored by the West Village—we would—our basic ground rule was that nobody shall be dislocated, or "relocated" as they

euphemistically called it in those days. And the slogan took the form that you mentioned, "Not a sparrow shall be moved."

Well, that was one thing that was going on in those days, on another plane. We did it because it seemed like a very good idea because people were hungry also to be constructive. It's very hard to be negative all the time and our neighborhood was full of constructive, non-negative people. And it galled them to have to keep saying, "No. No. No." And it was very important for our own morale that we should be thinking of improvements if we ever got the chance to do them. The City was extremely secretive about all kinds of things. We couldn't be secretive. We had, for one thing, too many people. You can't keep a secret with hundreds of people and it was very important that everybody involved knew about it. So for those two reasons, there was no use trying to keep secrets when everybody—so many people—would know them. And it was still more important that our side should know everything that was going on in this fight. Because each person then could take initiative intelligently when need be, because each one knew just what the strategies were, just what the difficulties were, just what was underway.

We also told the other side—told the City—always what we were going to do to fight them. We didn't try to keep anything secret from them. We said, "We'll make a survey and show that… and this survey is going to show that you're wrong," for instance. They always knew when there was going to be a rally or when we were coming down in force to a hearing, anything of that sort.

We never bluffed them, either. The police always were asking us how many people would be present at a rally or at a march or whatever was happening and we would answer honestly that we didn't know. If it was during a working day, we would point out that lots of people had to work [and] we didn't really expect too many people. Whatever was our honest estimate of this. And that was the best policy as a strategy, or as a tactic. Because if you say, attempting to boast or blow up your strength beyond what it is, "There are going to be so and so many people," and then you get only that number, or even less, your opponents figure you had a

failure on your hands. Bluffing is bad strategy. But we didn't anyway. We figured honesty and full exposure was the best thing.

This also applied to how we treated information from our opponents. We got lots of information on their plans, which they did try to keep secret. The reason we got all this information and intelligence was that there were so many people in their own offices who agreed with us, and who knew how crooked the whole thing was—the whole scheme was—and they would come to us with information. So we always knew what our opponents were cooking up before they were ready to spring it themselves.

And the way we put that information to use—a lot of it could have been very dangerous to us, those plots and plans of theirs ... The way we put it to use was we would trumpet it. We would say that a meeting had been arranged at the Settlement House by so and so for Ellie Guggenheimer or whoever it was, "to come out with a statement that the Settlement House—the Greenwich House—believed in the West Village urban renewal." We would say this is going to happen. Then they would deny it. But once they denied it, they couldn't do it. We did that over and over with their schemes.

The most amazing one was right at the end of the fight when—right after Wagner's election that year—when Mr. Felt, the head of the Planning Commission, and David Rockefeller of the Downtown Lower Manhattan Association, had a telephone conversation in which it was agreed that they would announce some plan that had to do with the West Village—while, as Mr. Felt put it, "our honored Mayor is out of town." Because they knew by this time that the mayor was abandoning this designation of the West Village and this was an attempt to euchre him into doing it—supporting the designation anyhow or confusing the matter. We didn't find out what the announcement was about. I think it was something about the location of the new Stock Exchange, but whatever it was, it was a plan.

So I went to see an assistant of the mayor, told him what had been told [to] us by a worker in one of those offices about this telephone conversation and he said, "Well, what's it about?"

And I said, "I don't know what it's about. But there is a plan to make this announcement. So why don't you call Mr. Felt and ask him what it's about." So he did so and Mr. Felt, apparently in great embarrassment, denied that there was such a plan. Okay. They couldn't do it. Always bring things into the open was our scheme.

Now who were our opponents in this? I've mentioned two or three already. The City Planning Commission, of course. The Downtown Lower Manhattan Association—the scheme may very well have originated with them, rather than with the Planning Commission. We never found out for sure where it originated. But they were both hand-in-glove in pushing it—the one openly, the other covertly, from the very start. Other opponents of ours were the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council, the Regional Plan Association—I believe those were the principal so-called civic organizations. Oh, and the Cardinal's office of the Catholic Church. Probably Robert Moses but he really didn't enter into this. People called it a battle against Moses because by this time anything that involved bulldozers was considered to be Moses' scheme. He—I'm sure his office—cooperated with all this but he didn't seem to have initiated it. The actual person who picked out our area—within the City—was Samuel Ratensky. But again, I can't say he really picked it out. It may have been the Downtown Lower Manhattan Association or Ratensky working in cooperation with them.

The individuals who were serious opponents of ours included Stanley Isaacs. Now that was odd because Isaacs was a great opponent of Moses and led successful fights against Moses regarding Tavern on the Green in Central Park and other matters. But he came to see me and we had a long conversation of several hours in our living room about the West Village and I was trying to convince him that it was a bad scheme and he was trying to convince me to give up the fight. And neither of

us convinced the other, but I never could get Stanley Isaacs to understand what a ridiculous and expensive thing, socially, as well as economically, this urban renewal plan was.

KENT: Was Stanley Tankel the Regional Plan Association's point-man in this matter?

JACOBS: I think Stanley Tankel knew better than to want this plan. He kept out of this. He didn't do us any harm. He didn't do us any good. He was—he and his plan were—just irrelevant to this. He was a very nice guy, Stanley Tankel.

The City also set up—I'll call these shell organizations. MICOVE, which I mentioned earlier, was a puppet organization. They actually got a few people together and got them to have some meetings and made some resolutions and so on. These shell organizations that they set up were really empty, but they were to give a façade of community approval—widespread community approval—to the designation of the West Village for urban renewal. So that it looked on paper, or as they announced it, it looked as if the longshoremen were in favor of it, as if the artists were in favor of it. Other groups—well, we took it upon ourselves to see what these facades amounted to. And to go to the legitimate organizations—show them what was being said, in effect, in their name—and they had a fit and gave statements to newspaper reporters about it.

For instance, the longshoremen, who were supposed to be in favor of this, amounted to one disgruntled man who had been anointed by somebody in the City Planning Commission with an organization's name. The actual longshoremen in the area and their union—their association—came out with statements that, no, they were outraged at this. They were against the urban renewal scheme. The artists of Greenwich Village, far from being in favor of it, were major helpers of the West Village people. And these were very important artists, internationally known artists, who had a benefit show for the West Village, and who were appalled at the

plan. But the City had found some artist or other who was glad to be anointed with the name of an artists' association and that was their façade.

The developer who was somehow involved with this plan—I don't know whether he had reason to think that he would be the developer to build the new housing but he was involved in the scheme—[was] Rose Associates. They were, at the time, employing, or working in cooperation with Barry Benepe, who was a very young man. Barry Benepe has done many good things later in his life, especially the greenmarket movement. But at this point, whether he was deluded or, like Barbara Reach, believed so thoroughly in urban renewal, or whether he was just naive, I do not know. He was doing errands for Rose Associates such as going around to apartments in a building in our area where most of the tenants were Puerto Ricans and asking them questions. When we found out what the questions were, we realized they would be twisted to indicate community approval for this plan. Actually the Puerto Rican residents of those buildings were very staunch members of our committee. The children of those families were the chief messengers who rushed around with news of what we called "the Creepers."

The City sent all kinds of people under various guises to try to pry out statements that could be useful to them. And the children were very alert to these people. The Creepers particularly concentrated on the Puerto Ricans because they could promise them all kinds of things in the relocation.

Now actually the Puerto Rican community liked the West Village very much. They were well integrated into the West Village. There were special services in Spanish at St. Luke's Church, for instance, to accommodate them. They used to hold pig roasts in our backyard on certain festival days. Their children were well assimilated into the schools. So the City's attempts to make ethnic friction in the neighborhood—which is what they were trying to do—didn't work at all. And in fact, the Puerto Rican part of the community, as I said, were the chief ones to let the rest of the community know what The Creepers were doing.

One day when Barry Benepe was down there some of the children from those buildings ran up to the White Horse where Gloria Hamilton lived above the tavern. Her husband was one of the owners of the tavern, and she was of major, major importance in every way in this fight. She was so sensible and so energetic and so devoted to the community, and they told her that a Creeper was down there. So Gloria dropped whatever she was doing and tore down and confronted Barry Benepe. And she gave him a most eloquent speech about misleading the people there, trying to use them, what they said, to hurt their own interests. And what a wicked thing he was doing. And how bad—socially bad, and humanly bad—was the part that he was taking. And he began to cry.

I mention this because not long ago—this is now 1997—not long ago a friend of mine here in Toronto was talking to Barry Benepe and he mentioned me and said that I had made him cry. If that's his version of this history, I would like to correct that. No, it was Gloria Hamilton that made him cry. I would have been glad to make him cry but I wasn't there at that time.

Rose Associates and Barry Benepe and MICOVE and another Creeper, named Roger Schaffer, were manufacturers of puppet organizations who worked with the City. They all worked in cahoots with a woman near Columbia University, who had an office where, and a little business for—it was really quite crooked—making or supplying papers to Columbia students that they didn't write themselves. She had been convicted of this fraud and served time for it, but was now at large again. And this cheating organization for students was now being used as an organization to do clerical work for puppet organizations. We found this out by comparing the typewriting on a letter that Barry Benepe sent me. A really strange letter where he asked for my recommendation for something—a travel fellowship that he wanted. And here on this typewritten letter from him to me was the same peculiarity of an R in the typewriter that always kept dropping and a few other typewriter peculiarities that we had noticed in the typing that came from not only MICOVE (the puppet organization that was set up for us) but also the puppet

organization that was set up over in Cooper Square in the Lower East Side. So somehow or other the same typewriter was being used, in short, for a couple of puppet organizations and by Barry Benepe. Almost sheerly by chance, Erik Wensberg, who was the editor of the Columbia University magazine...

KENT: The *Columbia University Forum*?

[End of Tape, Side 3]

JACOBS: Yes—found out where this office was and went there. And on the desk there he found a telegram. By this time Barry Benepe was in Italy. He had gotten his fellowship, and there was a copy of a telegram to him from Rose Associates right there in this clerical office for puppet organizations and for student cheating. Strange, strange thing. Of course, we publicized this information about the same office using, sending communications, telegrams for Rose Associates, and for the puppet organizations doing their work. Before we publicized it, we got—we took samples of—the typing for all these organizations to a well recognized analyst.

KENT: Typewriter expert, forensic…

JACOBS: Forensic typewriter expert, whose information and judgments, and analyses were often used in the courts.

KENT: And didn't he corroborate?

JACOBS: Oh, yes. He said these were from the same typewriter. No doubt about it. And showed—in fact, he saw similarities that were a little too subtle for us. And did it just the way they do in court—for testimony in court. And we called a press conference and presented these for the newspapers.

Now, all of this cost not a great deal of money because we were do-it-yourself fighters—the way we made the survey and did so many other things ourselves, always distributed our own leaflets, wrote our own stuff, and so on. But still it was expensive in our terms. This was not a rich neighborhood. We had to raise money and we began running book sales. People would give their surplus books and we would have book sales. That was a favorite, and it continues to this day in the West Village. But it began then. We had an artists' show. Rachele Wall organized that, and her husband, Leon Wall, was an artist. She knew a great many—she knew all the important artists of the time. We got some empty space in an industrial building in which to have it. It was a very exciting art show. It was attended by people from all over the city.

A major way we had of raising money—probably second in importance only to the book sale, because they could be repeated—was making Christmas wreaths and then selling the wreaths. They were very inexpensive. We got all the raw materials and we all sat around making Christmas wreaths and then of course everybody in the Committee bought one. But we also sold them to sympathizers elsewhere. Christmas wreaths are still, so many years later, being sold by the West Village Committee—the successor to the Committee to Save the West Village—as one of their methods, traditional methods of raising money. The same as the book sales are still being held. We were very fortunate in having in the community Leon Seidel's Lion's Head Coffee Shop. Later on—quite a few years later—he moved it east.

KENT: To Sheridan Square.

JACOBS: Yes. To Sheridan Square. But at this time it was at Charles Street and Hudson. That's where he started. And it stayed open late at night. And furthermore, Leon was there even after it closed—I suppose doing his bookkeeping and that sort of thing. Not only did people meet there, Leon was a very important

public character. He got information almost sooner than anyone else and then spread it almost sooner than anyone else. You just dropped in at Leon's to get the news even if you weren't getting a coffee or dinner or anything. He also became a depot, an important depot. As time went on in this fight we needed to have lots of things printed for distribution—leaflets around the neighborhood especially, but other things, too, that we wanted to get out to the larger community. He had a friend who worked in a printing company and was able, through an arrangement with his employer, to do printing himself after his shift was over. And he would stop in at Leon's to pick up anything that had been left there by a committee member for printing. And as long as you got it to Leon's before one a.m., you knew that you would have it the next morning, ready to deliver before you went to work.

KENT: Well, that certainly was efficient.

JACOBS: Yes. All the details of this fight could not be told in anything less than quite a long book, nor credit to all the people who were important in the fight and who lent whatever talents and ideas and so on that they had. But I'll mention a few of these: Carter Winter, one of the members. He was an art director. He thought up such a great—well, I'll call them exhibition ideas in this sense. A very original man. On one of the hearings that we went to, he turned up with a lot of glasses from Woolworth's. You could get very cheap eye glasses from Woolworth's in those days—with Xs made of adhesive, or masking tape rather, on each of the glasses. Everyone, the moment they saw them, they knew what it was. It was a building condemned for demolition. It was the sign that was on the windows. He also brought along masking tape so that everybody who wore glasses anyhow could put these Xs on their own glasses. And for the people who didn't have glasses, he had this large number from Woolworth's. So here we were—a big contingent of several hundred people. We made quite a splash at this hearing, all with our Xs on our glasses. It made such a splash and was so startling looking that the photographs that news

people took of us appeared all over the world. We began getting clippings sent to us from Brazil, and from Europe...

KENT: This is like Esperanto.

JACOBS: Yes. Everybody understood it—this demonstration in New York. And by this time we were getting support—verbal support and sometimes even editorial—newspaper—support. The *Saturday Evening Post*, which was a very popular magazine at that time, came out with an editorial for us.

We began to become a symbol of what was wrong with urban renewal and courage and the indefatigability, which we sure had, of people fighting it….

KENT: Excuse me. Go back to the crossing out—the X-ing—of the glasses. Didn't Stanley Isaacs characterize that fairly peaceful demonstration as a "riot"?

JACOBS: Not that demonstration, but another one. The one he characterized as a riot was the one where the City—it was one more step in them trying to drive the nails in the designation. It was the City Planning Commission announcement that they were, despite all the surveys, despite all the evidence, they were designating it.

KENT: I'm sorry. I interrupted you.

JACOBS: No, that's all right. And the riot, the so-called riot, was an attempt by our side to tell of some nefarious doings on the part of James Felt—that he had made a deal to designate this. And we had some evidence for that. But they would not allow our side to speak at all. Therefore, some members, I think Hugh Byfield was the one who insisted on getting up in spite—a very dignified man—in spite of being told that he could not speak. And saying, without permission, "Felt made a deal" and then tried to explain what he meant by that.

Felt said to the police, " Remove that man!" So Hugh was dragged out into the hall by the police. And in the meantime, I believe it was Steve Zoll who got up and repeated the same thing and tried to explain the evidence and what was meant. And he was dragged out by the police. And then one after another got up, tried to make the statement. You see, everybody knew. This was not arranged, but everybody in the Committee to Save the West Village—there were hundreds of them there—knew the whole story and any one of them was capable of explaining it. So the idea that by taking people out one after another you could squelch them—that didn't work….

KENT: So when people say that you were the chief strategist, you may have been but you were by no means alone.

JACOBS: Oh, I was not even the chief strategist! This was a very joint effort on everybody's part. That was another of the delusions of the City. They thought that I was the leader of this and that if they could get rid of me that the fight would evaporate somehow. They thought I was some kind of a witch or whatever. But that was not true. They didn't understand at all how communities worked. They didn't understand at all how movements like this occur. They can't be synthetic. They have to be real. And if I had been removed as the leader there would have been ten other leaders who could come take my place, who knew everything I knew, who had provided a lot of these ideas.

KENT: So how was it resolved? Let's move along.

JACOBS: All right. Eventually—oh, I was not there during this so-called riot because of the forensic typewritten material. I had rushed off to the typewriter analyst's office and gotten their statement and their blowups of the type and that sort of thing and we had called a press conference near City Hall. And I went there

with Rachele and Erik and some of the others who had been instrumental in finding this—we thought of it as the typewriter nest, or the cheating nest. And we were in the midst of the press conference while the so-called riot was going on, which only consisted of people saying, "Felt made a deal," being taken out in the corridor by the police and somebody else saying, "Felt made a deal."

When I was asked about this riot by, I guess, the *New York Times*, I said that—from what I knew—that we were not violent. We were merely vocal. That was a fact. But it was one more effort to try to tar us.

Oh, trying to tar us. I remember that Ira Robbins of the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council called us "Selfish. Pinkos,"—a whole string of names. And when that appeared in the newspaper and was read at one of our meetings everybody roared with laughter. And I knew then that whole McCarthyism business and the fear that it had engendered was over. Nobody minded what names they were called anymore. It was a good sign.

The way this whole thing ended finally was that Mayor Wagner was convinced that there was no sense in trying to go further with this—that opposition to it only grew by the day—that he became convinced that we really never would give up. And what we understand from somebody who was present at an interview between him and James Felt was that he said—he called Felt in and told him that the designation would have to be dropped—that these people were "too excitable." That was the reason. And Felt asked for one more chance to meet with the community and persuade it. And so Mayor Wagner told him—this is all hearsay but so many of these things were reported to us by people who were there, you know, and this was. Mayor Wagner told him, "All right" he could have one more chance. And if the community really wanted this, that was different, and he could try.

So Mr. Felt did hold a meeting, and he specified who would come to this meeting. But he also specified that I should not come. Now this was his delusion—that if I was not there that he could manipulate the other people. And he had

Barbara Byfield— The idea of James Felt manipulating Barbara Byfield was hilarious—Gloria Hamilton—I'm not sure. There were about fifteen or twenty people who were known to be hard workers and representative of the community.

KENT: Including Robert H. Jacobs, Jr.?

JACOBS: No, he wasn't there.

KENT: Excuse me.

JACOBS: No. He didn't have him at the meeting. So there they sat around at some boardroom-type table at the Planning Commission and Mr. Felt did his best at seduction—which was not very good. And what he wanted to get them to do was to tell him what they would like for the community. Now, we knew from the very beginning that that was the great trap. And everybody knew that. And that if they told him one word of what they would like for the community, he would twist it to say that he had community permission. That's what he was trying as his last gambit.

"Really. We'd like to know what would you like?" That was his...

And the only answer he got was from every one of them was, "Remove the designation from the West Village. That's what we want. After the designation is removed, we can go on. We can talk about other things. But nothing until the West Village designation is removed." And then they all said in chorus to remove the designation.

So that was his last chance. And when he had to report failure—or somebody who was there reported failure to Mayor Wagner—the designation was removed and the fight had been won. And after that, then we formed the Committee—the West Village Committee—in place of the Committee to Save the West Village. It

had been saved. And the Committee got to work on all kinds of improvement that we did want.

KENT: And housing was put into the community without displacing anyone—and more units than the urban renewal plan would have added. Isn't that correct? Or subtracted, you might say.

JACOBS: That's right. And we got up a very nice booklet. There's a copy of it that I gave—my only copy—I gave to my archive at Boston College. There must be some other copies around. But it explained—it might be of some historical importance—it explained the theory of infill housing—how this could be done so economically. And it was a very pretty booklet, too, very well done. Because the art director of it was Charlotte Winter, who was Carter's wife. She worked in the art department of *Architectural Forum*—one of the assistant art directors there. So it was a nice professional job. And that housing is finally there now in spite of many obstructions to it and delays. The tenants have a good organization and I'm on their list to receive their newsletter which is called *Down By the Riverside*.

[End of Tape, Side 4]

KENT: Lower Manhattan Expressway.

JACOBS: That fight has a very long history and I was in it only for a part of it. I wasn't in it at the beginning and I wasn't in it at the end. I was in at some episodes in the middle—in the sixties. Actually the scheme for this expressway goes back to, I believe, it's 1929—to the Regional Plan Association transportation scheme for New York City that included not only the Lower Manhattan expressway but a cross-town expressway at 28th Street, I think it was, "a midtown expressway" and some others. It was going to have big highways down each side of Manhattan, and kind of

shoelacings of big expressways across. And of course all the interchanges that such things involve and that have aptly been called "the Los Angelizing" of the city.

I suppose we can excuse the Regional Plan Association, even if grudgingly, for this because in 1929 they surely had no idea the devastation and the futility of such a scheme. What I find it hard to have forgiven them for is their clinging to the plan and promoting the plan long after it became evident how disastrous it would be. But that's what they did. It was as if this was an heirloom bequeathed to them by a previous generation of regional planners that they must treasure and burnish and carry out. The Regional Plan Association was quite an elite sort of group that had many of the worst aspects of paternalism, and being out of touch with the life of most of the people of New York. So that may have played a part up in it, too.

Anyway, I got into it in, I guess it was '62 or '63. And we had won the West Village fight by that time. [It] must have been in mid or early—I guess it was early '62. And I had just gone back to work at my regular job at the *Architectural Forum* the year before, and had had to fit that in with fighting to preserve the West Village. Then I had a sigh of relief. Now I could get along only with my job and with my domestic duties and interests as a wife and mother. My, wasn't life calming down?

But Father Lamountain of Broome Street came to see me from the Church of the Most Sacred Heart. And he had been fighting the expressway on behalf of his parishioners and the neighborhood. And, of course, his parishioners had been fighting it. This was in Little Italy. The expressway, which was sometimes called the Broome Street Expressway, would wipe out his street, his church and the homes and shops and so on, of no end of his parishioners and others. And I suppose it was because he knew that the West Village fight had been won and he thought that maybe some of these seasoned fighters could help him and his people in the Broome Street Expressway crisis.

I resisted this. On the other hand, I could see what an utterly disastrous thing it was, not only for his neighborhood, but and others in that part of

Manhattan, but also for the Village. It was quite clear that the scheme to put the wide roadway through Washington Square was connected to this expressway. It was either an access or an egress—I forget which—point to the expressway. That's why it was considered necessary. That was being planned in the usual way by Moses. He would do part of a highway without showing its implications. And then sooner or later, to the horror of many people, it became clear what these disjointed pieces added up to.

Well, it was clear that one of the things the expressway would add up to was not only the Washington Square road, but that it would join up with the West Side Highway and make much more of a thing of it and more interchanges again. And heaven knows what it was going to do over on the East Side, but plenty. So the disaster that it would portend for the Village, as well as the other neighborhoods, is the reason I—although I felt very resistant to getting into another fight. I wanted to work on my work. I had a feeling the City was making not only my life, but everyone's life, absurd by making us spend our precious time and our energy responding to things of this kind instead of doing the work that we wanted to do. Oh well. Couldn't be helped.

So I agreed at least to go to a few of Father Lamountain's meetings that he was holding on a regular basis at his church. And he had been also seeing to it that people were informed of the dates of the hearings that were, for whatever reason, connected with the expressway. It was necessary to appear at City Hall. And in some cases, arranging for buses, since a lot of his parishioners were not very used to traveling out of their neighborhood and, goodness, not going to an official places like City Hall. And they needed a little encouragement and help, just in the practical matter of doing it. Later they got more practice in this on their own. Of course the more I got to know about the expressway, the more hateful I found it—not only for itself and its effects, but for the way it was being done. And, therefore, got deeper and deeper into the battle.

One difficulty we had—of course we had to widen this fight as much as possible and show people throughout New York and throughout Manhattan, especially, what this meant for them. One of the difficulties we had was the political fights going on in Greenwich Village at the time. Little Italy, where Father Lamountain's church was, and where the expressway was going through, was the very heart of—the stronghold of—Carmine DeSapio, and the DeSapio and the Tammany Democrats. The Village Independent Democrats—not all of them, but, I know, some of the most vociferous, tended to think that the expressway would be a good thing purely because, it would wipe out Little Italy—like wiping out the enemy territory. So it was not the easiest thing in the world to convince these people that there were more important considerations—for the City and for the Village—than wiping out Little Italy to take revenge on Carmine DeSapio. But gradually people began to understand this and to see what were the priorities.

We also had allies in the Lower East Side because of what was going to happen there. And Doc Halpern, who came from farther east on the root of the expressway, was very important. Let me see, who—well, Rachele Wall, again. She had been such a great fighter for the West Village and she was a real stalwart in this battle. And so was Erik Wensberg who had been a great stalwart in the West Village fight and then became, to use a cliché, a tower of strength in the expressway fight.

KENT: And Hy Harmatz of Ratner's?

JACOBS: Hy Harmatz. Yes, indeed. Of Ratner's—a famous restaurant in the route of the expressway.

Well, we had hearings in which we presented the virtues of what the area now known as SoHo—which James Felt, the Planning Commissioner, insisted upon calling "Hell's Hundred Acres" and making us sound as if we believed in fire traps and dilapidation, and so on. He also called it "The Valley." And it was, the way he

said it, it was like the twenty third psalm. You know, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death…" [Laughter] The Valley sounded so sinister. It's almost unbelievable now that it was regarded by officials at that time as a positive good to wipe out those beautiful cast iron buildings.

KENT: Had Margot Gayle—

JACOBS: Margot Gayle had taught us all by this time about cast iron buildings and to value them and to recognize them. And I can't tell you how important her education, and her sensitivity, and her love of the city and of its heritage of good architecture was in this battle and in others. There were really wonderful buildings along this route, directly along the route. You would think that organizations like the Municipal Art Society would have recognized this and been on our side in this fight. No, indeed. They were, like so many of the elite of New York in these battles, they were our enemies. They were our opponents. They actually encouraged people to go to work designing what there should be instead of those cast iron buildings and instead of those old neighborhoods. Oh, well. I imagine this was, in a way, the decay of the good old responsible citizens of New York—that their organizations had been vitiated over the years, and become corrupted and decayed. Anyway, the elite of New York and their organizations failed the City over and over in these parlous days. And the Municipal Art Society is just one more example of that.

We had hearings. We got people down. We spread the word—tried to get people to understand what this expressway plan would mean to the city. And, what do you know? At the end of 1962, Mayor Wagner and the rest of the Board of Estimates turned down the expressway and it seemed we had won. Great rejoicing. Lindsay, who was Congressman then, came in to speak against the expressway that fall at a hearing. And he was greeted with absolutely tumultuous applause, because as a Congressman he had been against the expressway and had made common cause with our side, written effective letters, and so on. This was right in the

hearing by the Board of Estimate that he entered and was cheered and applauded. And I think this was not lost on Mayor Wagner. It couldn't have been. He was right there, and the Democratic organization. They saw that they were on the unpopular side and they saw that there was a competition that was likely to do them in. So I believe that that had—but I don't know—I believe that had an effect. Now the expressway *seemed* to have been laid to rest.

Oh, by the way, a very disconcerting thing happened during that hearing—or associated with that last hearing. Father Lamountain was the leader of this battle, and a very good one, too. And he had been going to be what you might call the master of ceremonies for our side at the hearing, introducing each speaker against the expressway, and giving a kind of running narration to the whole thing where necessary. The night before the hearing he called me up and said that he had a very ill friend up in Massachusetts somewhere that he had to go to. It was a life and death thing. And that he would not be able to appear at the hearing. My heart sank and so did everyone else that I told this to, about him not being able to come. And it was agreed in the emergency among us that I would have to take his place—somebody else could have but, you might say, I drew the short straw—and be the one who introduced the speakers. And of course there were plenty to help with this.

Now Father Lamountain came back afterward and it was a long time before I heard what had actually had happened. He had been called to the archdiocese headquarters behind St. Patrick's Cathedral in midtown New York. And, by one of the Monsignors in charge there, he had been told that he had to withdraw from this. Now, he was trained in the Church's very hierarchical organization, and he was trained in obedience to the church hierarchy. And, if this had been decided by the bishop or the cardinal, in fact, and his entourage, he had no choice but to obey it. Furthermore, he was not to let anybody know that he was withdrawing because the Church had ordered him to. So, in effect, he was not only ordered out of the fight at this crucial moment, but he was ordered to lie to his colleagues. And he really had no choice.

Well, we defeated the expressway for that time, in spite of this, in any case. And the fight died down for a while. But the expressway scheme had not been abandoned at all. Now, the fight was not only taken up by the City Planning Commission, but also very vigorously by the State—the State Highway Department—which meant it was taken up very vigorously by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The State became our chief opponent at this time.

I forget exactly just what the technical maneuvers were that, you know, brought this monster back to life again. But the timing of it had to do with a new law—some new highway laws, or regulations of the federal government. There had been so many fights against the highways, especially going through cities, and so much opposition that this had reached the halls of Congress.

[Break in recording]

In May of 1968, new regulations were going to go into effect that required more stringent studies of highways before they were adopted, and more information about them and their effects than had been previously required. So in April, in the month before those new regulations were to go into effect, a new hearing on the Lower Manhattan Expressway was rushed, this time by the State. And the expressway was not dead after all. This was held in Seward Park High School at night. By this time, quite some years had passed since the last dire threat and in the meantime, many thousands and thousands and thousands of people in New York—tens of thousands—had learned how bad the expressway would have been. SoHo was already reviving—starting to. I shouldn't say reviving. This new, exciting neighborhood was being created. And the pioneer artists in that area—people like Harry Jackson—had been joined by many others.

KENT: And that connection, may I ask you about artists' housing? And when that had occurred and when that had to do with it?

JACOBS: Yes.

KENT: And who instigated it?

JACOBS: Yes. That was part of Save the Village and the Artists' Housing. Save the Village was Doris Diether and Carey Vennema. My husband, Bob Jacobs, worked with them very hard over the years. They worked to prevent existing houses from being emptied of people or the rents raised so high that people couldn't afford to live in them. Artists' housing began as much the same kind of thing with Ann Lye.

KENT: About when?

JACOBS: In the sixties. I can't tell you exactly when in the sixties. It may even have started toward the end of the fifties. Now the artists' housing—the idea of it was that artists could have their studios and live in the same spaces—often in spaces that had previously been industrial.

KENT: And also illegal.

JACOBS: It would have been illegal for them to live there. So this was a fight to get it legitimized. They were living in—many, many artists were living in—such spaces illegally. And that's the way SoHo was being resettled, as an artist's area, to a quite an extent. So this was very much associated, in an oblique way, with the fight against the Lower Manhattan Expressway. It was very clear by then that buildings that would be destroyed, the neighborhoods that would be destroyed, were the very areas chosen by artists and becoming the most cosmopolitan and sophisticated, you might say, areas of the city. Very choice.

So by the time this Seward Park High School hearing was being held in the spring of '68, it was pretty clear to many, many people that this expressway would be a disaster. Nevertheless, the State was determined to push ahead with it, and in order to do it the most expeditiously, to get the hearing over and the decision made before the new regulations—federal regulations—went into effect.

The hearing was held by a number of state officials. They had come down from Albany. It was patently a phony, the whole thing. A hearing is supposed to be held before a decision is made, of course, and the decision itself is supposed to be based on what comes out in the hearing, the information. This decision had been made. This hearing was just to go through the motions. And the state officials didn't even attempt to conceal that. They were just trying in the most technical way to satisfy what they considered the letter of the law.

And their feelings about this were made most obvious, in a way, by how they had set up the hearing. They sat on the stage with desks, or tables. And the audience, of course, was all down below in the large high school auditorium. The microphone was down on the floor at the level of the audience at the front of the auditorium, right at the foot of the stage, in the shadow of the stage, you might say, below it.

Well, all that was okay, even though rather undemocratic looking. But the ridiculous thing was that the microphone was turned toward the audience in the auditorium, so that the speaker had to stand behind it, under the stage, and face the audience. It was very clear that the people at this hearing were not addressing the officials, that they were not there for the benefit of enlightening the officials, which is what the hearing was supposed to be about, but they were there to let off steam. The whole thing was just to let off steam and to go through the motions.

Well, there were, anyway, in spite of this, hundreds of people who wanted to be heard. And although the time permitted to each speaker was limited and people were short, it was going on and on. Oh, the first speakers, of course, were the relatively few in favor of the expressway and they were all officials, just about.

Then came this torrent of one person after another who was against the expressway.

At some stage I had, the same as other people, handed my name in to someone at the door who asked you as you came in, "Do you want to speak?"

And I had said, "Yes," I did.

And eventually, what was it, I don't know, about 11 o'clock at night by then. This would go on, it was plain, into the hours of the morning. Somebody or other whose name had come up earlier than mine ceded his time to me to speak. I didn't know what to do. Everything was stacked against us. So I went up to the microphone. I was very angry. We were all very angry in that auditorium. And I said, I pointed out, how ridiculous it was that we were talking to ourselves the way the microphone had been set up, instead of to the officials who were supposed to be listening to us and making their decision on the basis of what they heard. You can imagine how cynical we all felt about that.

And when I said that, the chief state person who was present, whose name was Mr. Toth, came running down the steps and turned the microphone around. Here was this criticism of how it had been set up. That was rank hypocrisy, and so I turned it around again and said we had been talking to ourselves so far and so we might as well continue. That they weren't listening to us. That nothing would make them listen to us. They had made their decision. That was clear. And that they were really only errand boys, in any case, who had no power to make decisions. They had been sent by their betters from Albany and they had no autonomy. So we had better let them take back a message, these errand boys. The message they should take back was that we would never stand for this expressway. And to emphasize that we would never stand for it, so they would remember this, I intended just to climb up to their level on the stage and walk across the stage and down the other side. And I'd be happy to be joined by anybody else who felt this way and would like to make the point of, "Please carry this message back to Albany."

So Frances Goldin, who was a civic leader on the Lower East Side came and joined me and we both started to march—went up the stairs and started to march across the stage. And people got up from their seats and formed behind us. They were going to march across the stage with us, too.

Now something very curious, and, as far as I was concerned, really unexpected happened. There was a stenotypist who had a new machine and had been employed by the State to make a record of this hearing. She was very proud of her new machine and it was precious to her, as well it should be. It was her means of earning a living. It was her tool. I, for one, and I don't think the others, either, would ever have attacked her tool, her means of a livelihood. But she was frightened. And she picked up her stenotype machine, she stood up from her table and picked up her stenotype machine and clasped it to her bosom to protect it. The tapes with the record on them fell out of the machine because gravity was not supposed to take care of them in this strange position. The machine was no longer on its bottom. It was on its side and out fell these tapes and they ran across the floor like confetti. It was amazing.

And she kept saying, "I'm not a state employee! I'm not a state employee!" as if to disassociate herself from who she thought we were threatening. I don't know what in the world was going through her head, but she was scared, that was for sure, and she didn't want us thinking she was one of that group of errand boy men up there.

In the meantime, Mr. Toth was saying to the policeman who was up on the stage, "Arrest that woman! Arrest that woman!" by whom he meant me.

The policeman, who I later got to know as Patrolman McGovern, said to me, "Why don't you come and sit here Mrs. Jacobs." He didn't arrest me. But he said, "Why don't you come and sit here." And he pointed to an empty chair on the stage. So I went over and stood apart, beside the chair.

And then I watched this really surrealistic event that was unfolding. Everything else was silent, eerily silent almost, on the stage. People were kind of

arrested in their march across, and here was all this tape, like confetti, rolling out and spreading everywhere on the stage. And people began picking it up from the floor and tossing it in the air as if they were dancers. But everything was peaceful and quiet, too. That's why it was so surrealistic. The state officials had retreated to the very back of the stage and they looked as terrified of us as the stenotypist did. I don't know why. We weren't menacing anybody. It was a very peaceable, civilized crowd. I just suppose they felt so alienated from ordinary people. I don't know why, but anyhow, it was really strange.

And I stood there watching this and I thought, "This has got to end somehow. Those officials don't have a clue how to bring this to an end. Nobody else seems to." And I didn't have a clue either, but I knew that it had to be brought to an end.

So an inspiration about that struck me, and I left the chair and walked back the way we had come. We never did cross the stage. The others came along behind me and I went down and people went and took their seats again. Such a strange episode was over now. And I said, "There is no hearing because the record is gone. And without a record, there can't be a hearing." That was the inspiration that had suddenly struck me. I really had no idea that this was going to happen—or when it happened, what in the world to make of it or do with it. So I said, "We may as well go home because the hearing is over." And everybody began to get up from their seats and leave. And as I went out, a police captain touched me on the shoulder and told me that I was arrested. And I said, "What am I being charged with?"

And he said, "Well that will be taken care of later. Mr. Toth has insisted that I arrest you."

And I said, "I don't think that's very bright of him."

And he said, well, he didn't either, but he had no choice.

The police, fortunately, as far as I could make out, were on our side. And I laid that to the fact that they had been listening to the hearing, too, and saw what scoundrels the state officials were and what a miserable part they were playing. And how right all these hundreds of people from the neighborhood were in their

assessment of what a waste of money, what a destruction of the neighborhood, what a ruination of Manhattan.

KENT: We're almost at the end of the tape so...

JACOBS: Yes. Well the only thing, subsequently, that affected me was the trial that I had, in which the serious charges against me were reduced to disorderly conduct, and to pay for damage that they claimed to the stenotype machine.

Very well. I knew very well that I hadn't touched that stenotype machine, and I also knew that nobody else had, that I had seen. There was no damage to it. So I had my lawyer, Charles Rembar, try to pursue that—get a receipt for repairs—get some kind of a statement. He never could get it. I said, I didn't want that on my record, that I had damaged a machine and it had to be established. But no! They were just as crooked about that as they were about anything else.

Later in 1968 I left for Toronto, where I took up residence for other reasons, entirely, than anything to do with the expressway. And I had to come back to New York a number of times for court hearings. But then the fight, the actual fight, was carried on by other people—the fight that finally put that expressway to rest. So that will have to be the tale of someone else, how that was done.

[Break in recording]

JACOBS: This a correction, or an emendation, to something I said in the account of the West Village battle. I spoke there of a conversation of James Felt with David Rockefeller of the Downtown Lower Manhattan Association that had to do with some announcement that was being planned. I am not sure what this was—I wasn't present at it and in recollection of what was told to me—I'm not sure whether David Rockefeller himself was figuring in this phone conversation or whether it was one of his surrogates—his director—or one of his other functionaries in the Downtown

Lower Manhattan Association. But it was someone at that association and James Felt who were concerned with this. And my recollection is that it was Rockefeller, but I am not sure of that.

KENT: Is that it?

JACOBS: That's it.

KENT: Right. Thank you very much Mrs. Jacobs

[Break in recording]

KENT: When did you move to Greenwich Village?

JACOBS: I think it was in 1934. I moved to Morton St. with my sister. We had been living briefly in Brooklyn. I didn't know, and neither did she, that we were moving to Greenwich Village.

I would spend the afternoons wandering around New York after going to employment agencies in the morning, and I would come out—I didn't know anything about the city really—and I would come out of the subway just at random, someplace, and start walking around there and remember where the subway station was and go back in and find my way back to the St. George station in Brooklyn—to the station that was in the St. George hotel there, or by it.

And this particular time I got out of the subway at a place called Christopher Street/Sheridan Square. I had no idea where I was, but I was enchanted with this place and I walked around it. And I spent the rest of the afternoon just walking these streets. [I] went back in the subway, went back to Brooklyn and told my sister, "Hey I found the place we have to live."

So it wasn't so hard to find an apartment in those days. It was in the Depression. And we went, and in short order found this place on Morton Street in a building that Oliver Williams—a very progressive preservationist and real estate person and building renovator, well before his time—had. We couldn't have had a nicer and finer landlord. Then later on, I moved to Washington Place and, in 1948, over to Hudson Street.

I didn't play any part in the Greenwich Village Study. I really am pretty blank about what it was. Stanley Tankel loved the Village and wanted to help. He wasn't really involved in the particular fights I was in. I think of him as a very fine fellow and a good citizen. Nice person. Along the line of others who were somewhat above that battle in many ways. They did their parts, often in important ways, but not in the nitty gritty of the fighting, you might say.

Another one in that category was, for instance, Robert Weinberg. He was one of the important members of the Community Planning Board. And I believe that he had a great dealt to do with keeping that as a living entity which became more and more important in the affairs of Greenwich Village. But he observed a certain distance and neutrality from things, as was perhaps correct, considering that he was, I guess, the Chairman of the Board.

In the Save the Village efforts—the petitions and the very definite things, very constructive things that they did, and effective things—I was not involved with those. My husband was. He was deeply involved in them. He worked a lot in the Save the Village campaigns with Doris Diether and with Carey Vennema. And his expertise as an architect was very useful in hearings about zoning applications of various kinds. Those fights had a lot to do with the zonings and he spent a lot of time at the Board of Standards and Appeals, and preparing for it. And so did Doris and so did Carey. Also, he was active—although less so than with Save the Village—he was active with the artists, the artists' housing fight. Now the—I was obliquely involved in . . .

KENT: Just a moment.

[Break in recording]

KENT: You were obliquely involved...

JACOBS: I was obliquely involved in the historic preservation movement by the City—the acceptance by the City Planning Commission of the idea of historic districts and buildings. My oblique involvement was this: that at one point James Felt thought that he could play off the designation of the West Village for clearance against the adoption by the City of historic preservation. I know for a fact that was part of it—it was to co-opt people, and to make them feel they were getting a compromise. So we in the West Village were supposed to be thrown to the wolves, so to speak, as a sacrifice for the City giving people the preservation measure. We were delighted about this because we thought that preservation was needed, too, and we were very pleased that somehow or other our efforts had, as we were told, as we had understood it, had helped push this. And we knew that it didn't mean our sacrifice.

Now, I knew Arthur Holden. I knew him as an architect and a poet who—in, well, to be frank, not very good poems, but a lot of interesting thinking—put his views about communities and architecture, law and so on, into sonnets. An odd exercise. But I never encountered him in the context of any of our battles in Greenwich Village. I think he was one of those people who thought a lot about these things but was above the battle.

Many of the people who got involved in one of the Greenwich Village battles were like me. They then got involved in another one, just because of the logic of one leading to another. But this also made us all the more effective, because people who got seasoned and educated in one fight could use that in others. And even more important, they had gotten to know people who could be helpful in these battles.

The battles between the Village and NYU. I got involved slightly in a peripheral way. The library— I thought that was a very unfortunate scheme and so did many, many others in the Village because it was on the south side of the square [Washington Square Park]—[a] high building where there had been a low one. And it would cut off the sunlight for a good part of the year when it was needed the most in the square. It seemed out of scale as well as having that liability.

KENT: But that's one you lost?

JACOBS: On the south side of the square. Yes, we lost that one. Philip Johnson won it. He was the architect for the library. And he was so much admired as an architect. I admired him as an architect too, but I thought he was wrong about this. But a lot of people were willing to take his word about it—that it would be a grand addition.

[End of Interview]