

Subject: Kate Millett

Location: Poughkeepsie, New York

Date: October 10, 2002

Interviewer: Darby Penney

DP: I'm Darby Penney and I'm interviewing Kate Millett at her farm near Poughkeepsie, New York and it's October 10th, 2002.

DP: Kate, can you please tell me when and where you were born?

KM: Yeah, I was born 68 years ago in St. Paul, Minnesota and so I have a different perspective on a lot of things than people in the east do and I'm of Irish descent so of course, I'm a reasonable person with a sense of humor. But, the system vexes us all.

DP: What kind of child were you?

KM: My mother said at my sanity trial—I was tried for insanity. Minneapolis tried me, but the case was heard in St. Paul, where I was born... and I passed my sanity test, by the way. I've been declared legally sane. This was before I was arrested in Ireland... (laughing). My mother said at my trial that I was very quiet. I'm the middle child, so I didn't get the big sister's attention and I didn't get the little sister's attention. So I kind of amused myself.

DP: When you were a kid did you perceive yourself as different from other people or other kids?

KM: No, not at all. My big sister was very famous as a scrapper and so that made life easy for me. And my little sister was very pretty so... I didn't really have a care in the world. I was, I think, a probably pretty happy kid. Because, you know, I belonged to a boy's gang and stuff like that. And then they came and stole my chug. And I was *horrified*, you know, because I had been kicked out of the gang, because girls aren't supposed to play with boys. And they took my chug.

DP: What's a chug?

KM: Well, a chug is like a soapbox derby, you know. That's a kind of car we make in the Middle West. And I have made sculptures of chugs, even (laughing). So, that was a big blow. And I remember my father trying to console me for it. But, I said, "That isn't fair, Daddy." And he said, "Well, life isn't fair," or something like that. But he

was sympathetic. Mother just thought I shouldn't have a chug anyway. I should stop acting like a boy and, you know, I'm thirteen or twelve or something...eleven...I should stop playing with boys. And Grandma Kelly was going to make our uniforms and everything. It was very exciting. We were all *thrilled*. It's the first entry in my diary as a child.

'And today we formed the Purple Feather Association, and Mrs. Kelly—Grandma Kelly— is going to make our uniforms and, you know, they're sufficiently theatrical'... and stuff like that (laughing). But, I guess the boys, I don't know, they were warned off by Mrs. Kelly. And then Mother colluded and said, "No, no, no. She shouldn't play with boys anymore. She's a girl." Well, I mean, of course, I'm a girl. But why shouldn't I play with boys? So, I was left playing theater with Susan Dudley. And her parents had an attic. So, we made a lot of theatrical costumes (laughing). And Jerome Kelly, who was the youngest in the family and we regarded as sort of an idiot because he was younger than we were. And he came to a play we gave once and he brought a whole pint of ice cream, so we were very delighted. And then we opened it up and it was mud (laughing). And he'd gotten in and he'd seen the play. So, you have to give him credit (laughing).

DP: Not quite so dumb?

KM: No, no, just kind of canny. And, he tried to entice me into his garage and I knew what it was for so, I said, "No way, Jerome. You are kind of dopey." But that was, you know, a kind of early awakening to sexual differences (laughing). Which is how I offended the first time, I guess, by being a tomboy, I guess. I thought you just played, you know. I didn't realize I was the only girl in the gang, you know. What does that matter? You know, I like snowball fights and things like that (laughing). We had a shack down by the river, you know. We had everything. So why not have a gang? I was the leader of the gang in the first grade (laughing). Sister St. Bernard said, "Oh, you're the leader of a gang? You get to the end of the line. I've had enough of your leadership skills (laughing)." So I was cut down to size pretty early. But, the rest of the time I just...a lot of the times I played alone, because my older sister's five years older and my youngest sister was five years younger. And so about the only kid in my neighborhood who was my size was Susan Dudley. So, I did offend her family. See, I had an Uncle Harry who told wonderful stories. I thought they were great. So, I'd go over and tell the Dudley family one of Uncle Harry's stories (laughing). I got in trouble that way, too.

DP: Uncle Harry's stories were racy?

KM: Well, they were sort of...they were kind of *Irish* stories. And they were particularly literary, because one was about Rory the Cat and...it's a very long and involved story, but the punch line is "Devil a word has he said since that day to this," and the cat talked. Well, the Dudley's looked at me and said, "Not too funny." I said, "When Uncle Harry tells it, it's wonderful." I said, "Hmmm," and that's all I said, but...I

thought it was a great story. It goes on for an hour and a half practically (laughing) about Rory the Cat and some of them were a little racy I guess, you know. They're the kind of stories that adults tell in front of children. They weren't really terrible, but I guess they qualified as, you know, the facts of life kind of stuff or some reference to one of those things. So the Dudley's saw me as a little chancy for Susan (laugh) but they did let me go on playing with her.

DP: Did you know you were an artist when you were a kid?

KM: Well, I sculpted with I was 12 years old. And I had, you know, we all had this science project thing and I was making a pyramid. But, before I actually put the clay on the...my father had cut the pyramid for me (laughing) or I think maybe I cut it myself on lines he drew. But before I put it on the plywood, I thought I'd experiment with the clay a little bit and I made a Greek head which I was fatuously in love with and...oh, I thought it was the most beautiful thing in the world. It was about, you know, this big. And I kind of let it go and the clay hardened up. So the day before I was supposed to hand it in...I'm in tears and my father is kneading the clay for me because, you know, we've got to get enough linseed oil in it to make a pyramid. But, really, I regret very much losing that head. So, I've been making up for it ever since.

DP: In your book, "The Loony Bin Trip," you talk about when you were 18 you worked for a summer as a psychiatric aide in a psych hospital?

KM: Ah huh.

DP: Can you talk a little bit about what that was like? What kind of work you did and what it made you feel about the system?

KM: I guess it was my first cause, because I saw hell. I mean, you know, I'm working as a psychiatric aide. I lost 14 pounds working there in the first two weeks. We ate the same food. And I lived in the nurse's annex and the patients lived in the hospital. They lived like animals and they were treated like animals, too. So, I counted silverware and stuff like that lest they go away with a fork or knife or something. You couldn't do much damage with those unless you did it to yourself. But, they were prisoners in the system. I guess they often wanted to kill themselves. I can see why. They were there for the rest of their lives and their lives were made miserable, and unnecessarily miserable. I mean, their families had dropped them off there without any explanation and never came back. So, they're, you know, staring out the window, all these years, hoping the family member who put them in will come and get them out. And, of course, the family member had no intention of doing so. And they communicated with each other, because that was before the age of drugs. So, there was a little solace among each other, but, you know, they're all supposed to be crazy, so, they can't really have a sense of solidarity, because each is crazy in his own way. Although there were occasionally really nice human things... they had divided

and conquered pretty successfully. And I worked *all* shifts. I worked the graveyard shift and stuff with old people, which was really demoralizing. Because the old people didn't have a chance in hell of ever getting out of there. Other younger people maybe could go in and out. But not very much. Because in those days, when you got boxed, that was it. But then they only boxed about 5,000 people in the State of Minnesota. All victims of their families, of course.

And a guy called me up from Ireland the other day and he said, "They've closed St. Mary's at Inness." Well, I had happened to have been there. And he said, "Did you know that they used that as a place for *parking* people who had illegitimate children?" I said, "No, I didn't." And then it explained a lot, because the young girl who had been jilted on her wedding day, had come back to the hospital. Well, that's why. And whether she delivered or was pregnant or was just suspected of being so or was just turned down by the guy who was supposed to marry her...one never knew, because you didn't ask that kind of impolite question. But a lot of other people were there because somebody wanted the farm.

DP: Yeah.

KM: It was about property. And people are treated like property in places like this, and this is how psychiatry has functioned— as a kind of property arm of the government, who can put you away if your husband doesn't like you. A lot of women were put away for that. Or you won't put out. Sexuality. Or you won't do the dishes, maybe. Maybe you just sit down. You won't do anymore housework. They you go to the bin.

DP: So as an 18 year old, this must have been a real shock to you.

KM: Oh, Jesus Christ, it was horrifying. I mean, I would come home and tell Mother. I said, "You won't believe this place, Mom. I want to write articles for the paper." She said, "Oh, no. They'll just think you're crazy." And I said, you know, "*Mother.*" And she said, "You're always for the underdog." I said, "What dog do you want me to be for? The upper dog?" "Well," she said...you know, she was Irish with a sense of humor and she kind of grinned. But she said, "No one will believe you." I said, "But, you know, Mom, it's a *State* institution! And this place...it smells so bad I can't keep my food down. So, I've lost 14 pounds Mother." "There's less of you," she said. And, I said, "Mother, you wouldn't believe how people are treated there." She said, "I would." She said, "Those people down there are too dumb to farm." That's a southern Minnesota expression (laughing) which means you really are *so* stupid that, given our fertile wonderful soil, these people are too dumb to farm. And she said, "Those are the people who work there." I said, "Well, that's nice. Thanks for the information. But those people are also brutes, on the men's side especially." And she said, "I bet they are." And I said, you know, "I want to write about it." She said, "Well, no one would believe you. You're only 18 years old."

And we were a little busy that summer because my younger sister, Mallory, got polio bulbar. You got kind of one night to live; and she's three weeks in the Miller Hospital and stuff, so I wasn't even permitted to come home once. So I had to stay at the neighbors because it was contagious. So mother was a little concerned trying to save Mallory's life, so she wasn't very interested in my ideas. But I was careful only to make \$600 because she claimed me as a dependant. So, I had earned my \$600 so I said to the head nurse, "Hey, I'm going to stay on as a volunteer." She said, "Oh, no, you're not (laughing). You go back to college." I said, "Yeah, but I've got three and a half weeks. I could give them to the place because I can't go home anyway because my kid sister's got bulbar polio." She said, "I don't want you around here." And I said, "You know, I'm offering my services and I can try out some of my ideas. Like I can play classical records to them, because people respond to that." These dumb ideas these kids have. And then I said, "I can teach them tennis therapy." "Tennis therapy?" "Well, I know they can't keep their eye on the ball because their minds are so addled by this place, but after a while they'll get the point and maybe they'll strike a ball and that's success. And it feels good to play tennis." Well, the nurse hardly remembered tennis or anything else. She's been there for 55 years and she probably had good intentions when she started out, but she just wants to control the place and, of course, (laughing) I'm still **more** obstreperous as a volunteer where I couldn't be controlled. And I had a very good friend down that named Rosy, and Rosy was a registered nurse and she was really good. So, we pursued our ideas, you know. I want tennis therapy and my music therapy and I'm giving my own time for this, so they can't really stop me. But, you know, you could really see, these people had withdrawn so far that, you know, they just lived in their own minds and, of course, their own minds are very unhappy. So...I mean, they did terrible things to themselves. One woman would scratch herself in her sleep. So we'd have to wake her up every couple of hours and bandage her. Now that's a degree of unhappiness that's really kind of hard to arrive at. And one woman was supposed to have Parkinson's Disease which is actually a physiological disease, not a mental disease...I mean, if there was such a thing. And they kept her under observation and we had to check her out in a spy hole in the door every fifteen minutes.

DP: And they call people paranoid.

KM: And...but this woman was...she seemed to commit suicide. Like, that is...she ate rats. That's what they said. Who knows what she ate. But we shoved her food at her twice, three times a day and she was locked in solitary confinement for 25 years.

DP: Oh, jeez.

KM: That's keeping somebody alive at their own expense kind of. And it was like that. I mean, they used the jacket all the time...straight jackets...and there was a very brutal Polish nurse who I tried to talk into..."Let me calm them down," 'cause she'd, you

know, threaten them with a plunger and stuff. And she was huge but she was really scared. They were really crazy, she thought. Well, they weren't crazy. They were tired of being locked up. Even I could see that. And so I'd sit with the woman and, you know, calm down with her. They wouldn't let me smoke with her, but I could maybe if she calmed down a little more I could take her out on the balcony and you could smoke. See, you could smoke on the balcony...

DP: Not any more.

KM: Now you can't smoke anywhere.

DP: I know.

KM: So...let's not get busted again (laughing) because I like tobacco. And, anyway, I'd sit next to her and, you know, kind of make jokes and stuff like that. And she would immediately calm down and then I could unbuckle her arms if she promised not to make a fuss. Well, I was the only person who had ever been nice to her, and so she promised not to make a fuss. And then I said, "You know, in a while, we can go out on the balcony and have a cigarette. You can tell me what's really wrong." Some times they told me. Some times they didn't trust me. But I was making real progress (laughing). When the time came, I had to go back and work for Mom again, because I had jobs because Mother had divorced my father. So ... but I could only make \$600 a summer 'cause she was still declaring me as a dependent.

DP: Did they use shock at this hospital?

KM: Oh, yeah. They used shock.

DP: And did you see that?

KM: Ah huh. And the first day I saw it they said, "Hold onto somebody's ankle," and I held on and they went *whirrrrr* and I said, you know...when it was over, I said, "You know, I don't like participating in this." And they said, "Well, she's a kid. She's only 18. So we're not going to make you." So, I said, "Thanks, 'cause I'm going to quit if you do." I made my little stand. This was a summer job. I had gotten through the university and took this course in abnormal psych and we hated the teacher. Me and my pals just hated him because he was just a bully and a male chauvinist and we'd sit in class and kind of sneer at him, you know, when his back was turned and stuff. And so we all decided: *we'd* cure madness. I mean, what's so scary about it for God sakes? So, we'd go down and take jobs. Well, of course, they were clever enough to divide us up. (laughing) We really caused a ruckus, 'cause, you know, we're from St. Paul and we don't give a damn. There's a saying in St. Paul that if it weren't for St. Paul there'd be no St. Peter's, and if it weren't for St. Peter's, there'd be no St. Paul. See, the asylum was called St. Peter's. It's kind of a reflection on the

beauty of Irish life lived *ala* Buddenbrooks in 1940 or something... '50. But if you're unlucky, you might end up in St. Peter's. And certain unlucky people did, who were almost always poor. And, I mean, just almost always. But some weren't quite poor and some had read about my aunt's marriage to Louis Hill, Jr. in the paper. So, you know, my name was Millett and they recognized my name, but otherwise nobody, you know, copped to it and I was just an aide, a psychiatric aide. And Gretchen, who had a much worse job than I did, worked in the place for little kids which was really awful. I mean, I threw up all afternoon after seeing that place and I said, "Gretchen, I don't know how you can take it." She said, "Well, I live in Farbeaux and... that's F-A-R-B-E-A-U-B-A-U-X. Almost everything. Had a French name. And, her folks owned a department store. So she lived in Farbeaux and she didn't have to live in, so maybe it wasn't so awful because at least she could go home to her own house. But maybe she was required to live in. I can't quite remember. And Janie Washburn was going to do it too and she went home to California. She said, "I can't even stay at St. Paul for a minute." I said, "Come on. You're from St. Paul." She said, "I don't know how you put up with it. I'm going to my folks place in La Hoya, California." And I said, "Oh, yeah (laughing)." They had a swimming pool and everything. We were all freshmen together at the university and, Becoulla, who became a doctor and lived in Sweden, she was in on it, too. She went to Hastings which is where the...kind of...it's the head hospital. They just did records there, so Becoulla was sort of bored and she was a musician as well as a scientist, though we didn't know she was a scientist yet. But music, you know, you might have guessed (laughing)...she couldn't make a living as a musician so she just decided to make a living as a doctor. So she probably still plays music. But she just saw the good side. The official, you know, "we're saving everybody." And a couple of years before I had my job down there, the Gray Ladies had been recruited because we had a forward-looking governor, Governor Youngdahl, who was then kicked upstairs in a Federal judgeship, because he was stirring up a fuss. He got the Gray Ladies in there. They're volunteers and they were going to paint the wards and, you know, jiggle everybody up and, you know, maybe decimate the population a little. Well, that wasn't good for the powers that be who were all dishonest...I mean, what a collection of doctors. The head guy was a psychiatrist who was never there. He was always on tour some place advertising his wares or something and the other doctors were dishonored. They were, you know, kind of thrown out of being doctors. Not exactly defrocked but just about an inch from it. And they went down there and worked for the State. One of them tried to seduce me (laughing). That's why I know they were so horny and awful. And... "Do you like Schubert?" That was his come-on line. Yeah, and I liked Schubert but I figured I'd stay in the nurse's annex thanks a lot. Heard that line before and I had a boyfriend my own age so I didn't need him. It was an amazing summer because I read every book in the library. I had nothing else to do. I'm stuck in southern Minnesota. Apart from going out with football players...the Giants practiced down there. The New York Giants in fact, who were really awful guys (laughing). So, Rosy and I stayed away from them as much as possible once we figured that out. She was very interested in what she was doing, which was

psychiatry...psychiatric nursing. And I was very interested in psychiatry because I'd kind of, you know, taken this yahoo's course and he believed people were crazy and, you know. I thought this has got to be some bullshit because my own *relatives* don't believe in this. See, nobody who's a Millett ever believed in psychiatry. It used to be a family joke. So, I thought psychiatry was some kind of hokey thing, which it is, but, I didn't know they had police powers and stuff until I came down and saw what powers they're got. And the Milletts would say, "These people have turned over their people to the State. They're bad and the poor victim, but how can we get them out?" So, they, you know, were just getting along then. It was the most awful summer of my life. And the next summer job I got was in Glacier Park. I decided I'd have a good time.

DP: That sounds better.

KM: Yeah, 'cause I'd seen hell...but I never forgot this hell. And then when the guy called me up from St. Mary's at Inness in Clare in Ireland and said they closed the joint. I said, "Oh, I'd dance the jig if I could and still be on the phone." And he said, "You know, they abused everybody there." I said, "You're telling me. I know (laughing)." But he said, "Kate, it was so awful." And I said, "Yeah," "...And we're doing a story on it." "Well, you know, good, I'll tell you anything you want." So, he was supposed to come to New York and call me up but he never did. Maybe he got everything he needed for his story. But I acknowledged I'd been there. I guess that's what he wanted.

DP: So this was very recent that they closed it down?

KM: Yeah, the other day. Yeah, but I was there in... well, I've been incarcerated twice. But...the first one was so complicated... because I was taken to Highlands in Oakland, then transferred the next day to another fancy place in Berkeley where the Berkeley kids go. But I was *admitted* at Highlands by a disastrous little mistake by my eldest sister who thought she knew what she was doing. She had been a psych major. Wow, a psych major. I mean, I'm an English major, I find psych majors funny. But, Sally had me admitted to Highlands in Oakland and then I got turned over to Berkeley and then I got turned over to Napa...

DP: Napa State Hospital?

KM: Yeah, yeah.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

DP: In *The Loony Bin Trip*, you described a series of events that led up to your sister having you committed.

KM: Ah huh.

DP: And one of the things that struck me was that your sister and your husband and your lover kind of colluded...

KM: (laughing) Colluded and collided (laughing).

DP: And what does that do to your sense of trust of the people close to you?

KM: A little bit disappointing to say the least. And you never recover from betrayals like that. Because, you know, I trusted my husband, who I had succored and helped through immigration and been such a good friend to him. And he *turned* on me. Well, it turned out he wrote a book. He's died since.

DP: Oh, I didn't know that.

KM: And it turned out he wrote a book saying that he didn't want to collude with my family in my imprisonment any further. Which is why, it seems, he divorced me. Well, of course, he had found another girl. But I thought that was kind of, you know, sort of backhanded nobility, but it would have been nice if he told me (laughing). Anyway, my mother used him to sign me in; you see, she needed his approval... because I was married to him. And he hated giving his approval and he was in New York and I was in St. Paul and, you know. I guess he thought, "Well, her mother, blah, blah, blah," but then he thought it over and he really didn't like the idea. But we were never each other's *keepers*, you know. I mean, it was a marriage between equals and he always understood that and I was by that time a famous feminist, so he thought the whole thing deplorable. But he couldn't deny my mother who was his particular friend. He had always been very kind to her and she *believed* in psychiatry but...I should go back to the beginning. Sally had me incarcerated. I went from Highlands to Herrick in Berkeley, and then to Napa State. Now this is all one incarceration...

DP: Right.

KM: ...but it's how they can spin it out. I was probably inside for two weeks, but you see it's a 72 hour police hold. So they had to keep moving me around 'cause then the clock started again and it doesn't play on weekends. So...and then the doctor said to me, "We want you to sign a voluntary commitment." I said, "I'm not an idiot." He said, "Well, unless you sign it, you're never getting out." Well, I had his promise he'd let me out if I'd say it was voluntary, which, of course, what's that worth? But I had no other option because nobody else would get me out. Not the people that signed me in. Sally went home to Nebraska where she was the wife of a Strategic Air Command officer who carried the bomb and was a member of the Strategic Air Command. My husband went home to New York. No, he hung around and so did

Sita. They hung around until Sally was gone...the big sister. And then they took me out to a Chinese meal and I kind of told them off, both of them. Because, I mean, good God, I carried keys. I've worked in places like that. I know how bad they are. Sally, of course, didn't know a damn thing...as always, so superior.

DP: Did they feel any remorse afterwards?

KM: (Deep breath) Yeah, but they think also I'm crazy, so they don't feel remorseful. Sally never did and we don't discuss it. And 'cause that's the agreement. We can't be friends otherwise. So I have to bow to her good offices and wishes and she will not say she's sorry or that she was wrong, although it is understood she is both (laughing). Her roommate has told me so...her housemate or whatever. But, she will never admit to anything. But she has since become an attorney and she's defended people from assault by their family and the psychiatric institution. So, she's paying her dues. But she was just, you know, a housewife at the time, and under the thumb of her husband, who was a lieutenant colonel. And, you know, I'm on his records. You know, my first FBI file was from Edward. And now, of course, I've got my own. (laughing) But, anyway, this was one imprisonment and then I got out because I did have the guts to sign the stupid document and the doctor said, "Okay, you can go." Because I had been making some calls to Flo Kennedy, who is the mother of us all and the head of the women's movement at the time, and Flo said, "Well, I don't get involved in family stuff." But I think she made a call for me and said, "You let her out because she is our darling." (Laughing) I didn't feel very much like a darling at the time. I mean, I'm dishonored. I mean, all I ever had was my own brain, you know. I wasn't beautiful...like Mallory. I wasn't good at money and smarts like Sally, so, all I had was my brain. And I had written a book and made history. So, I'm 35 years old... 38... at the time I'm incarcerated and I'm at the top of my powers, rich and famous by my standards (chuckle). I mean 30 grand a year made me rich (laugh). Doubleday spun out the money. Mother said, "Oh, you're such a child. You know, they're playing with your interest." I said, "Oh, that's too bad." I thought I'd do better than Scott Fitzgerald. He blew 150 thousand the first year. She said, "You should have got it all. You could have put it out at interest for yourself." I said, "Jesus, Mom, I never thought of that." Anyway...

DP: During that hospitalization, were you force-drugged?

KM: Oh, yeah. All the time.

DP: With?

KM: With Thorazine.

DP: What kind of a diagnosis did they give you?

- KM: Oh, manic, of course. It's the fashionable thing now. Has been for thirty years.
DP: And they give you Thorazine for that?
- KM: Ah huh. They gave me Thorazine 'cause I was speeding, they said. You bet I was speeding! I mean, I was going 150 miles per hour trying to save my life and get out of there. Speeding they called it. I mean, this is a mental term? And it's like I broke the speed law or something. Jesus Christ.
- DP: You talk in "The Loony Bin" trip about how, just before they had you incarcerated for the first time, you were working on this issue trying to get this political prisoner...
- KM: Oh, yeah, yeah...
- DP: ...Michael X freed...
- KM: Yeah, Michael.
- DP: ...and that people felt that you were, I don't know, over-involved or...
- KM: Oh, yeah. My elder sister said, "You're going to save a nigger from a rope." I said, "Yeah, you're right. I am."
- DP: She said that? In those words?
- KM: Well, we used to say that when we were kids. I mean, we didn't mean it pejoratively. I know it sounds terrible. But, we're Irish and we like saving people from ropes. She said, "You don't know a damn thing about Britain." I said, "I went to school in England. Don't tell me. I'm an Oxonian. Don't you remember, Sal?" She said, "You don't know anything." She said, "I think it's good you're on ice," or something like that. I said, "Well, that's really clever, Sally. But this is a bad place to put anybody on ice. Why don't you just get out of my face?"
- DP: I think a lot of times people find the energy of activists kind of bizarre, and they kind of use that as a way to say there's something wrong with your for being that way.
- KM: Oh, yeah. I exceeded. See, I was supposed to be "women's lib" and now I'd exceeded it and gone over into international politics. Because actually, he was a friend of Yoko and John, who were friends of mine. That's Yoko Ono and John Lennon. And we were all in this together...together with John Hendricks and Tosh from Belgium. And we made a committee. So they decided...in fact, Kunstler, our great constitutional lawyer, decided I should go to England because I'd been to school there. Well, of course, that doesn't give you much, but at least it gave me a feel for the place. And my good friend, Midge McKenzie, who I heard today is very ill, assigned me two friends of hers who waited on me hand and foot and filled out the

press stuff and then I just had to talk. So, you know, it wasn't very hard. I even talked to Bernadette Devlin, who said, "Leave me out of this, because I'm living a private life now." They shot her soon after. (sigh) Anyway, I had assistance. I had entrée into everything in England, in London, which I didn't know. After all I only knew Oxford... London was very good to me because McKenzie is a famous film maker and she had two protégés, kids who'd do anything she 'cause she said it's worth doing. And she said, "Kate is trying to save somebody's life. So, help her out. Let her stay in your place and you've got enough room for her and be her assistants." Well, they said, "Wow, we're honored," or some silly wonderful thing like that and they worked for me. So we could get press conferences and I got the front page of the *New Statesman Nation*: "Shall We Hang Michael?" It had been a foregone conclusion that they should. They didn't hang anybody in England in those days. But in the colonies they still did hang people. It was a crown colony of England at the time. And who's supposed to decide it are the five law lords and Kunstler tried to argue before them and they refused. He's an American. Well, I'm an American, too, but I'm just trying to work on his press image. And I got the front page of the *New Statesman*. So, I got something done. Then I came back to California and my big sister boxes me because I don't know the British Empire. Well, she didn't either as far as I could see. And she'd been a psych major, and so she decided I was crazy. Or said I was crazy. I never could figure out whether she thought I was or not. When I came out, she had thought I was also crazy. But just crazy in the sense of irresponsible. She said, "You're making it hard for all us housewives in Nebraska."

DP: (Laugh)

KM: I said, "Well, that's too bad. What am I supposed to do, lie?"

DP: So that was your first incarceration, when you were 38?

KM: Yeah. And then I went over to St. Paul where mother had beckoned me home and I was going to introduce my friend to the family. That was a big mistake, of course. And Sita was used *always* as a decoy. My mother thought she was an opera singer. I said, "Well, you know, Mom, she's a countess. But, you know, she's also a barefoot contessa and she's been broke in America and she understands poverty and all kinds of stuff that you haven't seen much of, Mother. We were scraping along kind of shabby genteel. Sita had been, you know, Woman of the World or Woman of the Year or something." She used to wear this wig in restaurants to frighten me. (laughing). I'd go to the bathroom and she'd come back and she'd put on that wig and I couldn't see where she was. And, I mean, we played all the time. But she was a serious civil rights worker and she, I guess, thought my family knew more than I did or something. Or she was delivering me to my mom or something, and then she whisked away. In fact, they kind of kicked her out, because the boys came to pick me up. And Mother had committed me for life to some little polite boys who came with a stretcher. And I said, "Oh, no. I know the operation (laughing). I don't need a

stretcher. I'll go willingly and quietly." Because they had almost broken my arm in California. Because, you know, you're going to take the gurney or a hospital armchair, you know...a wheelchair. And I said, "No, I'm going to drive my own car." They said, "Oh, no you're not," (laughing) and they tackled me. And this is where I felt betrayed the most. Because these huge, enormous bullies have got me on the ground and are breaking my arm and I looked at Yoshimora and he didn't move. That wasn't a very good moment. And so I thought, "Oh, that's too bad," and Sita you don't expect to oppose a bully and Sally had called them, so she is the victim of her own hyper drive I think because she wanted to incarcerate me and they had the wrong doctor. She thought I was going to see a woman doctor. But the doctor there was called Moriarty. It's like a joke. And what he said to me is, your only mistake was in trusting the people who brought you here. And he described me as a manic depressive and locked me up. So, I got to St. Paul and I'm incarcerated again for the fourth time in three weeks or something. And then my knights in shining armor showed up and they said, "Huh! We're your lawyers." I said, "You're my what?" And they said, "Do you want to get out?" I said, "Yeah, I do. But I'm not sure I'm getting out with you." And they said, "Well, if you think you have problems, you should be an Indian in Anoka, Minnesota." And I said, "Well, what's that like?" And they said, "You mean, you don't know?" They said, "It means Thorazine all your life." I said, "That's too bad." They said, "Will you go down for everybody?" I said, "I don't go down for anybody. Explain the terms." And they said, "We can make history with this case. We can change the legislature's view of things and so let's try." I said, "You're trying with my life? What are the options?" "Your mother has committed you." I said, "Well, that's nice. For how long?" "As long as it takes." So, everybody is lying a little bit, but I figure I'll go with the lawyers. So we have a sanity trial. But one thing was stipulated, no drugs. See the doctor who committed...who talked my mother into committing me. Mother calls him up, you know, her daughter's famous and stuff. Well, he's never heard of me in a whole million years and even I was on the cover of *Time* magazine. It doesn't matter. He's never heard of me. So, he thinks my mother's a little deluded and he'd like to see her famous daughter. So he locked me up and then he went on vacation with all four kids. He used to be a linebacker for Oklahoma. He was a real idiot, I think. But he was the major doctor of psychiatry for the University of Minnesota Hospital, so he's somebody. And he left me in charge of a German woman, who was sort of the vice president of the hospital or the junior or whatever. And my lawyers talked her into not drugging me. See, she knew some psychiatry. He didn't know anything except his own importance. And she said, "Well, what do you want to do?" "We want a trial." "Aren't you taking a chance," she said. "You could lose it." "Yeah," he said. "We're taking a chance. And Kate knows the chances." "Okay," she said. "They're going to ask questions like what are the multiplication tables." And the lawyer rolls his eyes, "What are the multiplication tables? They ask questions like that?" "Yeah, that's a sanity test," she said, "So drill her in the multiplication tables or we'll have somebody else do it." So, somebody drilled me in multiplication tables which I have a little trouble with, because my father, who was an engineer, told me six and nine

are, you know...when you add any factor of six and nine...well, if you do the nine times tables, 18 is 9. 27 is 9. So...it always works. (laughing) And the six times tables does too. So, this was sort of a joke between me and my dad and we called it the paddlewheel effect. So, I got to get past the paddlewheel affect and really seriously about the times tables and I haven't even thought of the times tables for a million years. I can't even do arithmetic for my checkbook, which always is a problem. And I can't do any math when people are watching. Because I have math anxiety (laughing) because my father left when I was thirteen 'cause Mom kicked him out. So, I practiced the tables, and then the rest of it is mostly synonyms and antonyms and language is what I do, so I can think on my feet. Although, you know, "what is to as such is to," it kind of depends on your point of view (laughing). And when you have kind of freed yourself of the restrictions of society enough to be called crazy, you can make some funny answers. But this was serious. So I never spoke in court. Every day court was packed with my supporters who are all in the women's movement, because they all told each other, "Come on. Kate Millett's on trial for her sanity." "You're kidding?" In my home town. "Wow, let's go see that." So, everybody came and I didn't say a word because I had careful instructions from my lawyers not to open my mouth. So we had to communicate in Norman French, which I happen to know because it's kind of part of the law and stuff and I know a lot of different kinds of French, so we could communicate this way. And I would say, "This is a lie," you know, they are lying, but that could cheer up my lawyers but they didn't say much either. They put the burden of proof on the people who are saying I'm crazy.

INTERVIEW INTERRUPTED BY VISITOR.

DP: You were talking about your trial.

KM: Yeah, my trial. My trial for sanity. And I won it because I shut up (laughing). Because, you see, it's all a matter of law and I'm not a lawyer so I had to shut up because they go on and on, lawyers. And the lawyers for the other side—Mother's side and the University of Minnesota—were really out to get me. You know, lawyers get vicious. Anyway, I won, and I was five days in court proving my sanity and then, you know, we had a drink in the judge's chamber and all that good stuff. And I'd proven my sanity, but my family wouldn't speak to me. So I stayed at my lawyer's house and...I mean, I was out of the bin and I'd been...you know, kind of all summer...it started in July and in August, and, you know, I was just a wreck from being threatened with probably a lifetime of incarceration because this guy at the University of Minnesota was such a male chauvinist. And, you know, he would have found me really obnoxious because I challenged them *always*, you know. "Come on, what books have you read? Do you know Chessler's work," and stuff like that. Chessler is Phyllis Chessler who has the body count as you might call it and proves in her book, you know, more women than men get incarcerated and stuff like that. And so I was really challenging them and they didn't like it that I had read as much. In

fact, I think a lot more psychiatry than they had because I read every book in the library. In St. Peter's, which had a very good library. All your classic guys, you know, Freud, Firenze and on and on and on. Adler, you know, I mean, the fathers...that kind of stuff. And, they hadn't read anything. They were just pill pushers. So...and they actually cannot even read a label. No, they really can't. It's appalling what they're distributing. I mean, they give Haldol to old people. Come on. It says right on the thing in PDR, you know, you don't give this. It's contra-indicated for aged people. That's how they killed my aunt. And it cost her \$50,000 a year to get killed.

DP: She was in a private hospital?

KM: Ah huh. Her son was responsible for her incarceration. I guess she lived too long. I mean, isn't that scary?

DP: That's very scary.

KM: The permanent power of attorney which she entrusted to her son. I mean, if you can't trust your own kids, who the hell are you going to trust? You better get some friends (laugh). And who *can* you trust? You know, because there's always property involved. She had a lot of money and he wanted to give it to St. Thomas or some other place, you know. And you can't trace it because the Church doesn't divulge. They don't have to. No church does.

DP: Really?

KM: Yeah. They receive kindly benefices and that's it. They don't divulge anything. So, I got out and I stayed at the chief lawyer's house, which was beautiful...really beautiful... the lawyers, both lawyers. Both rich lawyers...Mother's lawyer and my lawyer were friends of my aunts. But anyway, his lawyer was very good and got me off...all charges. Period. I wasn't crazy. So, I've even proved my sanity in a court of law which is hard to do I'll tell you. I mean, how can you prove something like that? You know, I mean, how do you prove a negative? I'm *not* insane. Well, I guess I proved I was sane 'cause I studied my times tables and answered questions and nobody asked me about the times tables. Terrible waste of time. But at least it kept me busy. And I'd go off everyday, you know, dressed. Because you've got to dress. Everything is judged by appearances. So I brushed my hair. I washed my hair. I ironed my dress. I was busy as all get out in that jail and it was a nice jail, I mean, as these things go. It was after all the Mayo Wing of the University of Minnesota. What could be better than that? We have marble bathrooms (laughing). You know, one thing you discover in the bin is that everybody is an opposite number. Because, for instance, there was some woman who was probably scrubbing the bathroom, but she reminded me so much of Sita which kind of made me keep my purpose. And when I was in for Michael, the first time in California...there was a black man

who...I don't know what Michael looked like, because I never met him...and his wife used to come and visit him some times. But I kind of saw them as Desiree and Michael Mallick because they had this black man, you know, tied up and everything...horrible. And he was locked up and so on. And, God knows what he'd done but he certainly was innocent of what they were punishing for. And he was, of course, very angry. And he would shout at night and so on and so forth and, I thought, "Boy, that's what Michael Mallick is going through," except he was going to die. But, who knows what they did to the black man anyway. See, I think that this country is kind of run by capital punishment. Because if they can do that to you. If they can kill you, if they can take your own life, then what can they do short of that? They can lock you up. So, they've now got all the black people...all the people on death row damn near are black and, I mean, it's so obvious how black they are. And, the Governor of Michigan...no, the Governor of Illinois has declared a moratorium 'cause 15 of his 17 next guys to go off were *innocent of any crime*. Now, when you've got that kind of a ratio, 15 innocent, two possible guilty, you don't commit capital punishment because that's forever, you know.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

KM: I think that the fact that this country is becoming increasingly authoritarian is really kind of based on capital punishment which they took up awhile back. And people respond to it like they're doing something wonderful. And that's kind of thoughtless, because it's just sweeping the problem under the rug. And incarceration is now for everybody. It used to be for 5,000 people in Minnesota. Now it's probably for a million in Minnesota. And who knows how many in New York State, where *outrage* has also included the poor and the black and the humble and the humiliated and all the rest of it. So, psychiatry's chief role was always to control the poor. And now it's doing it in a big way. Because this is a form of social control and capital punishment and punishment systems are forms of social control. So nobody gets educated in jail anymore. No one takes any courses. They've removed the courses from the women's side altogether in New York State and they're removed everything from the men's side, too which could be useful to you. You know, learn a trade so you can get a job, however humble. At least you know you could do that. Instead they're farming them out to do telemarketing (laugh). I mean, you know, 'cause they've got to earn their keep. Well, this is sort of crazy. This begins to look very, you know, fascistic, in fact, kind of like Nazi Germany in the 1930's. Everybody believes in psychiatry. So, it's supposed to be for our own good. Well, this is stupid. Let psychiatry prove that *anybody* has an illness, and, you know, I'd concede, but there is no physical proof as with germs and blood and stuff like that. There's no physical proof, so there's no pathology. A pathogen is provable. You've got a germ or you don't. And nobody's ever incarcerated for pneumonia. Everybody wants to get rid of it as fast as they can. It's a debilitating, horrible illness. I had it myself as a child and much as I feared going back to school...I was awful sick of lying in bed. So, this is sort of silly. Here is someone who is not discernibly sick in any way

except, you know, they said, somebody said that blah, blah, blah. That won't wash in a court of law. Third party, you know...come on. Where's the burden of proof? There isn't one. It's hearsay. But hearsay convicts you of being crazy. No pathological evidence of any kind. Well, you know, that won't wash. You know, if you've got pneumonia, it shows up. You know, and your spitting the stuff up, you know. They can take a slide of your sputum...I mean, come on it's...there's real proof. But if you've got schizophrenia or bi-polar, show me the evidence. Well, of course, there isn't any. So there isn't any illness. Now there's inappropriate behavior, but, you know, I know people who behave inappropriately all the time. They just think it's artistic or left wing...something like that. Or very respectable or whatever, and I think they're loathsome louts but they're not crazy.

DP: You talk, particularly in the concluding chapter of the "Loony Bin Trip," about madness or "mental illness" as a metaphor, the experience of madness or of extreme mental states as something other than an illness or a crime. Can you talk about how you think about this, what this means to you?

KM: You know, we used to take drugs to expand our minds. I don't mean Thorazine. I mean street drugs. And, of course, they're terribly forbidden now. And I never took drugs, but a lot of people I knew did, and they said it expanded their minds. I said, "Well, in what sense?" "Well, you know, I smoked some dope. I'm relaxed" and that kind of stuff. I said, "That's good." And they said, "It gives me wonderful verbal ability." I tried it some times, yeah, it really does. You know, you're so relaxed that you think you're very funny because you can pun and stuff. But, when you look at that, that's very creative. I mean, if you're a writer, it's very creative. Probably if you're a mother of thousands, it's a pain in the ass. But, so, the other drugs I never tried at all. But people say that they had good trips and that they enjoyed it and it's just wonderful and all that stuff. But we used to take drugs to expand our minds. Now we take drugs to shrink them. And there's a terrible difference. Nobody would ever *buy* Thorazine. It's awful. It's a hallucinogen... 'cause I've had it, I know what it does to you. And it did things that drugs did to me when I was a little kid because I had sulfa drugs. And they hadn't quite settled in on how much sulfa drugs I should have. (Laughing) Oh, so I had hallucinations. You know...oh, I'm sorry...

INTERRUPTED BY VISITOR

DP You were talking about madness as a metaphor rather than as mental illness.

KM: Well, I think that it's...we arrived at through experimentation which probably the human race has already done for millions of years. But at a knowledge, you know, that drugs alter your consciousness. Well, being in love also alters your consciousness. So, now we're afraid of everything because psychiatry says hew a straight line, and people who are religious or have religious experiences, they're

suspect. Leonard Frank wanted to explore his Jewish heritage. Folks threw him in the bin. Well, that's nice. I mean, kind of over-secularized. But that's what psychiatry does. It takes any unusual circumstance like being in love, or exploring religious experience, and makes a crime out of it.

PHONE RINGING. INTERVIEW INTERRUPTED

KM: Anyway, we've lost a sense of mental adventure because we're essentially afraid of the mind because you're afraid you'll go crazy. People have always been afraid they'd go crazy. At least since the 18th century when the great Swift was supposed to have lost his mind. Well, Jonathan Swift was the greatest stylist in the English language. He didn't lose his mind. He just took a job (laugh) as the Dean of St. Patrick's Protestant Cathedral in Dublin. And the bastards turned on him and led him around like a dog, and they said, "Look, he's lost his mind." He was the greatest mind in the 18th century. He didn't lose it. He became a prisoner. That's what it really seems to be. They imprison you for thought crimes. And thought crime is a very terrible idea because anything can be a thought crime. You can be a Republican and if you're in a Democratic place, you're a criminal. If you're a Democrat, you're a criminal when the Republicans are in charge. If you are leftist, boy, you're *really* a criminal. And you're also a criminal to the revolution, you know, because they've got ideas and you might have a different one. (laughing) They say we'll be the first ones shot when they have a revolution (laughing) 'cause we've got our own ideas. So I did a book on torture and they've got drugs that can turn you into...they've got *everything*.

DP: In that book you talked about them using Prolixin on Irish political prisoners as a drug of torture.

KM: Well, yeah. That was their drug of choice to put on me, too. But this was what it was tried out on. It's supposed to be a cure for schizophrenia. Well, I guess it can't cure anything, but it sure can mix up your mind. And that is a *horrible* sensation. And it takes a lot of mental fortitude to fight it off. And it helps to drink coffee and eat vegetables. And you can't get any vegetables inside, so you can eat fruit. But fruit is very good. Oranges are good. You know, anything with a strong taste that will kind of assault your senses back to reality. And coffee is very good, which is why they don't permit it. And so we lived on weak tea in Ireland. And in Ireland, it was just politics, period. But, you know, they pretended it was psychiatric and stuff. And I arrived at this awful prison at St. Mary's at Inness. And I don't know who's got me, whether the Irish Republicans have got me (who are not what the Republicans are in the United States, but people who believe in a republic, which we are *supposed* to be, as well as a democracy). Or if the other side's got me, who are the Ulstermen, and I don't know what's going on. But I'm assaulted by the police. I've been examined by a psychiatrist. Patrick has raked me into his den because I dared to order a drink, and I never even drank it, either. I reached for it and Patrick grabbed my arm. And I'd

had to wait overnight for my car, because my camera was in it. I'm not going anywhere without my camera. And if I'd known they had a hotel next door, I would have been there overnight. But, I didn't look out that side. The views were blocked and there's always building over there. So I had no idea I could go and lie down and experience a nice bed and good sheets. I had plenty of money. It wasn't a problem. But I sat up all night, and then I got my car because I was a little spooky about the car I had, because there's all these, citizen band radios in Ireland at the time and people are getting popped off. Well, I didn't want to get popped off and especially in southern Ireland, which is supposed to be a free republic. But they were paranoid as the devil, because the English had them by the pound, and at that time they didn't have the money they've got now. They were kind of caught in an economic distress and everybody also thought that the Long Kesh guys were wrong and they'd killed people and all that stuff. But they were starving themselves to death to prove that they could go down for a cause, which takes a lot of courage. It takes a long time to die of hunger. I mean, in the real world it takes years, but when you're on a hunger strike, it takes two months. And you can't come back. You know, you get to the point where you lose your eyesight and you don't get it back even if you start eating. And then you just die. And ten of them did. So, this was just at the beginning of the hunger strike where there was a lot of, you know, "Oh, they're bad guys" and stuff, because they believed the English propaganda. They certainly do in America. The basis of our foreign policy is our Anglo-America alliance, which is a way to shut up the Irish, who are a very large, vocal ethnic minority here by now. And if we didn't tell them some story, they might be for the wrong people (laugh). So, I was just over there because I was over there anyway, and I'd been invited to speak to the Labor Party. And I made a peaceful speech about, you know, quoting Yeats at the end like you're supposed to do. And then they asked me—the paper— what do I think of the Irish hunger strikers? Well, I didn't know much about them, but I said I thought they had a lot of guts and great bravery and they were, after all, doing something very non-violent. They were starving themselves, not other people. And I had to find their behavior rather heroic. Oh, well, wow, wow...that was the wrong thing to say. So, then I was for the hunger strikers. Oh, I was bad. So, well, actually everybody kind of secretly agreed with me who could read and write, but I'd gone off and *said* it. So Patrick, chief of psychiatry, has watched me cross Ireland very carefully and he's in touch with the police the whole time and I'm being watched. So why not change my car? And by mistake I left the camera in the boot of the old car, so I had to wait until my camera came back, which it did the next morning 'cause that car came in. So, Patrick finds my behavior very suspicious. And then I ordered a drink in the bar, which you're really not supposed to do.

DP: Why?

KM: Because it means you're going to America. See, it's a bar for people departing. And we forgot the licensing hours 'cause we're in the bar. I mean, they're privileged and...'cause you're going to America, you can do it. Well, I wasn't going to America

that week and I shouldn't have been in the bar ordering a drink, but just for foolhardy. Now, the punishment for ordering a drink in the bar, if I'd had any, and I didn't, would have been fourteen pounds. Well, I had plenty of money. I could have paid it. But, the punishment for me was to go to St. Mary's in Inness, because I had a record as a psychiatric blah, blah, patient. And they knew *all* about my record. "When did you stop taking Lithium?" Well, this summer. What business is it of yours and how do you know I stopped taking it?" Well, they knew all about it, because the doctors had just been on vacation in Minnesota and they're in touch with the network. You see, it's an international network. So, they had me nailed. So at least I'm in a psychiatric place, but I've been in them before and, you know, I'd be better off in jail. 'Cause in jail I got some rights. In a psychiatric ward, don't have anything. And I don't know how long they're going to keep me. And I'm in a foreign country where I have no rights at all. My American citizenship doesn't even show up. And I wrote out...they said write out your attitude or something once, and I wrote out "I'm an American citizen. I'm being held against my will and I want the embassy to be contacted." Well, it wouldn't matter if they had contacted the embassy because Sullivan, he used to be in Iran and (laugh, laugh)...I was in Iran as a women's libber so...and he's now in Ireland. He's got my number. So, Gloria Steinem said that she saw a paper, from the ambassador to Iran saying she's a trouble maker. That means wipe her out. So I was lucky to get out of there alive. I was lucky to get out of Ireland alive. All because Darcy knew where I was. She had figured it out.

DP: So you were basically held there incommunicado...

KM: Oh, absolutely.

DP: That must have been an awfully isolating experience.

KM: Oh, yeah. And they came down from Dublin, 'cause they suspected I might be there after weeks...two weeks went by and I was rumored to have had an accident. Well, on the road, you know, but they would search the hospitals. They couldn't find me. I mean, it's a little tiny country. The phone book is just that big...in those days anyway. And I wasn't in a hospital, so they thought...hmm. They went down and they were told I wasn't there. So then, Darcy knew the system. Her mother was a psychiatrist. And Darcy is a very radical person. She was an actress and she was married to John Arden who's a playwright, an Englishman. She said, "I know where Kate is." And she went to the place, and they said no, I wasn't there. So she said, "I'm just going to check," and she walked into the women's ward. I said, "My God, how did you get here?" She said, "Shhhhh." (laughing) So they discovered her and threw her out and she said, "I'll get you out." I said, "I sure hope to God you do." So she got me out, because she'd go there and she'd find out. See, everybody else was put off by lies and hokum, but not Darcy. Darcy saved my life.

DP: So, how long were you there?

KM: I could have been there my whole life.

DP: Yeah.

KM: And my mother saying, "Oh, she's off in Ireland. She loves Ireland," and all that stuff. "And they're so good to her and the nuns," and all that. Well, the nuns didn't run the hospital. The psychiatrists did. And the nuns were there in the daytime but not at night. At night...oh, we had the druggies in. See drug companies tested people there. And when I got out I looked at the tower and I said, "What's that?" They said, "Oh, that's the powders. That's where they make the powders, Kate." I said, "What do you mean by the powders?" "Oh, haven't you been after taking the powders?" I said, "This is a drug company?" "Ah huh, and they're testing at night." I said, "How do you put up with that as a nurse?" She said, "Do I have a word to say about it? The men are doing it. The government is doing it. The nuns don't control this place anymore. It's a State place." So when they discovered how awful it was the other day, they closed it down. Well, it's always been awful and I'll tell you another thing, there's a place called Still Organ, in the middle of the country when you drive from Galway...ah, from Dublin to Galway and every time I went by, they gave me the creeps. And I said to somebody I was with once, "What's that?" "That's a mental hospital." They probably...you know, in all of Ireland they had one nuthouse (laugh). But now they got a lot because they got American psychiatry and they got drugs. And maybe they threw out the whole shenanigans because, you know, our founding fathers were only 1936. They were kind of smart. We are still a free republic.

DP: Are you a citizen of Ireland, too?

KM: No, I wish I were. I wish I were.

DP: You're not afraid to go back after what happened?

KM: Oh, I've been back a hundred times. They assigned a special CIA man to see if I had a bad feeling about it. And, you know, he picks me up in a bar and he says, "Oh, I know all the good terms." I say, "Oh, do you indeed." "And I just live down the road from you." "Well, I'm not going to your house tonight (laugh, laugh)." And it turns out his wife knows the lady who I stayed with, and he's the next door neighbor. But, he also is the chief of logistics for the United Nations Army. And he said, "I'm off to a hot gas war." I said, "What's that?" He said, "You Yankee Doodles started it," (laugh). And he was going to Somalia. You know, the UN has to police these places, but here's Bush doing it all by himself now. I mean, when you don't pay dues to a private club like the United Nations, how come you get to boss everybody around?

DP: I wonder that, too.

KM: Yeah, I do too.

DP: You were speaking of the UN. I know that over the summer that you were part of the meeting that happened with non-governmental organizations to work on developing a treaty for the rights of people with disabilities. Can you talk a little bit about your experience?

KM: Well, I went to the UN all by myself, with one other gal who decided she had to go back to work. The one day I got called on, I was horrified. But, I had to go up and represent a whole lot of psychiatric groups and I had to speak for the mad, as it were. And I've never been so scared in my whole life because I had to address eighteen nations of the most spoiled, conceited, smart people, too, in the world. And, I mean, I worried powerfully about my hairdo and other things that don't matter. But, I thought, God, do I look okay and stuff. Because it all came back, you know. And, I mean, the UN is a little intimidating and I seriously have got to address eighteen representatives and they're lolling in their chairs. It's five minutes to five. It's all over in fifteen minutes or something and I've got to make my case. So, I did. And they allowed as I had the right to represent...to be a non-governmental on behalf of this group. Then a year later...a year and a half later. up comes this thing...by this time Celia Brown, who had to be at work that day, is really on top of it and says, "Come this day. We're covering it this day, this day, this day." And I go and Celia's been there for two days and she's done a good job and now it's my turn. So, of course, I made an outrageous speech. I said, "You know, I'm crazy in the usual sense of the word. That is, I'm a crazy artist. And why not see this in a somewhat humorous light because, you know, after you deal with really terrible disabilities of the other people and my disability is that I've *been dis-abled* (laugh) which is different. I mean, you know, the Lord made me okay but I'm not halt or lame or anything else, but I've been *dis-abled*...entirely *dis-abled*. I can't even get a job. I'm a scholar. But I just got fired from New York University, because there were other people ahead of me or something." They went back to basics and stuff, but I had brought in the union, so I got punished. And I've been punished, kind of a long time by a lot of different people and it's getting kind of tedious. But I sure learned a lot, and it took the edge off my arrogance and stuff. So, I said, "But there's nothing wrong with my mind. But I've been disqualified from being a human being. And they do the same to people with disabilities, real disabilities, because they take their inheritance rights away in Africa, and so on and so on, but they treat them like they're just *idiots* in America." Do you know, the UN didn't even have wheelchairs?

DP: Yes, actually I did.

KM: I mean, isn't that crazy? The United Nations of the world doesn't have a wheelchair? So, I made a kind of outrageous speech and I said, "Let's be funny about it. After all, the common language, you know...crazy isn't a bad word. It's a funny word. It means you've misbehaved or you're behavior is inappropriate, but I know a hundred million inappropriate people and they aren't called crazy. So there must be a little

something else to it, you know.” The young are indulged in this country to a crazy degree and the affluent are always indulged. So what is wrong with being a rational being? Because I think it’s bad science. And it’s also to kill imagination and I’m a poet and a writer and I love imagination. I get a real kick out of it. And I love careful language. Like, you know, show me the proof I’m crazy and stuff. And otherwise just use that word in the usual sense of funny, humorous...

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

KM: But it’s important to maintain your sanity. To *insist* upon it, because I won in a court of law, which is very hard to do. And it makes you understand how really crooked these courts are, because the advocates have this funny game they play, called “whose turn is it to be the patsy?” And they’re all lawyers and one is the judge one time and one is the lawyer the next time and one is the crazy man the next time and the doctor...I mean, it’s just revolving doors. And all of them are ninety seconds long, because that’s how long most hearings are. Well this is...well, come on. I mean, how long did O.J. Simpson get? (laughing) I mean, you know, he really got to prove his case or whatever. So this is a mockery. These are kangaroo courts. They aren’t courts at all. And this is what we get.

DP: You talk a lot in your work about the problem with psychiatry being primarily its reliance on force and coercion.

KM: Oh, yeah...that’s the whole problem.

DP: But, on the other hand, even if it were voluntary, what do they offer that would be helpful to anybody?

KM: Well, I mean it’s a matter of *caveat emptor* maybe. If you want to be dumb enough to believe this and take this medicine, I can’t stop you. But, if you’d like to hear another opinion about it, I’ll tell you what I think of it. And let’s start with the drug companies. Because they’re giving away the free pills to the psychiatrist, who’s giving them to you until you’re hooked. So, this is all dirty pool. If you did this with illegal drugs, you’d be in the hoosegow tonight. But these are legal drugs, in fact, prescribed, proscribed. You have to take them or they won’t put you up at night. You know, if you don’t take your meds, you go back in the bin. So nothing could be less free than this. I mean, how free is it? You know, can you make an informed choice? Do you know the side effects of all this stuff? They won’t even tell you what it’s made out of. It’s made out of coal tar, usually, which nobody in their right mind would swallow. That’s what you make toothbrushes out of. So these are generally petroleum products and stuff like that. I mean, you crack one little...twist one little hydrocarbon and you’ve got an original drug. Who knows what it does to you (laughing). You want to try it? I think I’d rather try something I knew a little bit about. But they’ve got a new name for it every day, you know.

DP: You talked in “The Loony Bin Trip” about the first time that you went off Lithium. Did you go off abruptly? Did you just decide one day “I’m not taking it anymore?” Did you taper off?

KM: I went off abruptly.

DP: And how did that feel?

KM: I had been going off for a couple of weeks anyway. It felt *awful*, because you do go through withdrawal. I mean, it ceases to be in your body after twenty-four hours but the memory of it is in your bones and all the rest and it was very hard. And when I went off the next time, I was very careful and I took one less pill every three months, so, no side effects at all because it had been finally rinsed out of my body. But, yeah, but it didn’t kill me. It made me a little irritated with people, but then I’ve been awfully patient all along. So (laughing) a patient patient. The mistake I made was to tell people I was going off. And then the next time I went off, after Ireland, I just didn’t tell anybody and no one noticed anything wrong with my behavior. So, it’s all a self-fulfilling prophesy, what is observed. Now I had some bad side effects...I mean, I had a sore that bled on my arm...well, it didn’t bleed but it kind of discharged itself and that was probably Lithium that had been left over in my system and my sinews and muscles and stuff. And I still can’t sit really still for a concert, which I used to be able to do perfectly. But it’s very...after about twenty minutes I start going...and that’s ataxia, you know.

DP: And you’ve been off of that for how long?

KM: Oh, many, many years. Gee, fifteen, anyway.

DP: Do you still experience depression?

KM: Well, sure I do, because the City of New York was going to take my home away from me. Now, that will put you in a depression. But, then 9/11 happened and whatever you’re calling the World Trade Center thing, and New York is broke, so they don’t have the money to demolish my home. (Laugh) Yeah, well, because it has a story, and twelve young women died there. I didn’t know there was anything special about my loft building. I just thought it was a pretty good loft.

DP: Twelve young women died there?

KM: Well, when they started shaking my tree and saying get out of there and stuff, I realized well, the Bowery must be the new hot property. And they said, “Yes, it is. You’ve got to get out of there because you’re not paying market rent.” And I said, “Well, I don’t have to pay market rent. I’m an artist in residence. I’ve kept this

building standing for you yahoos in the City for, you know, thirty-five years now.” “Oh, you’ve got to get out now.” “Well, I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’ve got to get out.” And so we said it was a landmark because Michael told me it was a landmark. He lives in the building. And he said “It’s McGuirk’s Saloon.” And I said, “It’s what?” He said, “Women died here.” I said, “Tell me about it.” So, he told me, and I went and researched it all up, and they sure did die. They took carbolic acid, trying to tell New York something, two by two by two. These are youngsters. They’re child prostitutes who are held there against their will by McGuirk who runs the meanest whorehouse on the Bowery. And, you know, I have a very patrician friend who only five years ago walked into a house she was renting to someone and there were Bangladeshi women in chains. I mean, this happens all over London. I mean, there are places where some girl from some foreign country like the Philippines, very often, is a prisoner against her will and even kept in chains and the doors are locked. She doesn’t have papers. She doesn’t even know what country she’s in probably. And that’s what it is to be a woman. This is fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, in 1899. We’re just property.

DP: Still?

KM: Yeah. And we are getting more like property every day. The rudeness of men is astonishing and it has just come up because it’s a war time. A war time which nobody goes to and nobody even wants, but everybody feels more masculine—if they’re of the male persuasion—and it’s a very authoritarian time. Policemen are rude and they’re authority figures. If you don’t obey him, he’ll shoot you, period. It doesn’t help if you’re a property owner. I mean, it doesn’t matter if you’re rich or poor. You’re a woman. Period. You’re just dirt and they’re kind of reminding us, because American women got out of line a little bit. We invented this women’s stuff, which was our *only* contribution to the history of ideas altogether. I mean, the ideas of the founding fathers were all French and English ideas anyway.

DP: Do you feel your experience as a mental patient was held against you as a feminist and as a scholar?

KM: Oh, of course, always. They didn’t want me at the press conference.

DP: Last year and I think also before that in 1998, you were part of an international tribunal against psychiatry, which seemed like an interesting piece of theater...

KM: Oh, yeah. It *was* theater. We did it in the Volksbroneil (sic) which is where Brecht has performed his plays and it’s in East Germany which is poorer and more exciting in a lot of ways and stuff. And newly freed up at the time and stuff. And there are a lot of good museums over on that side, too. So, we performed it for two days and two nights and we got...we had the audience...we had six hundred people in that hall almost all the time. Well, it was May Day and, you know, the Irish...I mean, the

Germans get very political at that time, and they have a holiday so, why not be political because, you know, we're all students, intellectuals and all that stuff and over at the Rafishcout (sic) and we like to hang out and jeer or something and so performed it as theater. And I was in the nut box. And there were a couple of others in the nut box who were English speakers, but mostly they were German. And we did have to conclude that psychiatry had offended against human rights, because they use force and they won't let go of it either. And a very subtle Israeli said, "They have that term 'mental patient.' That in itself is an insult to human rights." And he proved it. And so, because, it means you don't have any rights, because you have substituted judgment. You know, you have to have to know the law to appreciate psychiatry's hold over people because if you don't know the law, you just think they're, you know, bullies or they're superstitious or something. No, they have police powers.

DP: Why do you think it's so hard for the majority of Americans...or even, actually, in my experience, even most progressives, to understand that what psychiatry does to people are human rights violations? I mean, somehow once psychiatry gets involved people are like..."Oh, it's a medical issue, we shouldn't get involved." And I can't understand that.

KM: They have, of course, criminalized medicine practically (laugh). It's all mixed up with drug companies and stuff and they have...I mean, psychiatry was probably one good branch of human knowledge when they studied the psyche, but they haven't done that for years. And psychiatry is just a form of social control. Period.

DP: But, I think that most Americans, if they think about it at all, assume that all those people are there being *helped*, and...

KM: Yeah, it's the helping profession.

DP: ... they don't know about the police powers. But I noticed even when you bring it up to people whose politics are in other ways progressive, this one kind of gets past them somehow.

KM: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's all in one generation, because the Milletts never believed in psychiatry and used to make jokes against psychiatrists. And that used to be the popular view, when I was a kid. Psychiatry was nonsense. Everybody knew it. And if you were dumb enough to go to one (laughing) you maybe deserved what you got. But, you know, they didn't put you away. You could just go to a psychiatrist or you could, still more fashionable, go to a psychotherapist and, you know, examine your belly button or your life history forever. It used to be a sign of a thinking person to be in analysis. And I'm a writer so I would never do it, because you don't give away your soul to anybody. You have a hard time holding onto it yourself and nobody tells your story because, you know, you got the gift of gab or something. Anyway, (laugh) you know, it's professional secrecy, so. But, people...other people don't tell their

stories and people don't exchange much, so at least it's a way of talking to someone. Not nowadays it isn't. Nowadays, you know, every therapist has a number, a secret number they call because they're protecting their license and they don't want you to off yourself. Well, I mean, as Camas said, "The central question of life is: why do we continue?" Given how absurd it is, well, now, it's a crime if you don't. And it always was. Those girls who attempted suicide down on the Bowery went to Bellevue and in Bellevue they were on the prison side.

DP: For attempting suicide?

KM: Ah huh. The State owns your body. Well, excuse me. I don't own anything? Even my own life? Even my own body? Come on. I mean, if I don't, you can tax me to death. You can drive me crazy, but I own my own life. And if I want to end it, it's my business. Don't put me in your psychiatric wing. Thanks a lot. But, you know, they cause so much death, because what is the natural reaction when told you have a hopeless mental illness? Well, I might as well shoot myself now 'cause I'm going to disintegrate (laughing). And that, you know, that diagnosis does you in and the humiliation of being there. I mean, the *indignity* you're subjected to. My God. "Now, we're ready for breakfast," Oh, what an awful way to talk to people. That bullying, cheerful...oh, God, I hate it.

DP: Like a kindergarten teacher?

KM: Yeah.

DP: Did you find that there was camaraderie on the wards when you were there?

KM: Yeah, when I was there in California, there was. And I thought, "This is something new." Because they supposedly didn't have drugs in the old days. Well, in fact they did have drugs. They had Benzene...I mean, make you sleep. What's it called? Not Benzene...um...

DP: I was going to say Benedril, but obviously that's not it either.

KM: (Laughing) No, but it was sleeping pills.

DP: Phenobarbital?

KM: Yeah, Phenobarbital. And I used to give that out every night, you know...boom, boom, boom, boom. "Well, give out the Phenobarbs. Now you give it to that one and that one and that one." "Well, what is it?" "Phenobarbital. Give it out." I said, "What's it do?" "It makes them sleep. It helps them sleep." I said, "Well given where they've got to sleep, maybe I should give them out." "Do you want it?" Oh, yeah, they wanted it. They were, you know, druggies. And so now they've got these

wonderful new psycho tropics, every week another one. It's the same stuff. Placebos. But not really a placebo, a big tranq.

DP: Yeah.

KM: A big tranq. Knock you right down big tranq. I mean, when I had Thorazine, I mean, I couldn't even think straight. I couldn't even go to the bathroom. I mean, everything went wrong. You know, if I went to the toilet it took me two hours. I fell asleep all the time. I'm still on the pot. My God and I'm asleep (laughing). And I got a little better at fighting them off, but, you know, they're giving them to old people. My aunt was 101 years old and not senile by any means. She used to teach second grade. She was the best second grade teacher you ever saw. She taught me how to read. Mother and Father were off in their own little quarrels and I wasn't learning how to read. Mother was reading me *Alice in Wonderland* at home, and I'd go to school and it's about Dick and Jane. I thought, "Contemptible garbage. No thanks." Well, it turns out you can't just *not* read. You know, they won't let you by with that. So they put me back, where I was bigger than the chair. That was humiliating. I thought this is going to be the rest of my life.

DP: You know, given the police powers that psychiatry has, and given the sense that it's getting to be more authoritarian in general, what hopes do you think there are for overcoming the system?

KM: It's a fascist system, you know. Let's face it. I'm sorry to say that. But when you give the family that kind of power, they can call the cops on their own kids. That means you're casting them to the dogs, and some families don't even *want* it. But then the school system insists. Now, Peter Breggin has fought an action against that, all by himself practically, and now other people are joining in and they say, "Well, maybe speed isn't so good for people who are already speedy," (laugh). Sure isn't. So you put a child on drugs. Oh, great idea isn't it? Ritalin.

DP: Do you think there's any hope for people to be able to defend against psychiatry?

KM: You see, look, it's a fascist system of social control. What's wonderful about it is that it's better than Nazism, because people *believe* in it. People always knew there was something fishy about blaming it on the Jews, you know. That's scapegoating and everybody really secretly knew...although they probably believe, 'cause it was in their interest. Well, it's gone a little further than that with psychiatry. It is, of course, in your interest to lock up your kids 'cause you can't handle them and they're adolescent and acting out and they are awful and so on but do you want to give them over to be crippled? 'Cause they'll never have a job. And their success stories are about nil. And NAMI is still yelling for more research funds 'cause they're also rooted in the drug companies. And these are really for the most part, really ugly parents who never should have had children to start with.

DP: And then when I meet them, I understand why their kids have problems.

KM: Oh, yeah. I mean, they're authoritarian. Not every one of them by any means. There are people who piously join thinking that they're going to save their kid. But you can't save your kid. I mean, you've given them over to the State. Now you want to save them? This was the dilemma of my big sister. She had given me over to the State and...people shouldn't major in psych, I don't think. Anyway, they do this in Russia, or they certainly used to. They're still doing it. But, you know, when people have schizophrenia because they are dissenters (laugh). I mean, that kind of tells you, you know, it's a real good disease for dissenters to have. (laugh). Now, the family does it here, and the State does it in Russia? And in China they're really practicing it a lot, because if you're a labor organizer, you end up in the bin. And if you still won't reform, you end up dead, and they're selling your parts for industry (laugh).

DP: So, you don't think we can escape from the psychiatric police state?

KM: No, you've got a therapeutic state now. And Bush loves it and believes in it and so on, 'cause he's too tight to pay for it.

DP: And so do the Democrats.

KM: Yeah...

DP: I think Democrats and Republicans both look it at the same way.

KM: Oh, yeah. And they withdrew because they found it too expensive. I mean, you know, forget human rights. But...that one who's married to Gore...

DP: Tipper.

KM: Well, Tipper isn't very bright. She's a typical Tri-Delt. And, ah....

DP: A typical what?

KM: Tri-Delt (Laugh) Delta, Delta, Delta. A "D" student all the way. And she just can't get the point. She just thinks that, you know, physical and mental should have parity. Well, yeah. But, let's talk about this *parity*. Who are you going to do...what are you going to do with the money given to all the psychiatrists? They are going to be the most powerful people in America. Doctors now have bit the dust. They do what their boss says. Well, do you think they won't do that to the shrink-o's? I mean, they're willing to sell their soul to the highest buyer right now. I know pill pushers who will see you for twenty minutes, fifteen minutes and charge \$100 bucks.

DP: It's nice work if you can get it.

KM: Yeah. I mean, think. He made \$300 an hour and he didn't have anybody in his front office either. That's \$300 bucks an hour and he's booked solid, 'cause he's in the Village and he doesn't ask questions. He's just a pill pusher. And, you know, psychiatrists never ask questions. They don't give a shit about therapy. I mean, at least therapy is the *talking cure*, you know, talk, talk, talk. But, you know, they're a sounding board, or at least you hear yourself making a fool of yourself. Bi-polar? It's all physical. Well, show me where it's physical? Well, that's what the medical model will get you.

DP: Well, thanks very much. I appreciate it.

KM: Oh, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW