

Interview with Tami Gold about the making of PASSIONATE POLITICS
For CLAGS
January 1, 2011

How did you come up with the idea for this documentary?

My friend Joyce Warshow was working on this film for a few years as part of her commitment to telling the stories of older lesbians who have been committed to social justice and activism. Joyce was always concerned that the lives of older lesbian activists was hidden from view and she was determined to challenge and change this. So she began to work on a film about Charlotte Bunch in around 2005. Shortly after beginning this project Joyce was diagnosed with cancer and while she underwent surgery and many medical procedures, she never stopped working on this film. Joyce died on Oct 2, 2007. One of the last requests Joyce made was for me to take her vision and make it into a film.

How did you come up with the opening animation in the title sequence? Why did you decide to begin the film this way?

I wanted the film to be both dynamic, a bit hard hitting and at the same time gentle. When I close my eyes and think about feminism, about women's power, about lesbianism and our possibilities, I see dancing, singing, even flowers growing. This might sound sappy and non-militant, but I know that this was at the core of Joyce's passion and it is what made her so strong. It was what I most learned from her. So the opening animation is an acknowledgement of what Joyce taught me about life and our potential power as women.

There is so much footage - beautiful footage of Charlotte Bunch as a child and young adult? Tell me about this.

As with any biographical documentary, the film needed a visual language and the challenge was how to create this covering a span of fifty years. When I first began working on the film I went through all the material; the interviews Joyce conducted, the visuals of Charlotte at her home and with her life partner Roxanna Carrillo, newspaper clippings, books, letters and more. I remember the day I went through the photos Joan Biren and Bettye Lane had given Joyce to use. They captured the unique moment of the women's movement of the 1960's and 70's and I knew that these images would be critical in creating the texture of this time. But I was concerned that still photographs alone would not be enough. Then I learned from one of the interviews that Charlotte's father had taken 16mm footage of her family beginning in the mid 1940's. This became a treasure, the gift of 16mm Kodachrome color film. After Charlotte gave me the fifteen or more cans of thousands of feet of family footage, I carefully worked with film preservationists to restore the material and this is where we found the wonderful footage of Charlotte getting married in a red dress.

Where did you find the other personal archival footage?

As soon as I received all the material, I spent weeks screening and organizing the footage. This became my road map. I learned in one of the interviews that Charlotte was one of the speakers at the Gay and Lesbian March in Washington DC in 1979 and quickly contacted the filmmakers who documented this event in the film GREETINGS FROM

WASHINGTON DC. And this is how I found most of the archival footage of Charlotte. While shooting in South Africa with Charlotte in 2008, I met an organizer from the Caribbean who told me that in 1980 she and Charlotte worked with filmmaker Martha Stewart and made a video tape with women from many different countries entitled *World Feminists*. This started the next search. And so it went. This is why documentary filmmaking is so exciting – searching for specific archival footage – and we found some gems. I remember the day when the editor, Sonia Gonzalez-Martinez, was going through hours of black and white archival footage of the civil rights movement. Charlotte had been part of the freedom riders and went to Montgomery in 1964. Sonia was looking for the best images to illustrate this experience. After hours she found 45 seconds of Charlotte right there – with a group of other freedom riders in the middle of Alabama.

There are many different ways to tell a story. How and why did you decide to tell the story chronologically?

At first I wanted to begin the film with exclusively contemporary scenes of Charlotte working with different women's groups all over the world inter-cut with flashbacks of Charlotte's childhood and early experiences. This seemed exciting and less predictable. But when we tried this structure and held rough-cut screenings, most people did not understand Charlotte's political growth. As we worked with the material it became clearer and clearer that we needed to begin at the beginning, so to speak, and by telling Charlotte's story chronologically we were creating a stronger narrative which would explain her political and personal growth.

What did you learn while making this film?

I learned about the amazing life and work of Charlotte Bunch and that not everyone is a leader or a strategist, but that Charlotte is. I also learned about the power of being quiet and about thinking before doing. I was reminded that the personal is political and that the political is personal. However, most importantly I was introduced to the potential power of the global women's movement and that women really do hold up half the sky.

Who is the primary audience for PASSIONATE POLITICS? WHY?

Everyone can learn something from this documentary. And as Joyce so elegantly emphasized, sharing the stories of older lesbians who have been committed to social justice and activism is our way of celebrating our future. So, in honoring Joyce, we will work to reach lesbian communities throughout the world. **PASSIONATE POLITICS** is designed to speak to women and men in both the developed and developing world. I can see it having an amazing impact in Women Studies, Human Rights and Political Science classes and translated into many languages. I also know that it will be a dynamic tool in organizing against gender violence throughout the world. It raises so many questions and though it is about one woman's life, the message connects to all of us.

How do you describe PASSIONATE POLITICS?

It's a new one-hour documentary that brings Charlotte Bunch's story to life, from idealistic young civil rights organizer to lesbian activist to internationally recognized leader of a campaign to put women's rights, front and center, on the global human rights agenda. Charlotte has been both product and creator of her times: every chapter in her life

is a chapter in the story of modern feminist activism. As co-founder of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Charlotte works with women leaders from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, developing strategies to expose and combat violence against women in all its forms. Braided throughout the film are scenes of this work --- Charlotte's connections with women in Peru and South Africa.