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Editor of SPRINT newsletter

Interview with Julia Lamber, Jean Robinson, and Pamela Walters  
Washington, DC  
July 25, 2005

Marguerite Beck-Rex: I was working as a reporter in Ohio for a small chain of newspapers owned by Howard Metzenbaum. The sports editor, who was my buddy, sat right behind me, and nobody covered women's sports, they didn't have anybody, so I said "I'll take that on." That gave me a chance to cover women's sports. And that then was what led me into Title IX.

Jean Robinson: When was that?

MBR: Dates, I'm really bad at date.

Julia Lamber: Just give or take a couple of years.

MBR: About five years before the women's SPRINT project started at Women's Equity Action League. Before that, I was a reporter in Ohio at that time and it was really quite exciting because, well, nobody was paying any attention. What I did, I took it as my kind of my mission to take national issues that were being put forth by feminists on either coasts and to apply them to local situations and see what I could see as a reporter. I had a women's rights column, which is how I got hired. If it weren't for those issues, I probably would never had gotten hired.

JR: Where in Ohio?

MBR: This was in Cleveland Heights.

JL: Is that where you grew up?

MBR: No, I grew up in New York City.

JL: How did you end up in Cleveland Heights?

MBR: Well, I married and we moved to California. His parents had a farm in Ohio, and after his father died, we had to go back and do something with the farm and I thought farm life is terrible, as far as I'm concerned. I nearly got sick, so we had to move into more urban things that seemed to me to be normal. And then finally we went to Cleveland Heights which was wonderful place and full of all kinds of rabble-rousers.

JR: I went to Oberlin.

MBR: You did?!

JR: I started in 1969.

JL: You were a reporter?

MBR: I worked as a reporter and I had a weekly article, basically. It was not really a column; I really used it to investigate and report on what was going on. Women in prisons, local jail; things that related to tubal ligation and husbands' consent; or rape victims who were turned away by hospitals; and then this bit about sports, which was very exciting to me. I was not the least bit athletic, I mean, worse than not athletic, I was afraid to move just about – put me behind a desk please. It was really hard, so covering women in sports was quite an eye opener for me, and I really enjoyed that and learning about Title IX because I had done so many stories on Title IX locally, which related to the local high school for the most part: the girls want their field back; they'd taken away the girls' only athletic field for junior varsity boys something like ten years earlier, and now the girls want their field back. And the coaches weren't getting equal pay, so I had a chance to write about all that. It was lots of fun. I got to learn so much about Title IX.

A friend of mine moved to Washington, and my husband and I were looking to move out of Cleveland and someplace sunnier for one thing, and someplace where we felt we had brighter futures in our work. This friend called me and said that she knew of an opening, at the Women's Equity Action League, that she'd heard about. She said it was just the thing for me and I should apply for it. And I thought that was crazy, but I got all my clips together, sent this packet, and lo and behold I got an interview. They flew me out. And I thought, oh well, lunch in Washington, that's very nice. That can't be bad. And then I got an offer. I was hired to head the SPRINT [Sports Project Referral and Information Network] project.

JL: It wasn't because you were in Ohio; WEAL started in Ohio, right?

MBR: No, it had nothing to do with Ohio. I didn't even know what WEAL was when I came to Washington. I learned during the interview process, and I learned about the Title IX project, but no, I didn't know anything about WEAL.

JR: You were the first director? So, you basically started it from scratch?

MBR: No, not really. The truth is there was a wonderful proposal that was written by two women, Carol Parr, who was the director, and Char Mollison, who was an intern at that time. And they wrote a great proposal and that's what brought in the money that set up the project. All I did was take what they had laid out and became the project manager and director of the whole thing. Char was my assistant. After a couple of years, when the funding didn't come through again at the right level, what happened is they let go the person with the highest salary (me) so they could keep the project going. By then I had moved my family from Ohio.

JL: Woops.

MBR: Right. So, I had to really hustle, but fortunately Carol knew Karen Mulhouser, the director of National Abortion Rights Action League and they needed someone to do national press. But I spent two or three years on Title IX.

JR: So, tell us about the SPRINT project.

MBR: The most important component was the clearinghouse, the hotline, so that anybody could call from anywhere and ask anything about Title IX, especially how to network with other people who had worked on whatever they were trying to work on at the moment, so that they could get some support and get some information and some strategies. We heard from individuals and we heard from teachers, mostly. We gave very full answers and were there to hand hold over the phone anytime they needed that.

I think that was the most important part of it. Then there was a newsletter which went out, I think, four or maybe six times a year. It went to this very large circulation list that was built up from people who called, and I don't know who else – the women who were involved on the board, the board members, were mostly from academics, and they had ideas of who needed to be on the list, either in their own area or at other schools where they knew things were going on, so that's how we built our mailing list.

We did some literature, we did workshops, we did some workshops and in Washington we traveled to workshops and were on panels, that kind of thing. I don't remember all the wonderful language we had -- wonderful language for why this was so important. We had a logo and I was so proud of it. It was a running shoe with a women's symbol, and they were kind of super-imposed on each other, and that's how the newsletter got to be called *In the Running*. It was beautifully designed. We had a wonderful artist.

JR: I'm almost certain I know that logo.

MBR: Yeah. Our colors were kind of buff and a deep red. We thought we were very classy.

JR: I was director of Women's Studies at IU in the 70s. I'm trying to figure out where the newsletters disappeared to. Do you know if there is a collection, a full collection, of SPRINT's, *In the Running*?

MBR: I've got one; I just have to find it. If you tell me where to send it, I will find it and I will definitely send it to you. I didn't save just one, I mean, I saved a lot – you'd think that I'd never done anything else in my life, and I had to prove I had done something or I wouldn't be worthwhile to the world, but I really saved them.

Pamela Walters: That would be wonderful to have. We could make sure that they get archived someplace.

MBR: Oh, that would be great. You'll get lots of names. One of the things we had was a problem-solving column; people would write in, and then we would mention the names of the people in the school. It's all about things going on in schools, for the most part, that's what the newsletter was made up of.

JL: These are your copies [informed consent]; I'm going to give them back to you and that has our addresses in them. So, when you find them, you can send them to us.

MBR: Oh good. I know I will, I know things are like that. I am missing a whole box of expensive electrical parts, and they will show up in no place that I've looked, because my house is still being refurbished from the hurricane. I mean, this is two years later, and we're not totally done yet.

JL: SPRINT stands for what?

MBR: I'm trying to remember what it was supposed to stand for.

JR: I just looked it up this morning because I had looked at WEAL Fund's material. [Sprint stands for Sports Project Referral and Information Network to Achieve Educational Equality.] I found several good quotes from you –

MBR: You did?

JR: I think it was a New York state suit but somebody, some school district, or maybe it was at the state level had a regulation that girls couldn't play contact sports because it might hurt their breasts. Do you remember this?

MBR: No, but I believe it.

JR: So, did you travel around and also talk to teachers, give workshops?

MBR: Right, and they were mostly at schools. Sometimes they were sponsored by other organizations, or at a national conference. The NCAA always have that. That was a scary one.

All: We'd really like to hear about that.

MBR: You would?

PW: Yes, because part of what we are interested in is the back and forth between the proponents of Title IX and the opponents of Title IX and the kinds of tactics that were used and the kind of arguments that were used.

MBR: One thing that I remember very clearly -- I felt I was going into enemy territory. The women's coaches and the AIAW [Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women] were afraid they were going to disappear, be subsumed, not have anything,

which, of course, is what happened. The one I went to I was really paying attention to what I could hear about that sort of thing. NCAA thought they could do more for women than any other group, as if that were their goal.

JL: Is that how they talked?

MBR: Yes.

PW: That they could do more for women than anybody else? Because they had the power?

MBR: Yes, they had the power.

JR: and the money.

MBR: And, of course, the women who were doing what they were doing now would have roles in the organization too, like why not?

These days, I don't know who is really fighting Title IX so very hard, except the wrestling coaches. I've been on the web and looked at that. And I don't remember anything more about that, but it gets me made just the same and I'd like to punch out a wrestling coach.

JR: I get the sense it goes from sport to sport. One of the biggest was football.

MBR: Well, another thing -- I'll be very happy to send you this, when I find this issue of *In the Running* -- I did a piece on why football loses money because in most schools at that time, it did.

JL: It still does. In fact, it is worse, I think, nowadays.

MBR: Yeah, and nobody seems to want to pay any attention to that, just made me crazy. I did an article on it, but it never was anything that anybody anywhere else wanted to pay attention to. What's all this fuss about, you give up a little of that, you'd have more for this guy that you're worried about. Might not get to play ping-pong or something.

JR: Do you remember when you went to the NCAA, were you well treated?

MBR: Oh sure. I mean, there weren't an awful lot of women there, there were some. Yeah, I was well treated. I felt a little odd.

JL: And what was the context?

MBR: It was a national conference and they wanted to have a Title IX panel there.

PW: They were doing the inviting?

MBR: Oh yeah. I've got some information on that conference I can dig it up; I don't have much of it on the top of my head. It was in Atlanta.

JR: Well, they were probably trying to put their best foot forward. It was probably already clear that they were going to take over everything anyway.

MBR: And if money was going to go someplace to women's sports, they didn't want to pull the budgets any more than they could help, so they could control it better. If they had the whole budget which I guess was the new game plan.

JL: Did you work with other women's groups, or was it pretty much focused with WEAL?

MBR: Well, I think WEAL, primarily, but yes there were other women's groups. I'm trying to think of who they were right now. NOW [National Organization of Women] had somebody; I can't remember the name of that person. We worked very closely on a few things. At one point, we needed to. We wanted to put more focus on Title IX and we knew that what was going on at that point was -- things that were being slowed down were being slowed down because of what looked like red tape. You know, in Washington. But red tape anyplace. Anybody who could use it to slow it down, they would use it. So, we were looking for a way to focus national attention on that and I came up with an idea that we could have a run, and we could call it "Breaking the red tape run." And we could do it from the steps of HEW and we would invite HEW to participate.

JL: And did you?

MBR: Yes. I'll tell you what got us on the front page of The Times, and it wasn't our issue. Someone from HEW, a guy who was in his 40s who ran with us, dropped dead of a heart attack. That just shows what Title IX would do to men. We were so grateful to have him with us, we really were so grateful, he was so wonderful person, and he dropped dead, and so they put his picture in the story. Otherwise, I think we would have gotten a little bit of coverage, but it wouldn't have been anything like what we got.

PW: You were talking about the red tape. Do you think that that was a deliberate strategy?

MBR: I think sometimes it was, and I think sometimes it was just, there was a lot of red tape. I really wasn't in on the politics of trying to change that from the inside. I did go to meetings that we had with, who was the secretary of HEW then? I can just see her face in front of me --

JR: Patricia Harris.

MBR: Yes, Patricia Harris. But there were other people who were really involved in that strategy. I'm trying to think of this one group in particular, I mean, certainly AIAW was

there, certainly American Association of University Women was very active. And, of course, NOW. I'm trying to think of another group, I'm thinking of a particular person – Margot Polivy, have you heard her name?

JL: Yes.

MBR: Yes. She was a very good strategist. And there was a group that kind of thought those things through in a way that I just didn't have the political experience about or I didn't know how to start. I've since worked in the Senate, so now I know what I didn't know then.

JL: I think one of the things that's interesting about these kinds of movements in the 70s, the different women's groups who got together, each of whom had different strengths. So that, maybe somebody was particularly good at strategy. Of course, in those days we didn't come with all the credentials that we might come with to such a coalition today.

MBR: I think basically I got hired because I was a grass roots person doing a grass roots thing. One year before I left Ohio, I got an award from Ohio NOW for having the most articles for women in Ohio that year. And they did that to help me keep publishing my stuff in the newspaper because there were various threats to cut it or to drop it. It was really a political award to make it really impossible for Metzenbaum to cut that out.

PW: Was it the Plain Dealer?

MBR: No, no, it was a chain of suburban papers called the Sun Newspapers. I tried to get the Plain Dealer to take the column, and the man I spoke to about it said, 'boy if I had a column on everything people suggest to me, like tennis shoes.' And I said, 'tennis shoes are like women's rights? Come on.'

JL: That's a lot like just anything.

JR: There were two of you, just the two of you at SPRINT?

MBR: Oh no, we had more than that. We had a large staff. We had an efficient secretary; we had someone who was a bookkeeper/accountant type person who did anything that related to money or circulation or numbers of that kind. She was German, and she knew just what to do when she interviewed. And then she turned out to be a very nice person and she was efficient, but she also had all these other sides that she would never ever let show.

Let's see, who else was there? I think at one time we had five people.

JR: And was it at the same place that WEAL was?

MBR: Yes, sure. It was the Sutter building, at 15th and H Streets. I think that's where the corner was. It was a great location. And who else, I'm trying to think of other

women's groups that were involved. There is the National Association of Women and Girls in Sports, that was about more recreational sports, not academics.

PW: Was WEAL primarily academics?

MBR: Not necessarily academic. I wish I could think of all the organizations that were involved, and that must be in a list somewhere because at the meetings there were people from all those groups.

JL: And this is particularly in the late 70s, with Patricia Harris?

MBR: Uh-huh. Something else that struck me, besides finally learning about what was going on at which campuses and so forth, was that when parents called in, it was more likely to be fathers than mothers.

JR: Really?

JL: with the 'I have a daughter who...' That kind of father question?

MBR: Yep.

PW: She's a good athlete and she deserves blah, blah, blah.

MBR: Right, yep.

JR: Were there areas of the country with more activity than others?

MBR: Yes. I was trying to think of some of them today. Certainly, State College, Pennsylvania. Ann Arbor. . .

JR: Michigan State?

MBR: Michigan State, but also Wayne State.

JL: I think there was a very active organization in Michigan, when you are talking grass roots involvement. And I think it was one of the states that PEER [Project on Equal Education Rights] used as a state project.

MBR: And Texas. I'm trying to think of, not just Austin, where else? Gosh, there was this really good basketball coach, and she wound up with some sort of national job. There was quite a bit going on down there.

JR: Donna Lopiana?

MBR: That's who I'm thinking of. I think she was an athletic director and also a coach.



JR: Were people like this on your advisory board? For instance, Donna Lopiano?

MBR: I don't think so. I mean, I don't think we had people like that on our advisory board. I think we had someone from State College. I really am getting a little confused right now as I think back; did we have a separate advisory board for SPRINT, in addition to WEAL? I don't think we did.

JL: Do you remember where your funding came from?

MBR: Yes, FIPSE [Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education].

PW: It was a federal program, and when the Department of Education was created, I think FIPSE funds disappeared.

MBR: Because a lot of women's studies programs applied for money from FIPSE because that's where you went.

JL: and that's where SPRINT was funded?

PW: Does that mean you were focused on higher education?

MBR: Yes and no, because we helped lots of people in high school. It sounds as if it would be WEAL – I'm thinking of the distinction between WEAL and WEAL Fund, because we were WEAL Fund. In general, I'm just sure we did an awful lot that really related to high school in *In the Running*. People called us about things related to high school. But, I know I always thought of WEAL as being something that was focused on higher education in general, just because most of the people involved either had been or were academics. I don't think they meant to be exclusive. It's so funny when I think about it, there's a huge difference between WEAL and NOW, even then. NOW, of course, has become entirely different creature. But even then there was a very big difference. Just in everything, including demeanor.

JL: Tell us more about that.

MBR: WEAL was just a little bit more reserved. I'm not quite sure what the words are. I'm thinking of words that would be the wrong words but would convey it. More reserved, more lady-like, less grass roots, even when they were grass roots.

JR: No bra burners?

MBR: Oh, gosh, no. No bra burners; not wanting that reputation.

JL: So, at meetings, could you tell there would be NOW people over here, and WEAL people over here? Would you be able to tell the difference?

MBR: No. The one person who stirred things up a lot wasn't from either of the two. This was Margot Polivy. Boy she was a fighter. She's somebody worth talking to; if you're looking for arguments that are gone to butt heads, she'll give them to you. If she's still around, I don't really know.

JL: She is. We've been exchanging emails with her. We just haven't found a time yet. But we will. She was the lawyer for AIAW.

PW: So, did these differences in style and approach between NOW and WEAL affect the possibility of working together?

MBR: No, I think we worked together. I think we did work together; we just wouldn't all work on the same thing necessarily.

PW: You didn't all work on the same thing.

MBR: No. And also, here's something about WEAL that is different from NOW, even back then. WEAL was more politically inclusive. Things may have changed but after I left WEAL, and through NARAL [National Abortion & Reproductive Rights Action League] I became friendly with, can't think of her last name, Mary, she was a Republican, and she was the co-chair of the Republican National Convention and left over the abortion issue. We became very good friends and she tried to help me when I decided, maybe I'd like to work for NOW, by getting me an interview. What I discovered, when I talked about being able to reach out to women in both parties, it was the kiss of death. Nobody would ever admit that, but they really didn't care.

PW: They didn't care about reaching out to Republicans?

MBR: Not that Republican women were going to be turned away, but the idea that turning things into a bipartisan position was just -- they didn't get it as a good strategy at that time. I think that they always been more involved in politics on the partisan level than WEAL was.

PW: Was WEAL specifically focused on education?

MBR: Not just education, although it tended to be a large part of it. I'm thinking of other projects that were going on at the same time, but the only one that comes to mind is women in the military.

PW: Maybe something about social security maybe? I was really aware of WEAL in the 1970s because I worked on educational issues. I did educational program evaluation for a while, some of it dealing with gender, so that's the context in which I first came to know anything about WEAL. And my sense is that WEAL was working to make sure that the laws that were in place were implemented and enforced? Would that be a fair description of their mission?

MBR: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PW: Does that represent a difference with NOW as well?

MBR: I don't really know. These things were not talked about, but from my judgment, those were the differences. But we worked very closely with one of the NOW women who had been involved in the drafting of Title IX. I don't remember under what circumstance or who it was. You may have uncovered some of this in your interviewing who was involved in actually sitting down and seeing it drafted the way it was. I know there was the one woman who worked for NOW who may have also worked for HEW at that time. I don't really know.

JL: They were involved in the drafting?

MBR: Uh-huh. Yeah, I mean it didn't come out of whole cloth when somebody in congress decided this was a good idea.

JL: Probably a lot of behind the scenes work there.

MBR: Right. I'm trying to remember whether it was that issue or some other in which they tacked something on hoping it would kill the bill and it didn't; it got passed instead.

JL: That's the story they tell about Title VII in 1964.

MBR: It might be true and it might not; I don't really know.

PW: So, were there activities that WEAL was involved in trying to change the law or shape it?

MBR: I was not aware of anything like that. Not after Title IX, you mean? I only came after Title IX, so I don't know what went on.

PW: Is WEAL a product of Title IX?

MBR: No. I don't think so.

JR: It predated Title IX.

JL: I can't remember when it was founded, but it all happened about the same time.

JR: Title IX may have been the catalyst; I mean the idea of educational equity.

MBR: This seems pretty likely to me. I'm wondering who was on the board way back then; they would know that.

PW: The reason I ask is I'm wondering if WEAL could have played any role in the writing of Title IX. The regulations, yes, but in the writing of the original legislation.

MBR: I don't know, but I bet you Margot knows. And I wish I could think of the name of this woman who was at NOW at that time, who really played a major role in it, and I can picture her face, I can't think of her name. But if I do, I'll jot it down and make sure you get it.

JL: That's great.

MBR: So, how many people have you gotten to talk to right now?

JL: Well, today we're just talking to a couple of people, but we've been spending more time tomorrow and the next day at the Library of Congress reading papers. I've been reading some oral histories of congresswomen.

MBR: Oh, great.

JL: Yeah, and then we have some other names who've agreed to be interviewed; Margot being one of them and Cindy Brown, who worked for the HEW in the Office for Civil Rights. But, we just haven't been able to find a time yet.

MBR: Well I hope when I find *In the Running* you'll have lots of other names of people at schools around the country. They won't be there, but they could help you track down.

JR: And we're also doing state level studies for all of the cases and Ohio is actually one of them. Ohio, California, Florida, and Kentucky. So, in fact, if it turns out that we can find people who involved with Title IX in those states they might still be there.

MBR: I'm wondering whether with all the growth in sports whether women's participation in sports has peaked or shrunk.

JR: I think it's still growing.

MBR: That's good to hear.

JR: Both recreational activity as well as competitive, at both high school and colleges and universities. It certainly hasn't been decreased. A lot of schools, a lot of universities are getting more and more pressure to add more sports.

MBR: Well that's wonderful that they are.

JR: But that, leads to these kinds of conflicts again. Wrestling coaches say 'yeah, but you're taking away my scholarships to give scholarships in rowing' or whatever.

JL: By now we also have the generation of women who've grown up with Title IX. Who've grown up with competitive sports as part of their life, which is really wonderful to watch.

JR: They just see it as normal.

JL: But, then that does bring different conflicts. . . .

PW: There is also a generation of boys who grew up with Title IX also think of it as normal. That girls are good at sports and that's just it; that's that.

MBR: Quite amazing. Well, my first athletic activity happened when I turned 60. I was involved in something called 'No Limits in Women for Physical Power.' It sounded good to me. So I had my first experience in playing basketball, tackling and being tackled in football, bench-pressing, and I forget what the other thing was. I know – we rounded up a softball team in the long run that we really kept going for a while. And my sons were so thrilled; I have two sons, one son's a real jock, and they were just thrilled, cheering me on. Something else entered my life and you know, okay I've done that, been there done that, now what am I going to do.

JR: When I looked for you on the web, I found a lot of things, and I kept thinking, 'is this all the same person?' You did these trips to Provence?

MBR: Yes. I'm a painter now and I take other painters to Provence once a year.

JL: That happens to be Jean's favorite place in the whole world.

JR: I can't remember which year it was, but the house that you had rented was one that we had considered renting near Uzes. Every time we go, we stay someplace different, and it's been a couple years since we've been. But, we rented a couple of really nice places. the towns are really small and lovely.

MBR: There's so many, there's just so many.

JR: It was near Vaison, but about 20 minutes away by small winding roads. I love it there.

JL: You said you also worked for Congress?

MBR: I worked for the Senate, I worked for Tom Daschle and the Senate Democratic Policy Committee; I was their editor and managed the graphics department.

JL: A real renaissance woman.

JR: And I read about you in the *Wall Street Journal* about people who don't want to --

MBR: *The New York Times*. That was really something. Things were changing in the Democratic Policy Committee. All the things that I did there – everything was getting much more electronic. They wanted much less paper and it was getting more computer-oriented than I could really get comfortable with no matter how I tried. I mean, it is just generational. Somehow in a conversation at some time, I said something like 'well, when I retire,' and they picked up on that and decided that I might be ready to retire and then these people who do all of the computer work could have that job.

Three people called on me one day. I was called to a meeting with three people, my boss and several others that would be involved, and the proposal that I retire at that time was put to me and I would have this little buy-out package, which wasn't very much. And I said, 'well, I can't afford to retire, I have a mortgage to pay off, and it'll take two years and that was my plan.' Well, you really serve at Senator Daschle's pleasure. So, I wrote him a letter and I talked to the compliance offices and I was trying to talk to a lawyer. Then a friend called and she said she had a friend who was talking to somebody at the *New York Times* who was doing a piece on people who couldn't afford to retire. And she said 'I'm gonna tell them about you,' and she did. And it was just at the right time.

So, I kept my job, not the same job, they did convert some things. You can imagine what's happened to the Senate since then. It's just awful. But, I was, by then, their archivist. So I was an archivist for two years and then I retired with my mortgage paid.

There was a whole committee of goddesses up there watching over me, I know. I tell people who talk about the higher power, I say, look, one is really not enough.

JL: We really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us.

MBR: I'm very happy to be here and I'm very glad you're doing this.

JL: It's really great fun.

MBR: Yeah, I would think so, yeah.

PW: And if you or when you find *In the Running*, even if we can find them in Bloomington . . .

JL: other kinds of things you have in your papers would be wonderful.

MBR: Sure. I do have things, I have posters and I have all sorts of things.

JR: And we'll be making several more trips down here. You have our addresses and phone numbers, and you also have my email.

MBR: Right. This sounds like a very exciting project. Do you have any timeline on this for yourself, your work?

JL: We have a grant that's for four years so we'll have to do something before the end of it. And, we're actually hoping for something before then.

JR: And actually, in addition to the book, we've been talking about doing maybe some op-ed type pieces.

MBR: Wouldn't that be wonderful?

JL: Marguerite is the person to help us, because she has those goddesses up there.

[discussion of getting op-eds published]

JL: Again, thank you very much.

MBR: You're welcome.