

Audio File ID: II2014_04

Interviewee: Deborah Shaffer

Interviewer: Kathryn Darnall

Interview Date: 2014-02-21

Duration: 01:31:54

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

Interviewer: I am here with documentary filmmaker Deborah Shaffer, and to start out, would you go ahead and just say your name, the date, your age, and your occupation?

Deborah Shaffer: Deborah Shaffer. I'm an independent filmmaker. The date is February 21, 19 -- [laughing] we're back in the 20th century at this conference -- 2014, and I'm 65.

Interviewer: Okay, Wonderful, you are an independent filmmaker, but how did that career begin for you? How did you begin as a documentary filmmaker?

Deborah Shaffer: Okay. I did not grow up intending to become a documentary filmmaker. I think that perhaps there are young people today who grow up with the idea that they could become a documentary filmmaker. I never heard of a documentary filmmaker or an independent filmmaker for that matter. I grew up in the '50s in commercial film, and when I was in college, somebody introduced me to the films of an organization called Newsreel; it was a filmmaking collective based in New York City initially. It spread out over the United States, and they were making films about the Vietnam War and other social movements of the time, and I was becoming, as a high school student, actually increasingly disturbed about what was going on in Vietnam.

Deborah Shaffer: You know, the U.S. involvement was reaching its peak levels and the anti-war movement was really heating up and I was becoming extremely interested in -- I was developing feelings against the war and becoming interested in the anti-war movement, and when somebody introduced me to these films accidentally, I was blown away. I'd never seen anything like them. They were shows. One afternoon, at somebody's home in Darien, Connecticut, that collection of short, 10-minute what would be called the Agitprop films, just very simple, made of stills, black-and-white stills, and music, and they were revolutionary in the sense -- I had just never seen anything like it, and they really excited me.

Deborah Shaffer: But it was some time before I went to college and I did get involved in the anti-war movement, and I went to a fairly small conservative women's college in New England and was increasingly frustrated there. I used to do an anti-war vigil every week on the town green, I was at Mount Holyoke College, and about eight of us would do this vigil every week with our anti-war signs, and I got tired of feeling very isolated. I knew people who were at these big universities where there were really -- people were taking over the whole campus and there was a strike at Columbia and there were big demonstrations at Cornell, and at Harvard, and everywhere else, and I wanted to be part of it. I left Mount Holyoke and went to the University of Michigan with the express purpose of joining SDS and the anti-war movement.

Deborah Shaffer: I had continued to know about Newsreel. I had done a summer internship. I was teaching, actually, and somebody from Newsreel had come and we'd shown Newsreel films on campus to these high school students. It was kind of a big deal. Anyway, there were Newsreel -- There were

people from the organization, from the Newsreel organization. were in Detroit making a film, and I ended up forming an Ann Arbor chapter, and so my first introduction to documentary was using it for political purposes, it wasn't making them. I didn't still dream of making them, but we formed this little group in Ann Arbor, and we got a collection of the films and all moved into a collective house together, and we had a couple of motorcycles and a Volkswagen van, and we used to go out and show the films every night. We had a big box on the back of a motorcycle we could put a projector in, and we used to take a projector, and reels, and extension cords, and the films about the war or about the Young Lords -- the Young Lords film wasn't done yet, but films about the Black Panther Party in California or Richmond Oil Striker, the struggle over people's park in Berkeley. We would show the films every night in dormitories, union meetings, people's churches, classrooms, wherever we could get a group of people together. We did them outdoors, on sheets against buildings.

Deborah Shaffer: I really quickly got introduced to the power of film as an organizing tool and as a way to get discussions going. You didn't have to do anything, and I was very shy. I didn't really want myself to be a speechmaker or a leader, and I discovered really quickly I could thread the projector and show a film and people would do the discussion themselves. They would just happen. It was a very exciting time, and somewhere in there, I had to learn how to repair the prints because they started to wear out, so somebody taught me at a splice actually with tape, and I remember being really excited when I could do that. Eventually, I finished school and came to New York where the Newsreel headquarters were. I gravitated towards the office there. I didn't really know people in New York. I didn't know what I was going to do. It wasn't as hard then as it is now to find a job as a young college graduate, but it was difficult.

Deborah Shaffer: I was having a really hard time making my way. Newsreel said, "We're not taking new members right now." But I kept going anyway. I just kept going by the office, and I knew how to clean the prints at that point, so I'd make myself useful cleaning and splicing the damaged prints, and they finally took pity on me, I think, and said, "Okay, you can join. You're already a member because you were in Ann Arbor, so you can stay." Then in New York, there were a lot of changes happening internally in the organization. It was the early days of the women's movement, and the women at that point, really, for the most part, weren't making films and didn't have film-making skills. The group had been founded by mostly men who had either camera skills or editing skills. There was one woman who was already an experienced editor, who was very talented, but in general, it was the men who did the work, and the women went to the meetings, and were the girlfriends, and made coffee, and did the bookkeeping, and shipping the films around and stuff.

Deborah Shaffer: But at the time I joined, there was pressure for the women to be taught skills, and in fact, the men were sometimes not allowed. They could come on a shoot, but they had to just be there to teach the women how to do things, so it was, in a way, the best film school, I think, I could have gone to. I just remember going to a demonstration in New York City, and at some point, I just was going to go with the group, and at some point, somebody handed me the camera and said, "Here. It's your turn." I said, "What?" You know the way you look here and you point the camera this way, and that's how I learned, and sound recording the same way and film editing. It was very hands-on, it was very immersive, it was very democratic, and it was wonderful, and I loved the work. I discovered that I loved not only the politics, but I loved the actual craft. I loved the hands-on. I hadn't really been an art student or anything, I mean, I didn't ever think my life was going to go that way, but I really loved the craft of film-making and the challenge of telling a story, putting the story together on film.

Deborah Shaffer: I stayed in that organization for about a year and a half in New York, until internal upheavals within the group forced --The group kept splitting into more and more factions and splinter groups and whatever, and I finally left the group, and then I had to make a living, and I did various things. I worked in the first legal abortion clinic in New York City as a counselor. A bunch of us from Newsreel ended up somehow getting these jobs which was fascinating education for us and a fascinating time to be doing that work, but I also slowly started getting jobs as an assistant editor and was able to use the skills I had learned to see the dailies of other people's films, and I was good at it, and one thing led to another, and I ended up becoming a film editor. On the one hand, that's how I earned my living for many years in New York. I ended up, just to jump over a lot of stuff, I did independent films, but I worked at a fair amount for CBS television in the '80s. In fact, I did films about Central America, edited films about Guatemala, and a sort of survey film about Central America, among other things.

Interviewer: Is that how your interest in Latin American films started?

Deborah Shaffer: No the interest in Latin America had already started. Now I can go back to that, that it started in 'the 70s because at the same time as I was working as an editor, I also started making my own films, started making films independently. I started at the bottom of the ladder as a filmmaker and at the top, at the same time. I started as an assistant with other women from Newsreel. We formed, actually, I think, what was possibly the first women's production company in New York called Pandora Films. We made a sex education film for teenagers which came -- Do you want me to get closer? Do you want me to lean closer? I don't mind.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Deborah Shaffer: We made a sex education film for teenagers, which came directly out of the work I mentioned I had done in the abortion clinic. Just what I've learned about where young people's minds were at in terms of [inaudible 00:09:58] I was just telling my nephews this story the other day, and they couldn't believe me. They don't believe me. It was only when I was in college that the birth control pills became available, when I was partway through college. It's hard to remember what it was like. That's for another interview, for another archive, I guess because that's not Central America, but anyway, independent filmmaking, I made this sex education film. My partners and I bought a Steenbeck, a flatbed editing table, and I was living in a loft with other people. We were living collectively and we had an editing room and it got rented out to other people.

Deborah Shaffer: One of the projects it got rented out to, I think this was my first experience with Latin America. I'm trying to remember, but I think one of the first time somebody else referred some people to my editing room who were making a film about Chile that was called "Avenue of the Americas." "Avenue of the Americas" was a documentary about the Allende years in Chile. The scriptwriter of the film had been Charles Horman who was one of the two Americans who was killed in the national stadium in Chile. I didn't know that much about Latin America at the time. The Vietnam War movement had pretty much died down. The war was over. We're now in '76, so the war ended in '74, and I think a lot of us who were very active in the anti-war movement were a little bit bereft. We were floating around not really knowing what to do with ourselves politically.

Deborah Shaffer: I also wasn't really active in the women's movement at the time. That was also driven by, there was a lot of factionalism. The producer and the director who had been working with Charlie who had rented my editing room in '76, they were just renting my editing room, but I started assisting them in the editing and started learning a little Spanish. Mostly learned to swear because they fought

with each other a lot. I learned to swear. One was Peruvian, one was American. I learned sound recording also, is one of the skills I learned, and they asked me to take sound for an interview they were going to film for the film, and it was an interview with Joyce Horman. It was one of those apocryphal days. We went up to the apartment where she was living on the Upper East Side of New York. We interviewed her and we interviewed her in-laws, Ed Horman. Well, we didn't interview Elizabeth Horman, the mother, Charlie's mother, but we interviewed his dad, Ed Horman, who was the figure who was played by Jack Lemmon in the movie "Missing."

Deborah Shaffer: By the end of the interview with Joyce, she basically told us the story that forms the narrative of "Missing," which is the story of how Charlie had gone to Vina del Mar, and then they came back during the coup, and he was basically taken from their home and disappeared within the national stadium and ultimately killed in Chile. But at the end of the interview, we were all in tears. Joyce was in tears. I was in tears. The producer, the camera man, the director. Everybody was just -- It was such a moving story that she told us. It cemented -- or started -- my real commitment to being interested in taking learning Spanish more seriously, just being interested in what was going on in Latin America. I stayed with that project till the film was finished. Then I was known as an editor who spoke Spanish. So when other people came through town, I assisted on it. I didn't really speak Spanish yet, but I could fake it kind of.

Deborah Shaffer: I edited a film about Puerto Rico called "Puerto Rico: Paradise Invaded." It was made by a Brazilian director who was living in New York, who had been in Chile. I worked and assisted on a Bolivian film. There were a number of projects, and then I guess that led probably fairly in a fairly straight line to my doing what was my first film about Central America, probably was "Nicaragua: Report from the Front." Let me think. Yeah, in '79, I did a film about the U.S. labor movement called "The Wobblies."

Deborah Shaffer: That was just another strand of my political interest was American political history because, as I referred to the anti-war movement kind of dying out, I think a lot of us are casting about for what to do next, looked back to what had been the history, what had been the historical movements in the United States. We started looking at the history of the labor movement, the Communist Party, the other left-wing activist movements in the United States. That was the period when there were a lot of historical documentaries produced about the veterans of the Spanish Civil War and the various labor movements. I made a film called "The Wobblies" about the IWW. That was my first feature documentary actually. That was released in '79. Then some friends approached me about helping them. They had filmed in the contra camps in Honduras in, let me see -- I have to take a second to remember which film was first.

Deborah Shaffer: Actually, probably the first thing that I did, no, was editing. At a film festival with "The Wobblies" in Berlin, I'd met some filmmakers from Central America who were producing a film about El Salvador called "El Pueblo Vencera" that was being made by a group of Salvadorans, and they needed help finishing the editing of that film in order to get it ready for a film festival in Havana in December. They invited me to Costa Rica to help with the editing. And I went to Costa Rica in November of 1980 and helped with the editing of that film.

Deborah Shaffer: Then right after I left Costa Rica to go back to New York and the filmmakers left to go to Havana with the finished film, the leaders of the FMLN were killed in El Salvador. That was a huge -- It was a pretty huge deal, and a friend of mine in New York, Glenn Silber, who had made a film called "War At Home" about the anti-war movement in Madison was trying to raise money to do a film about the

growing U.S. involvement in El Salvador. He was trying unsuccessfully to raise money. But a month later, or a few weeks later, the nuns were killed in El Salvador, the four American nuns were killed.

Deborah Shaffer: At that point, PVS gave him money to do a documentary about what was going on in El Salvador with the proviso that we had to have the film on the air then by January 19, which was the night before Reagan's inauguration. In 19 -- I guess he was inaugurated in '81, he was elected in '80. The nuns were killed December 4, we had little over a month to do a documentary, which we did. I mean, I didn't go to El Salvador with the crew, the crew went off to El Salvador. But I remember Christmas day that year, I was at the editing table syncing dailies that they had smuggled back to New York with a soccer coach who'd gone to coach a soccer game in El Salvador, had agreed to bring back some of the films so I could start working on it.

Interviewer: I mean, it's Christmas Day, and it's 20 days after four American nuns have been killed, and you're looking through and syncing these dailies so the daily film reels. How does it feel to look through that material?

Deborah Shaffer: It was exciting. I'm sure my parents were upset with that. I didn't go home for Christmas. I mean, I must have gone home later. I can't remember exactly what happened that day, but I know I was at the editing table on Christmas day. I was worried for my colleagues who were in Salvador filming. It was pretty scary for them. They interviewed General -- I can't remember his name. I'll have to look it up. But they interviewed one of the generals who was clearly at the top of the chain of command. It was always presumed, is still presumed, that the nuns wouldn't have been killed if it hadn't gone all the way up the chain of command, just kill four Americans. Although, in the end, I think they did punish some low-level soldiers, left it at that, and that only with a great deal -- after a great deal of pressure from the American Embassy. I was scared for my crew, for my colleagues, and they were scared. It was a pretty terrifying thing, I think, for them to be in El Salvador.

Deborah Shaffer: There were plenty of other journalists there, and there were rules about how to be careful, and where you could go, and what you can do. But because I was the editor, I didn't end up traveling as much. I didn't travel to Salvador. Certainly that, I didn't at that time or later. It was very exciting to be part of the film. We worked 24 hours a day, we had two crews going with -- We rented at least, I think, two other Steenbecks possibly. We were in -- My house became like a little factory to get the film done, and we were having dinner at midnight every night, all of us and then the night shift would start editing. I was the day shift, so I had go to bed while the next crew took over. But we got the film on the air, we got the film on the air January 19. It was called, "El Salvador: Another Vietnam?"

Deborah Shaffer: Then we proceeded to start on a version that we were going to release on film. That was just sort of the TV version, and we finished it in such a way that we didn't actually cut the negatives. We developed a very complicated technical way to go from the work print, new work print so our negatives were untouched. Then we said about spending the next nine months cutting a film called "El Salvador: Another Vietnam" without the question mark, which was a long documentary about the war, and the FMLN, and the history of what had gone on there. That film was nominated for an Academy Award, must have been released later in '81, so we were nominated in '82. We went to the Academy Awards with that film, it didn't win.

Deborah Shaffer: Then I was really just hooked on the Central America trajectory. I had now edited three films really, plus we did a fourth film out of the same material for "El Salvador: Another Vietnam" called "Seeds of Liberty," which was really about the nuns. It was for the Mary Knowles, a commission

film for the Mary Knowles out of the same material. I'd worked on four films about El Salvador, and then I was approached by the people from Skylight pictures, who, at the time, it was mostly -- the people I was approached by were Pam Yates and Thomas Sigel, who were friends of mine, who had been filming. They were working at the time on their film about Guatemala, "When the Mountains Tremble," but they had been filming along the border in Honduras, and they had filmed the first footage of the contra camps in Honduras.

Deborah Shaffer: It was at a time when Reagan was still not only denying that the United States was supporting the contra, he was saying there weren't any such thing in the Congress. The very first footage that was shown on American television was shot by Pam and Tom, and was footage that they sold to CBS from their very dangerous trip along the Honduras border and filming in the contra camps. But they asked me to come on board and help them do a film out of that material which was called "Nicaragua: Report From the Front," which was released probably, I'm not sure, probably in '81. I became the co-director of that film and editor, and while I was finishing that film, I had heard of Charlie Clements.

Deborah Shaffer: I heard that there was this American doctor who was working in El Salvador. I think the year he was working there was '82. There was an organization called Medical Aid to El Salvador that was trying to raise money to send medical supplies to Salvador, and they had some film footage of Charlie that they were showing around in people's living rooms and things like that. I hadn't seen the footage, but I'd heard about him, I knew that there was this guy. I think a New York Times Reporter had written about him and I went to the Producer at CBS, I mentioned before that I had edited at CBS a film, one about Guatemala and one called "Central America in Revolt," and I went to the producer there, I said, "This is a great story. Potentially, there's this American guy who's worked, a doctor, who was working in El Salvador behind, in the war zone, and it could be potentially a really great film."

Deborah Shaffer: I'll never forget the producer looked at me and said, "Oh, I don't want to be typecast." He wasn't interested in doing more Central America. But it stuck in my mind, this potential story, and then a guy named David Goodman contacted me. David worked with the American Friends Service Committee and I was editing, I was in the throes of editing "Report from the Front." I was really busy and David, who I didn't really know but I had spoken to on the phone once, I'd given him advice, he had made his first film and somebody had hooked us up, and I'd given him phone advice about distribution or something. He called me and he said, "I'm coming to New York, could we have a coffee? Can I meet with you?" I said, "I'm really too busy. I'm finishing this film. I'm editing around the clock. I'm sorry." He said, "Well, it's about a film about Charlie Clements" I said, "I have time for coffee."

Deborah Shaffer: He came to New York and Charlie was, at that time, back in the United States, on it starting, he's speaking to, and he was working with the American Friends Service Committee, and David was working for the American Friends Service Committee. Charlie had agreed to let the service committee do a film about him. A lot of people apparently had approached him about doing a film and he didn't -- It's difficult to know who to trust. He'd given the AFSC permission to do the film, and David called me saying, "Look, I'd like to do this film, but I'm not that experienced. I've only made one film, would you work with me?" I said, "Yes," without knowing David, without meeting Charlie, without knowing much more about it. I knew it was a great story, and I said, "Yes, I'll do it."

Deborah Shaffer: Very shortly thereafter we met with Charlie, I think the first time we met was at my home. I have a vision of him sitting around the kitchen table and Charlie agreed to do the film with us under the auspices of the American Friends Service Committee. The most exciting news out of that meeting was that there was footage of him in El Salvador. It would have been very difficult to do the film

if there hadn't been any material. He had been in El Salvador for a year, but he was back in the U.S. talking about his experiences. It's hard to do film if you don't have anything to show. He said that people had filmed him in El Salvador and that he had, when he gave permission to be filmed, the deal was that the footage had to be made available to whoever would need it. I knew we would be able to get access to this footage.

Deborah Shaffer: I think there were two different crews. There were -- there was a guy named Don North who had been a camera man for one of the networks. He was sort of a string-on cameraman. He'd been in Vietnam and he had gone to El Salvador on his own nickel with a Bolex camera, a wind-up 16 millimeter camera. He had tramped around in the region of Guazapa, which is where Charlie was working. He had not filmed Charlie, he had missed Charlie, but he had filmed in the clinics where Charlie worked, and he had filmed in the schools where the kids were, had to jump into bomb shelters when the planes came over to bomb them. He filmed operations in these clinics, and he had really important footage. At one point, he himself got caught in a raid. They were about to be bombed and he had to bury his footage in Salvador, his 16 millimeter camera, and he had to bury them in the mountains somewhere in -- underground -- and somehow later recovered them. I don't know if he went back for them or somebody dug them up for him. Anyway, he finally got his footage. We had access to his footage.

Deborah Shaffer: There was a camera man named John Chapman, who since died, who filmed for a film called -- There was a film called "In The Name of the People," which was a film about -- a documentary about El Salvador. That was also nominated for an Academy Award in another year. But in their filming, they'd also filmed in the whole Guazapa region, and I knew that he had come across Charlie and had filmed Charlie. They went in together. He had filmed Charlie walking into El Salvador with his backpack. John had died, and his footage, his materials were, some, in a laboratory in Richmond, California. He hadn't paid his lab bill. They had to pay his lab bill to get the footage out, and some of the footage was in a trunk in his sister's garage in Santa Barbara. I went and stayed with his sister in Santa Barbara and dug through his trunk and got, found his footage of Charlie between -- I don't remember what was in them. Some was in a lab and some was with the sister. I'm digressing, you want to put me back on it. You can put me back on track.

Interviewer: What I'm curious about is, see, you have this archival footage from El Salvador showing Dr. Clements, and then you conducted a series of interviews with him and followed him on a speaking tour. You really have the perspective of seeing what kind of a scholarly and a student community are feeling, and seeing, and experiencing when they witness Dr. Clements giving his lectures. Was there anything that surprised you?

Deborah Shaffer: There's always a challenge, surprisingly enough. I think the film turned out to be a huge challenge. Charlie was a very compelling speaker in-person, and students and audiences -- AFSC set up the speaking tour, and he spoke to the Quaker groups, and peace groups, and college, and medical schools. People were electrified by his -- they would get involved with medical aid to El Salvador or set up their own programs. But he was actually a little stiff on film, he was very straight arrow, he had been a military guy, and he wouldn't show his emotions, either as speaking or in the interviews. It was very frustrating for us as filmmakers because we need some emotion in a movie, you need, even in a documentary, my feeling has always been still, they're still personal films. They're still character-driven. You need to laugh, you need to cry, you need to feel something, and it was -- On film, Charlie didn't translate that well. We had the archive footage, we had the speaking to, we had the information, but we didn't have much emotion.

Deborah Shaffer: This is going to be a long story, you want me to go? Pam and Tom were on an assignment for Frontline out of Boston, and they were going to El Salvador and they were going to be filming. On their day off, we decided that they would go to a refugee camp in San Salvador, in the capital. Somehow, we knew that there were people in this refugee camp who had been patients of Charlie Clements. Maybe we just knew that there were people from the region, of Guazapa, who had been forced out of the mountain and they were now in refugee camps in Salvador.

Deborah Shaffer: Pam and Tom went to this refugee camp looking for people who had known Charlie, and they found these women who talked about what a great doctor he'd been for them, and how he'd taken care of various health issues, and saved the kids, and they talked about being bombed, and very wonderful interviews, and at the end, Pam and Tom asked them, "Do you have any message for Charlie?" Again, it was almost Christmas for some reason. They said they wish Charlie all the best with his family, but he should come back, they really needed him in El Salvador. It was very moving stuff. It was a beautiful interview, beautifully shot. We decided we would show this material to Charlie, and that would be how we would get him to emote, but he would, of course, not be able to help himself once he saw this material, but it didn't work.

Deborah Shaffer: We put it on the Steenbeck, and we showed it to Charlie and there's a very awkward scene in the movie where we interviewed Charlie at the Steenbeck. It looks kind of odd because, "What are you doing at this Steenbeck?" but being the military guy he was, he swallowed hard, and watched the footage, and didn't get too emotional. Then we hit on the tactic of having him read from his diary, which is what made the film. It's what was the turnaround in terms of film-making and pulling the film together. The very last thing we shot for that film was we highlighted selections from his diary and set him up and had him read from the diary. That worked, that gave us the little spin we needed to make the film work as a film, as an emotional experience as well as tell the story.

Deborah Shaffer: The combination of Charlie reading in the archives, in the interviews with him, and the interviews with the women and other archives we had found from El Salvador, that's what we made the film out of, and I think it won the Academy Award. I think we released it in '84. We made it in '83. It was released in '84. It was the '85 Academy Awards, which we won in '86. It just keeps rolling year by year. That film was on public television. We got support from public television for it. It was seen by millions and millions of people. That film probably had the best distribution of almost any of my films, and there's a wonderful story. Some -- A few years later, I don't remember now how many years later, I was at a party on the third floor in the building I lived in, there was an artist, and she was having a party.

Deborah Shaffer: I think she was seeing this guy, but anyway, I started talking with this guy who was telling me he had just been in Vietnam. He was doing facial reconstruction surgery in Vietnam. Kids had been damaged both by cancer and by Agent Orange. I said, "Well, how did you get into this line of work? I mean it's fascinating." He said, "I saw this documentary when I was in college, when I was in medical school," he said, "I saw this documentary about this doctor who went to El Salvador." He said, "It just turned me around." I said, "Well, I made that documentary." He said "You did not." He thought I was totally making it up, and I dragged him upstairs to my editing room to show him the outtakes, and said, "I made that documentary." He's still, that guy, to this day is still doing facial reconstruction work around the world.

Interviewer: It sounds like with that far reach that it really -- We had a Q& A after a screening with your film yesterday, and you had mentioned that your films are really made for an American audience to put

a face on some of these revolutions. Do you feel like you've been successful in particular with "Witness to War"?

Deborah Shaffer: Absolutely. That was really the idea. There wasn't a good way to talk about foreign policy. There were many ways to talk about foreign policy in El Salvador, but we had this all-American guy who could be our guide through it. For me, it was a very personal film because Charlie is about my age, and he had been on the other side in the Vietnam War. We talked about my formation as an anti-war filmmaker. He was a soldier. He was fighting the war in Vietnam. Doing the film about him just went full circle with my own -- it was a personal film for me, it went full circle with my own political development and his journey from his -- We used to refer to the film as "An Odyssey of conscience," which he had from being an Air Force, as he says in the film -- or his friend says -- his Air Force buddy says he went from flying the planes to being bombed by planes he used to fly.

Deborah Shaffer: He was a pacifist civilian in El Salvador. He wasn't a combatant, but yeah, especially because he was credible and relatable. You could relate to him. Yes, that continued to inform my filmmaking and that led directly to the film about Nicaragua came right after. It's a different story because he's Nicaraguan, not American, so it wasn't exactly the same built-in, and it wasn't the same built-in identification process, but Omar Cabezas seemed to me like a really good -- He was such a poet, he was such a beautiful writer and speaker that he seemed -- But all the Nicaraguans are -- I'd forgotten about that till we saw the film yesterday again and it's a country of poets and people who are illiterate, in Nicaragua, people who can't read, speak poetry. They speak in -- It's just amazing, beautiful. They have an incredibly rich oral tradition, spoken language tradition, going back to the days of Ruben Dario. I loved hearing the Nicaraguans talk again yesterday. I haven't seen the film in a while.

Interviewer: Yeah, so, how did it feel? Is there anything that you saw that surprised you or anything that, looking back, you're like, "I thought we put that scene in there," or, "I thought we cut that out," or?

Deborah Shaffer: It's always a little scary to go back and see old works, like, "Is there going to be a cringe factor?" There actually was not, with one exception. I have to say I thought the film was very well done. I look at a lot of films, I have to judge a lot of films, I vote, I'm in a lot of panels, and juries, and the Academy and I watch hundreds of documentaries every year. There were 150 documentaries qualified for the Academy Awards this year, and I watched most of them. It's really -- I see a lot of films. I think I'm a pretty good judge, and the best news is that I thought that "Fire from the Mountain" really holds up as a story. It's definitely dated. It looks dated. It's shot at 16 millimeters, so it's a square four by three formats, so everybody now is used to a more horizontal format, 16:9 format, and it used to be in the early days of video, we thought 16-millimeter film looked much better and that video looked very harsh, and cold, and flat.

Deborah Shaffer: Of course, now I think we've gotten all so used to video. That video has improved so much that now 16-millimeter film looks fuzzy and old. But I actually think it looks very beautiful. It's got this nice softness to it that video doesn't have. I thought the film held up quite well in terms of structure, storytelling, editing. I think because we know so much what's happened in history, the ending was the only thing that was a little cringe really to me and there were too many optimistic going into the settings, some future-looking endings, even for the time it had been released. This time, watching and I thought, you know, "There's probably about three statements there that -- There's probably two too many at the end of the film in terms of just summing it up." But that was really the only thing. I thought the ending dragged out a bit, I was gratified to see it. It's always a wonderful feeling to go back and see your earlier work and think, "Wow, I really did that. How did I do that?"

Interviewer: It actually blends into my next question, which is, you've traveled to Nicaragua and you were interviewing Omar and shooting this film at a time when the U.S. is still intervening. Did you feel well received? Did you have any struggles?

Deborah Shaffer: Well, it's interesting. The Nicaraguan government had done a huge campaign around, "It's not the American people, it's the American government." We heard that everywhere we went. I think it's even in the film, there's a carpenter who speaks -- He's not old in the film, his name is Jose Antonio. I actually went back and saw him two years ago. Now he's older. But he says, "We know its your government. We know it's not the American people. Carry this message to the American people: we know its your bad government that's doing these things." In terms of the people of Nicaragua, we never had anything but enthusiastic love and acceptance. The people around the world, they love America, they love baseball, and American food, and American culture, and American t-shirts. Nicaragua was a huge baseball country. We were super well received everywhere.

Deborah Shaffer: The contra war did not really come to Managua that much, it didn't come that far south. We filmed in the north, we filmed in Esteli. Things were pretty much okay around Esteli when we filmed there. We went farther north to the coffee plantation, and that was the only time that we were in an area where there could potentially be contra activity, and I didn't realize until we were getting closer. They stopped the cars, and Omar was with us, and we had to have an armed escort, and there was somebody in our car who was armed, and I was like, "Oh, I guess this could be serious." Nothing happened. We did not run into any trouble, but we did have to be prepared. There had been ambushes in the area and surprise attacks and things like that. Fortunately, nothing happened. It's a little bit ironic, I got known as a filmmaker essentially. I made these films about these wars in Central America, but the fact is I was safe most of the time.

Deborah Shaffer: The film about El Salvador is a "Witness to War," I never left the United States to make that film. My mother was hysterical, of course, when I was going to Managua to make "Fire From the Mountain," and I kept saying, "But mom, I live in Manhattan. Managua is certainly as safe as Manhattan." It was a pretty rough time in New York City at the time, so I never felt terribly. Except that one time when something could have happened and nothing did, I didn't really feel in danger. Certainly there are other filmmakers, Pam Yates, who I mentioned before, who did "When the Mountains Tremble," she and her partner at the time, Tom, were in very, very dangerous situations. Often, they traveled with the guerillas in Guatemala, they traveled with the army in Guatemala. But that was not me. I was not Miss Guerilla Filmmaker.

Interviewer: Looking back on that experience in Managua and even traveling around, do you think that those experiences have changed you, or how have they changed you? Did you feel like a different person when you came back, and were editing this film, and could look and go, "I've been there"?

Deborah Shaffer: It's funny. I remember feeling -- Actually, when I came back, I had a hard time adjusting because I'd spent like six weeks there or something when I was filming. I had a hard time adjusting to New York when I came back. I got lost on the subway one of the first days I was back, which is something I never do. But I was so overwhelmed by, quote, "Civilization." By subways, and stores, and material things, and the hustle and bustle. It was much more primitive, at that time, especially, it was a much more basic existence in Managua. Electricity was rationed, the lights were turned off at certain hours, you could only have water every other day, we had cold showers the whole time we were there pretty much. I guess I could say it made me hardy, but I think I was hardy to start with or I wouldn't have

done that. My family used to go camping when I was little. Whatever, I have a cabin in the woods that's off the grid. That stuff doesn't faze me too much. I guess it's not everybody's cup of tea. I guess I could say it made me confident, but I think I was confident going into it in those ways. You have to be. You can't be a documentary filmmaker and be fussy or prissy about your accommodations.

Interviewer: I think, being a documentary filmmaker, you're spending a lot of time witnessing, and taking in, and seeing these images, and hearing these interviews. How does it feel to hold all of those stories?

Deborah Shaffer: That can be really hard, I remember especially, for instance, an example from El Salvador and other, Vietnam. We had a lot of scenes in the film, archive material, people who had been killed. Some of it was pretty gory, and there's always, "How much do you show?" But I used to think that it would get easier to look at that like as it. Because when you edit, you look at things over and over and over. I thought, "Well, it'll just get easier. I'll get used to looking at it." The opposite happened, it got worse. It was so upsetting to look at these battered bodies or partially skeletonized or hacked up body part. Whatever, it was bloody and gory, and it became more and more upsetting to look at it. It hurt my eyes, I'd cover my eyes and edit without looking fully at the image. Actually at the time I started on the Chile film, I had nightmares, I had terrible nightmares. Hearing people's stories of the coup in Chile, I'd never had concentration camp nightmares before, but I did at the time. Definitely, I think it has a huge effect. I was only minorly exposed personally to any danger or oppression or anything like that, but I think it has a profound effect. Profoundly upsetting and it's also part of what makes it worth keeping going with it because it's important to get the word out. Because ultimately, my goal is to change the policy, have some effect on what was going on.

Interviewer: Do you think that especially given that you've been nominated, *Dance Of Hope and Fire From the Mountain* were both nominated at Sundance, and then *Witness to War*, as you mentioned, won an Academy Award. Do you think that those accolades have helped both the visibility of the film, and then in making some social changes in the US?

Deborah Shaffer: I wish I could say I thought that they had. Hopefully they have had an effect. If people used to say, "Oh, documentaries, they don't reach very many people compared to feature films. You're much better off making fiction films." I pretty early on said, "It's not how many people you reach, it's what happens to the ones you do reach." I told this dramatic story of the doctor who after seeing *Witness To War*, devoted part of his life to doing facial reconstruction surgery around the world, he goes to Africa and Vietnam. I think the films definitely have had their impact in a small way. There are documentaries that we could probably find examples that have started a really very public, say social campaign to get someone out of prison or to stop a pipeline, say a film like *Gasland* is a recent example of a really activist film that I think is -- *Gasland* I'm sure its had a huge effect on the Anti-fracking movement. There's no doubt that films can do it, that they can really contribute.

Deborah Shaffer: It was how I got into it in the first place, seeing these anti-war films. There was a night in Ann Arbor where we showed a bunch of anti-war films, people went and occupied the Razi building right afterwards. That was an era when there was Razi on campuses. Razi got kicked off most campuses, it's back now. The films had an immediate galvanizing effect on the people that watch them, I'm not going to claim that any of mine particularly had a major effect. But in recent years, and we've got a lot of examples, films like *An Inconvenient Truth*, I think, really contributed to the people who are getting involved in climate change issues. There's no doubt a film like *Blackfish* that's out this year that's

about the mistreatment of the orcas in sea world, and in recent years; what's it called the one about the dolphins? The Cove. Documentaries are important.

Interviewer: You mentioned this galvanizing effect and in seeing some of the transcripts from Dr. Clement's speaking tour, you can definitely see presenting at an ROTC meeting versus presenting with a group of physicians. Have you had any concerns about people not necessarily misinterpreting your films, but maybe coming away with a message that was not quite what you were trying to convey?

Deborah Shaffer: I don't think so. I don't think that it's very easy to misinterpret the films. I'm trying to think if I've shown the films to really hostile audiences ever. It's probably been a self-selected; the people who would say be really pro-intervention in Central America didn't come to my film screenings, for the most part. I'll let you know if it comes to me, but I can't recall any instance where I had an unpleasant confrontation or something over the film.

Interviewer: What about with Dance of Hope? Dance of Hope was filmed in Chile and you were dealing with family members who were looking for disappeared loved ones, and you had mentioned the pain of witnessing those stories. But did you feel like you were-

Deborah Shaffer: That was a very profound experience working in Chile dealing with people who still had no closure. The bulk of the film was filmed in 1988. I was there in '87 to research and I was filming in '88. The coup happened in '73. People, for the most part, had disappeared between '73 and '76. I was interviewing women who 12 years ago their sons hadn't come home from high school. You get stuck in that moment. You're still the mother of a high-school kid even though 12 years have gone by. It's a horrible thing for someone to have to go through is having somebody disappear out of your life without a trace and without knowing what happened to them. Without knowing if they're dead really, there's no proof. Have they died? If they died, how did they die? Where are they? Where are their bodies? You can't grieve properly. Their women are in a constant state of grief, which definitely had a impact on us. But they were also the women, I think, who because they had nothing to lose they found a bravery. They were the women of the [inaudible 00:51:54], the [inaudible 00:51:58], I don't remember exactly how that all goes. They belong to the organization of the Catholic Church that the [inaudible 00:52:05] of solidarity in Chile. They were the first people who protested in the streets against the Pinochet dictatorship which is a very brave thing to do given how that when the coup happened, the response of the military carried out the coup was just to indiscriminately kill people and disappear people.

Deborah Shaffer: I learned something about real terror doing that film because it was random. They didn't only arrest and disappear "Political targets" or people who were organizing, it was random. Which makes it all the more terrifying for the population because you never know why and you never know if you could be next. Then the net result was in Chile. When I went there the first time; it was '85 was the first time I went there to do research for the film. There was still a real air of mistrust and fear in the country. People did not talk publicly about what had happened to them, they didn't talk politics publicly. Something you talked about it behind closed doors with your family, but just people didn't want to say things out loud in public on a bus. You can know who'd overhear you, who were Secret Service, who would disappear you, what neighbor might denounce you for whatever. It created the terrorism that the Pinochet regime instituted in Chile created it. It was a real reign of terror. It was scary to land in Chile when the plane door opened and even though it was '85 and they were starting to gear up for the plebiscite. I went there and '85 for research, '88 was the campaign of no. We filmed during the plebiscite in 87. Maybe it was 86. The plane opened in Chile and I actually was almost face to face with Pinochet the first day I was in Chile taking and I was recording sound because it was the day he announced that

there was going to be the yes or no vote. What was the first vote? The vote was whether there would be a vote, I think. Whether he should continue in presidency; that was the first vote. There was this public thing. We had gotten press credentials and there was this public place where he was going to make his announcement and we went to film it. It was terrifying to be a few feet from this monster that I knew about, that I had seen other footage of and heard about and that I knew people who knew people who had died in Chile, and it was terrifying. A very strange feeling.

Interviewer: You're standing there and you're filming him. Did you at that moment fear for your own personal safety? Aside from being face to face with someone that you-

Deborah Shaffer: Not really. There was a lot of press around. There were a lot of demonstrations and they broke up a lot of demonstrations with tear gas. We got tear-gassed a lot and water cannoned a lot. The police definitely they went after the journalists, but usually when it got dark. They waited until it was dark and you couldn't film so well. Then they would single out the journalists with their water cannon, I got knocked down a couple of times. It wasn't anything super. One night they went after people with their nightsticks and beat a bunch of people up, and actually two journalists ended up in the hospital. The night that the plebiscite loss, what was the vote for yes, the one. It was during plebiscite that I was filming. It was the vote for the yes or no. Yes to some more years of the dictatorship. This is a mess, you'd have to cut this partly because I can't remember, I have to go back and think about the details. Anyway, I think it was the night the no vote won. There was a deliberate blackout later at night; they turned all the street lights off and then some journalists got beat up. We were just not in the wrong place at the one time. We were around the corner when it started and so we were okay. But couple of journalists did end up in jail for some time with cracked heads and beat up the bears tidings thing. The worst of the reign of terror was over eventually at that point. They were not disappearing people then, that had pretty much ended; it was reasonably safe to be there. Scary, but safe.

Interviewer: In conducting some of these interviews, you're working with women who have lost family members, but you also interviewed a few people that were somewhat sympathetic to Pinochet.

Deborah Shaffer: Right felt I had to do that in this case. I don't always feel I have to cover "Both sides of a story." Because That's not always, necessarily truthful. I mean, I know that in news there's this, oh, "to be objective you have to cover all sides". Well, it's not necessarily always reflective of what's really going on. But in Chile, it was, it did reflect there was a very big, there still is a very big right wing in Chile. Initially they had a lot of support. That was one thing I learned being there, that Chile is a very divided country, right, left, and center. I think it's still is to a large extent. I felt that it really wouldn't have been a good representation of what was going on politically in the country without interviewing. We're doing a film about women and their role in Chilean politics at the time. Our focus was the women authorities that had disappeared. But it did feel important to include women on the other side or we would have been unbalanced. We interviewed the woman who was the Mayor of one of the big poor neighbor, large poor neighborhoods who later became a Senator. I think she might still be a Senator in Chile. And we had to dissemble a little bit when we obviously didn't tell her where our sympathies lay when we wanted to do the interview with her. The way we got our press credentials the first day we were in Chile, we had to go to the DINA, which is the organization that the secret police also belong to, infamous DINA, to get press credentials. We said that I was working with a woman who was a Professor of Latin American Studies from Bucknell University. What we said was that we were doing a film about the contribution of Chilean women to Chilean Society and Culture. We didn't obviously say anything about Human Rights or Politics or any of that so it's just about the contribution of Chilean women. That was the line we used with the woman who was the Mayor of Peninsula Maria . She was suspicious of us. We

had to go to a luncheon before she would agree to be filmed. We had to go to luncheon and she put me at one table and the [inaudible 00:59:52] is the professor at another table. They asked us similar questions to see if we're going to answer the same way. They were vetting us by grilling us and we managed to squeak through and not say the wrong thing. I remember her ranting and raving about what a terrible person Ted Kennedy was at one point. Having to really bite my tongue and not say anything, not give myself away.

Interviewer: Was it really frustrating to sort of, one evening you're watching the Dictatorship shut off the street lights and hearing about Journalists being jailed and the next day you're interviewing someone who is essentially in support of this regime. I mean, it must have been really hard.

Deborah Shaffer: It was a little strange. I felt uncomfortable only because I wasn't able to be fully myself with her. It's not a role I really enjoy. I don't. I generally make films about people who I really admire and respect. At one point, I was very puzzled about what tied my films together because they seemed really quite different actually. I thought this is really weird. We have this labor history film, women's films. I realized that at some point, really the main characters, that the Protagonists of my Films were really people who are Idealists, who had risked a lot to fight for what they believed in. Those were the people that I really admired. Those are the people whose stories I wanted to tell. I'm not the Journalist who like, "goes after people in a film or exposes people". It's just not what I do, and it's a perfectly valid thing to do, but it's just not for me. I did feel a little uncomfortable being under false pretenses with this right wing, Pinochet supporter from Chile. But I felt it was important to include her in the film and her perspective and even to give her a platform, so which we I think we did. I'm not sorry. I mean, I would do it the same way again. That Film also really holds up. I mean, I saw that one, I shared it on International Women's Day last year and I was really pleased with it. We did something interesting with the answer of hope. Maybe I was talking about because one of the problems with all these political films is being in the historical moment. For instance, with a film like Fire From The Mountain, it is very dated politically. I mean, what's happened with the Sandinista Revolution. People were laughing yesterday at the screening because daughter [inaudible 01:02:42] who's here as part of the conference, suddenly appears in my film next to Daniel Ortega at the signing in constitution.

Deborah Shaffer: She's of course no longer really on the same side in that government. In that way, the film is dated just because history overtakes you. We were very aware when we started dancing folk of that problem, and we didn't want to make the film about what was happening politically day-to-day, because we didn't want it to be dated within a year, and finishing it in one or two years or finishing it when things changed. While we filmed during the time of this Campaign for the "No", during the time that the Plebiscite. We kept that in the background, and we tried to keep the stories of the women in the foreground. We tried to keep some universalized as opposed to very specifically pegged to what happened on a certain day, and it works. I think at the time the film was released, it suffered a little bit. That film didn't have these wider distributions of my other films for other reasons, also that I can talk about. But I think it suffered a little bit at the moment of its release, because it wasn't super timely. It wasn't about the immediate events. But now 25 years later, it actually really holds up as a universal story of these women struggling to find out what happened to their loved ones. I was really pleased to see it last year that I felt, wow, this really it still works that we did it right. The idea of universalizing it, and not pegging it to the women worked, and it's given the film like a shelf life. I hope, I just I've been in correspondence with people in Chile right now. I think we're going to show it presented this summer. There's a documentary film festival, and it's 25 years since the film's release in the summer. I think we're going to present it in Santiago, and hopefully a lot of the women will come, and a lot of the crew who worked on the film. One thing I should say, I didn't say yesterday, I worked with crews in the local

countries for both of these films. I used a Nicaraguan camera man, and sound person and in Chile I worked with a Chilean camera man, and sound crew, which I always felt was very important. Just to not come in as a group of foreigners into a situation, but by working with local crews, I had a different way to understand the culture. They could help me understand what was going on around me. I think the people we were filming trusted them, because they felt they weren't foreigners, they were they were their own people. I think it helped with the intimacy. I think it really helped with trust, so that people opened up to us. I saw in Nicaragua all the time like these News Crews would just come in, and be there for 24 hours, and should leave, and you'd get a new story that way. But you don't get to really know people who don't get their real personal stories.

Interviewer: You mentioned screening the film in the summer, but have any of the women that were interviewed seen the film?

Deborah Shaffer: Yes, I made sure that they've been, there was VHS tape at the time got to Chile, yes. I think they've pretty much all seen it. One of the women from Colombia, from the Northern desert was actually in New York this last year for the 48th Anniversary of the code. I hadn't seen her in 25 years since we filmed together came together, and she came for another woman photographer who actually knew about the women in Colombia because of my film, had done a book. Wrote a Chilean women book in the '80s about the women in Colombia, and she's gone back, and done updated the book recently. There was a publication party in New York, this is a temporary, and one of the women came up for that, and it was great. We had a nice quick draw, all of us in New York at NYU. Yeah, they've definitely seen the film. It'll be wonderful to have them together for a screening, Chileans have imagined of this. Some other thoughts through in my mind, what was it? I don't remember.

Interviewer: I'm curious since we're here at a conference obviously, about archiving with Central American Revolution. You're seeing a lot of history, seeing people that you've actually filmed, how does it feel to revisit some of that? Is it spinning any memory?

Deborah Shaffer: Well, it feels great. I don't know what to say about it specifically. I know what I wanted to say about the Chile film though, there was a woman photographer ended up introducing another filmmaker Patricio Guzman, I don't know if you're familiar with his work. She introduced him to the women in Colombia, the same women who are in my film, *Glory in Her Book*, also appeared now in Patricio's film from last year, two years ago called, *Nostalgia for the Light*, which is a beautiful masterful film about Chile and about the universe and about the search for the deceased. It compares the stars to the search for the disappeared in the desert, and it's just beautiful with the same women. It's really nice to see them over time. Although unfortunately, women in many cases they still looking, they still don't have answers. There were people at the conference. It was very nice to see Carlos Fernandez Javor, who I didn't know well when I was in Nicaragua before, and I'd actually never met Dora Maria for some strange reason, I had met a lot of the other leadership but somehow she and I had not really crossed paths in Nicaragua before, which is strange. This is why or how much time has gone by. It's amazing. Did we talk about this really, I can't remember, I talked to somebody earlier. People laughed when she came on screen at the signing of the Constitution seeing that my documentary, and it's not a scene that she'd get a laugh except that there was Dora Maria sitting next to Daniel Ortega in 1973. Here we are so many years later she's speaking at this conference and I think it was just funny for people to see her then and now.

Interviewer: I have hearings some of these perspectives and these experiences changed any of the memories that you hold from your travels or in making *Fire from the Mountain*. I know you had

mentioned that some of it obviously doesn't still hold up because of just history moving on. But have any of your personal experiences been colored or adjusted or changed looking at.

Deborah Shaffer: By the conference? No, I don't think so. I hadn't been in Nicaragua in many years and I did go a couple of years ago. That was pretty profound, just seeing what was better and what was worse in the country or what the promise of the, I think for all of us of a certain age, there was this Dora Maria said it probably the best at this conference. There was so much hope and so much idealism and so much of it hasn't really panned out. We've all had to adjust our thinking in our way of life. Of course, some of the idealism was probably misplaced and some of them wasn't, and I think I can't speak for them, I can speak for myself. The fundamental issues of social justice, of the need for justice and truth, and a decent living for everybody. They haven't changed, they haven't gone away. I would bet that most of the people here at this conference and me included, would still do what we can to fight for those things. I'm still looking for idealists to make movies about them. Our ideals may have been battered and we may be more pragmatic, and in some cases more focused on just taking care of daily life and making a living and raising families ourselves and all the things that we have to do. But I'm probably just isn't optimistic, and idealistic as I once was I think.

Interviewer: You have recently donated within the last year all of your footage from Witness to War, Fire from the Mountain, and Dance at Hope to Human Rights Documentation Initiative at the Benson. Is there anything in particular, any hopes that you have for its future use when you think about looking to the future?

Deborah Shaffer: Well, I'm just so glad to have the material similar where it's going to be safe and taking care of. It wasn't really properly stored in my home all these years. In fact, some of the boxes had some water damage on the outside. I don't think it really got into any of the material, but my only hope is that if that it's available, it's going to be a huge job for you guys to get it digitized. I don't envy you, they're actually organizing it and getting it available. But my hope is that it will be available for scholars especially to use. That there'll be material in there that's relevant for people to understand and to know that it's invaluable history. I know I was talking to one of the other conference participants this morning and he was talking about all the boxes of things he thrown away. I threw away years ago, a lot of this wonderful collection of early feminist magazines and newspapers. I had a whole trunk full of them. At some point I threw them away and I could like, "Why did I do that?" I hope somebody else has them in some libraries somewhere, I think somebody probably does. We were taught in film making not to throw anything away or tiny trims, what they call it, in one frame of film. Little frames. I am sure there in those boxes, little boxes, the tiny trims. I mean, I was a very well-trained editor, and I throw away my tiny trims. I hope it's useful to somebody. I hope it's worth all the effort that you guys are going to put into it. I'm very glad it's beautiful.

Interviewer: Are there any maybe hidden gems in your collection when you think about, maybe scenes you've had to cut that didn't make it into the full-length films that you hope someone finds and uses or?

Deborah Shaffer: There always are, but I can't remember anything. I'm almost certain that the best stuff is in the films. It's funny in the case of the wobbles, I can remember things we couldn't include that these days would go on the DVD extras. I'm sure if we've done DVD extras at the time I made the film, there would be a lot of things, but I can't think of anything particularly juicy. It's a wonderful model for the future. You missed the panel that was this morning where somebody who did a film in Guatemala with children's perspective on the wards in Guatemala and Salvador. She filmed, I think in '92 and she's going back now and finding them. She went back and filmed the same kids 20 years later. They were,

yeah, 12 and 14 when she filmed them the first time, and now they're 32 and 34, contrasting their lives. They're doing it as a web project instead of making another movie. It just gives you so much opportunity to branch out in a way you can't do it. In a documentary you have to follow a linear narrative. But when you're on the website, you can just layer upon, you can keep branching out or rooting down as deep as you want into all these other areas. I think it's a great model. The internet is going to change and it has changed everything for us, but the fact that all this material can be digitized and available to anybody around the world with a few clicks it's fabulous. In the old days, somebody would have had to travel here and get a tape recorder, didn't listen to things.

Interviewer: I have been processing your collection obviously, and I actually brought the specific folder with me today. Because in going through your boxes, I found what I have here are actually little manila envelopes with drawings on them.

Deborah Shaffer: I know who did these, it's Salvador, his name is Daniel Flores. He did transcripts for me. He did translations and transcripts and he did this. He was an artist, so he decorated. Oh, that's so cute. Yeah, he was Salvadorian, he was living in Nicaragua. He was back and forth between Nicaragua, New York and he did. Those are nice. I used to have other drawings it's just that I don't have anymore.

Interviewer: Then I've got, looks like Canto Por La Vida. It's a book of songs.

Deborah Shaffer: Yeah, this is from Chile from [inaudible 01:16:09]. That was the full title I was looking for. They probably handed these out at demonstrations so people could sing along. We don't need to talk about what the dance of hope actually means in the quicker, sola. It's explained in a film, I mean, it's a couples dance. When these women hit upon the idea of doing the dance alone in Chile as a protest performance, it was profound because people in Chile and never to see the women dance, this couples dance, this love dance, to see them dance it alone, had a profound effect. Just as a visual statement, it was very emotional for Chileans. They got it. You can't miss the fact of this partner's dance they danced without a partner.

Interviewer: I think these are probably my two favorite in the collection just because I love the things that get collected on a trip, but they're horoscope books.

Deborah Shaffer: I have no idea where this came from. These were in my boxes, country are they are even from. Do we know? I see 1988, they smell like my film archives.

Interviewer: They're in a box with films.

Deborah Shaffer: They smell vinegary, some of the 16 millimeter film. Some of the films [inaudible 01:17:40] vinegar.

Interviewer: We've tested it, it should be fine.

Deborah Shaffer: Great.

Interviewer: I just wanted to see it.

Deborah Shaffer: But these I don't recognize, it's not like me. I wasn't ever into horoscopes, but it's possible, like an assistant or an associate. Horoscope 1987, so these are from Chile, I guess. I do vaguely

remember, I think we possibly thought about filming a scene with a fortune teller. The film about the women in Chile is a little bit free form in a sense because there was the women, the prostitutes. We were just looking for different stories of women that tell so, I would bet that this was research that we thought about possibly filming a fortune teller. It was a good idea, why didn't we do it? It would have been a great scene, wouldn't it? A fortune teller. I bet that's what we were thinking of. [inaudible 01:18:45]

Interviewer: Yeah, we've got the [inaudible 01:18:48]

Deborah Shaffer: Yeah, those are great. There are several films have been done about the women and their textiles, [inaudible 01:18:55] Yeah, this is from the same from [inaudible 01:18:59] This is Cien ninos Esperando un tren, its a film about this guy, Ignacio Aguero, who's a filmmaker, director, still living in Chile. He has a new film out very recently. It was in New York and I missed it, but somebody has just sent me a link on the Internet. He's a very wonderful film-making colleague. Obviously, we went to an art exhibit. Oh, yes. I remember going to this exhibit, this was an art exhibit of military art by the militaries.

Interviewer: Obviously, you're holding the exhibition catalog from the art. What was it like to go and see all these?

Deborah Shaffer: Well, I see that the presentation, the introduction is signed by Lucía Pinochet, I can't see her last name, [inaudible 01:19:48] It's the wife of Pinochet. It seems like it was one of the presenters. We tried to get an interview with her, we tried under the guise of the contribution of women to Chile, we really wanted to interview her, and she really just flat out refused. But we went to the exhibition as part of our attempt to develop a relationship with her. We did that announcement that I described to Pinochet, she was there. Once I've collected myself and my knees stopped shaking, I know that I could do my job. I did go over and introduced myself to her and said "I just arrived in Chile, we're doing a film about women." and could we interview her, and she just pushed me off right there. But then, we went to this exhibition that we were hoping, we tried for a bit to get an interview with her. It would have been great. Yeah, it would have been great.

Interviewer: Yeah. If you had to do it again, that would be?

Deborah Shaffer: I'd still try to get an interview with her.

Interviewer: Is there anything else looking back on your other films in terms of witness to Fire From the Mountain or anything that you wish you had thought to ask?

Deborah Shaffer: There are always so many missed opportunities, I can't think of any specific now. But when you're editing, you're always like, "Why didn't I ask that follow-up question? Why didn't I think to do this? How would I miss that?" or you arrive somewhere too late just after something happened. I don't remember any specific because there's so many of them. Even though I'm pleased with the film, there are always, "I could have done it better." Did you want me to look at any? These are just magazines.

Interviewer: We have few magazines.

Deborah Shaffer: These don't look like anything particular that I would.

Interviewer: It's always fun to just take a trip through memory lane, but these are all different.

Deborah Shaffer: How to diet. Here's an article about the Sandinistas, [inaudible 01:21:44] what does he get [inaudible 01:21:48] diet, I have no idea. This is Nicaragua. I just probably collected things while I was there, I wouldn't even have known these were in the boxes frankly.

Interviewer: Have you thought about doing any films to follow up on [inaudible 01:22:11] ?

Deborah Shaffer: No, somebody asked me that yesterday. I'm not sure that any of my films would really lend themselves, but I'm going to give it some thought now that somebody brought it up. Like the film that was presented this morning, the children who were children of war, that makes sense. There were 12 and 14, and then to go back when they're in their early 30s, but I'm not sure. Off the top of my head in the case of my films, I don't see a follow-up in any of them right now, but maybe I'll feel differently. It's also possible because of meeting up with Carlos Fernando here, we might present Fire From The Mountain in the July anniversary in Nicaragua, I think it's a 35th anniversary this summer, and apparently there's going to be a film festival. Maybe in Chile in June and Nicaragua in July and we'll see what ideas that sparks for further film projects or video projects. I'm in touch with my crews, the people who worked on the film. The Chilean cameraman lives in Brooklyn now, but he spends a lot of time in Chile, his family is still there. My Nicaraguan cameraman is still in Nicaragua and he and his wife were making feature films there.

Interviewer: Have you had any follow-up with some of the subjects to your film? Like Dr. Charlie Clements?

Deborah Shaffer: Oh, Dr. Clements. It's funny, I hadn't seen him for years. We had totally lost touch. He was with a group, I think, physicians for social responsibility. Did help them develop some programs in Africa and he did various things. Then he went to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. He ran their organization for many years, they were connected with the unit. Like FSC is to the Quakers, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is to the Unitarian church. He headed their organization for a number of years. Now, he's at Harvard. But anyway, we'd been out of touch. He got in touch with me because of another film project that somebody brought him that had to do with some holocaust rescuers to a Unitarian minister and his wife who had gone to Europe during the Second World War. The people who were making the film needed some more expert film help, I ended up being involved in that project for about a year. But that got me back in touch with Charlie, I had dinner with him probably a year ago in New York. I said, he's now gone to the Kennedy School at Harvard University. The gardener, what is it? The Garden Center for Human Rights?

Interviewer: He's the director, I think. It's called the Kennedy,

Deborah Shaffer: Could be Kennedy Center for Human Rights or something, I think in that order.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Deborah Shaffer: We're in touch, we're good friends. I would say we're very good friends. Witness to War was shown in El Salvador a couple of times in the last couple of years, Charlie himself has been there for some of the screenings my partner on the film, David Goodman was editing another film, and

he just happened to be working with El Salvador, an editor, and they worked in El Salvador and he showed the film. People who were in the film in Salvador have seen it.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about their responses?

Deborah Shaffer: I think they all just had a great time seeing themselves on film again and revisiting. I think people loved reconnecting. Charlie himself went down for some anniversary. Then NBC cameraman [inaudible 01:25:45] . He did a little bit of a follow-up film with Charlie, he went with Charlie and filmed him then and now. I bet that material is on the web somewhere, I haven't looked lately. But it's always great, it's always great to go back and see people again. As I said, I was in Nicaragua two years ago, but I was there on vacation. I had a death in the family and I wasn't really there on a film trip when I went two years ago. I hope if it does happen to go in July. It'll be interesting because of all the political divisions that have happened and see how we pull it off.

Interviewer: Well, [inaudible 01:26:29] adjusted his political leanings a little.

Deborah Shaffer: Well, he has not adjusted them. Apparently he's still with the Sandinistas. As I said yesterday in the Q&A, I did not see him when I was there because he has remarried for I don't know the third or fourth time, I'm not sure, an Italian woman, and they were in Italy. I was there many years and they had gone to Italy, so I haven't seen [inaudible 01:26:54] since '87 or '88. That'll be interesting. I have been in touch with his daughter. There's a scene very near the end of the film. It's actually his wife at the time is walking on the beach and [inaudible 01:27:09] is playing a little girl on the beach. She's quite a grown-up, young, professional woman. She came to see me in New York once. I don't know exactly what she's doing in Nicaragua now, but she's a professional. I mean, she's living her own life. It's amazing, they do grow up. I don't know, wherever.

Interviewer: Given your extensive career, I mean, quite a bit has been focused on Latin America.

Deborah Shaffer: That was about 10 years, I think. If I think about it, it was really started around 1980. It had a lot to do initially with US involvement in El Salvador, which was echoing US involvement in Vietnam. It was initially US foreign policy that got me interested in Latin America. It was the [inaudible 01:28:03] personal story that really got me hooked and kept me there. I haven't made a film, probably the last one was Dance of Hope, which was released in '89. I didn't do an independent film after that until 9/11 actually. I did a couple of films about 9/11. I did some television programs. I did something about women in Africa. Did another film about a woman scientist. I mean, my interest continue to be very broad in one way, but I'm still interested in women's issues in social justice issues of course of any sort around the world. I would love to do something in Latin America again, if the opportunity presented. For whatever reason, hasn't been at the top but I mean, my daughter is 24 now, so I haven't traveled extensively outside the country. I stopped traveling when she was pretty little. It just was too hard to go away for long periods of time. I went to China for three weeks when she was a baby when I came back she was three or something, I think, when I went to China. But I said I can't do this right now. I can't go away from them. But she's on her own now. I can go again. I'm free again, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, I just wanted to say thank you so much for not only your generous donation of film materials, but then also participating in this oral history project. Are there any final remarks?

Deborah Shaffer: I'm grateful to you guys for taking the archive, I really am, and for talking care of it. As I told you, this isn't into you particularly but just, if you come across stuff that you don't know what it is

or it's puzzling or is this important or not important or what the heck does it mean, also we use shorthand a lot of the times you discover that to describe. Like we have a story, we were calling a Doctor Charlie before we had a title for the film. The labels may not make sense, just call me or write email and whatever. Now, I'm glad to try to help sort it out. As you can tell, I'm fairly compulsive obviously, I was about saving things. If I can remember, now it's great. I'm very happy to be at the conference and it's very stimulating. I mean, just thinking about what this all means. Where we came from, where we're going. I mean, this is probably all of this it's brand new to a lot of people here, right?

Interviewer: I think so. I think many of us in terms of looking at graduate students either come from a context where we lived after these revolutions happened. Because we're looking at mostly at the '70s through the '80s, so you've got graduate students that the Civil War in El Salvador started before they were born. So I think it's an interesting intergenerational connection to see some of these and hear these stories. You might know what happened in Nicaragua in the '90s, but you don't necessarily always hear the first-hand accounts.

Deborah Shaffer: Okay. No, it's interesting. Yeah, I guess you've got much more in the Middle East and we all do.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Deborah Shaffer: It'll come around again. I think it'll keep coming around.

Interviewer: Well, thank you again for your contribution. I appreciate you.

Deborah Shaffer: Thank you. I don't know if you going to put that up rods. It's pretty long.

Interviewer: I've got some methoding skills.

TRANSCRIPT END