

Interview of Jamie Margolin by Rose Cassidy

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Jamie Margolin (she/her) is an artist and climate justice organizer studying film and television at New York University. Originally a co-founder of Zero Hour, a youth driven climate organizing group, she has since transitioned into making art and media that inspires climate justice and decolonial thinking through her projects with Pelea Animation. Jamie's worldview is informed by her hometown of Seattle as well as and Indigenous and South American organizers she has worked with in both Seattle and throughout the world.

ROSE CASSIDY: Jamie, thank you so much again for meeting with me today. I am super excited to hear more about your story for this archive. So, just to get started, could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and how that has informed you as a person?

JAMIE MARGOLIN: I grew up in Seattle, Washington on Duwamish land.¹ I was born in Valencia, California, but I moved to Seattle when I was two, so all of my memories are of growing up in the Pacific Northwest and that's played a huge role in my connection to land and nature and having that being very accessible. Seeing the impacts of the climate crisis and also having the beauty of the land and sort of what it was before being very obvious to me, so it made that feeling and knowledge, that something's wrong, that things are wrong, it made just a lot more obvious and I spent a lot of time growing up in different parks that were very much more wilderness than park, and the ocean, the Pacific ocean. I think that definitely played a big role in shaping me. So that's where I grew up.

CASSIDY: Awesome. Well, it's great to hear you talk about the Pacific Northwest with such love as a fellow Seattleite. So with the environment and where you grew up informing you, can you remember a specific moment when you feel like your work in activism started, or the first time that you felt called to act?

MARGOLIN: I think there were multiple times that I felt called to act. I didn't actually officially start acting on it in an effective way until I was 14, or what I thought was effective at the time. But I had the callings multiple times. I remember in second grade, I think I watched a documentary or something about the climate crisis and I tried to start a green club² at my school, so I made little pins that said "Green Club". I didn't know what that meant or how to do anything and I just handed them out and I was like "I don't know what to do next." It fizzled out and nothing happened. That was little second grade me. Also, I remember -- it's really sad because I don't think it's operating anymore, I think something happened with COVID³ -- my preschool teacher and kindergarten teacher -- I went to a Montessori school⁴ where my mom worked too so it was very much a community vibe -- took the class to Tillicum Village⁵, which is this island of Seattle that had a longhouse and cultural center. My teacher herself was Native American and she

¹ Native American tribe in what is now Seattle/King County whose land remains unrecognized

² Environmentally focused club

³ Global pandemic beginning in 2020

⁴ Style of teaching focused on child-led activities

⁵ Washington State Park on Blake Island

took the class to Tillicum Village to see a traditional performance with food and stories of Duwamish and Coast Salish cultures. I remember I was very young, but I remember at that point, it was very strange to me that something was here and now it didn't seem to be anymore. Obviously Indigenous cultures are still alive, but the thought of "wait a minute – this whole America thing, there's something suspicious about this." I remember reading all the Kaya American Girl Dolls ⁶ and being really obsessed because she was from the Pacific Northwest, and so I read the books and I was like "Woah, this is this area, this is what the area was like before colonization." I was like "wait a minute, that seems a whole lot better. I don't like this." It was a very rudimentary, kindergarten understanding of colonization. Reading American Girl Doll books of Kaya because I was a horse girl⁷ and I really liked that she had a horse. Then, as I read the books, I was really culturally intrigued and I found out that this land, I'm now a settler, an occupier on. I had learned about stuff like that in school, but seeing the cultural performances and getting more involved with the local community in Seattle -- I tried to go to Tillicum Village again, but they said that boats weren't running anymore, it was closed down or something. I think something happened with the storm and COVID. It's really sad because it was a great center. It awoken something in me and I think that it's done that for a lot of people, so I hope that they can get it back and running for however it serves the community best. Anyway, there were a lot of moments throughout where I started to question the country that I live in, the way that society works, its very existence. It's not that I mellowed out, but I guess the more electoral politics was thrown in my face in terms of the 2016 election, my mind briefly was less in decolonization mode and more in "oh god, we have to keep Trump out of office" mode. When I really started taking action was, when you could say that "that's when she started being an organizer", was the 2016 election to try and stop the election of Trump⁸. I was 14 years old and I was translating. I was the only Spanish speaker there. My heritage on my mother's side, I'm, Colombian, and on my father's side, I'm Ashkenazi Jewish-American. My mom is an immigrant from Colombia and my dad was born in California. That was the mixed household that I grew up in. The context for that is I'm a fluent Spanish speaker, so in the office there was hardly any Spanish speakers, so I would translate calls from people who didn't speak English for the office. I was also a general intern at the Democratic Campaign headquarters. Then once the election results came in, I transitioned more to environmental work and joined Climate Action Families⁹, which was then called Plant for the Planet, but has now transitioned to something else called Climate Action Families. That's when I started doing a lot of local climate justice organizing in Seattle and I really got my footing in that community and decided that this is what I'm going to continue working on and fighting for.

CASSIDY: Wow. Thank you so much for sharing that. Gosh, already in that short period of time, what an expansive view of your activism. You've talked about how, circling back to your experience of reading the American Girl Doll books and starting in your mind about learning

⁶ Toy doll brand and collection based on American historical eras

⁷ Reference to slang term "horse girl", meaning a young person who grew up fascinated by horses

⁸ Reference to 2016 election of Donald Trump

⁹ Intergenerational climate organizing group

about decolonization and understanding what that means, how has that developed over time, and how has that informed your activism and what you care about?

MARGOLIN: That's developed a lot. The Kaya books and my teacher -- who's still kind of a friend, it's a very tight knit community -- were like the first inklings of questioning the place that I stand on, the supposed society that lives here, is an invasive, in my opinion, illegitimate one and I had that feeling for a long time and I learned bits and pieces here in a history class or a documentary, but it was never properly covered. That side really started to open up more when I, to truly question and try to actively try to do that work, was when I joined the environmental justice movement, and because it's so interconnected with the work that the tribes in Washington do in protecting their land, because the tribes are such a fundamental part of the movements to stop new fossil fuel infrastructure, I would end up seeing more, being in rooms and spaces with more Colombian organizers. I met some folks who are South American who are teaching me about the Jemez organizing principles¹⁰ and decolonization. I grew up in a pretty white suburb. The education that I was getting, while it wasn't anything ridiculously right wing like the stuff that you're seeing in Florida, I was taught the general American mainstream narrative of the world and history. There wasn't anything that radical about my history books no matter how "woke" the schools claim to be. When I was truly getting the true education, it was through organizers that I met from South America and North America. When I started to see more folks at events talk about their experiences, the Lummi nation, the Puyallup tribe, the Duwamish Tribe¹¹, people who I would see at events. There would be totem pole ceremonies, things like that. A lot of climate events would have some sort of land acknowledgement and some folks from tribes giving an update. So I started to be more exposed to think of that worldview more, and then as I started national organizing with Zero Hour¹², we can get into Zero Hour later, that's only grown. Then, as I have learned more about my family's history on the colonization of South America, where my grandmother's people come from, why I speak Spanish and not the original language in Colombia -- well, there were many and there still are. Over the years and the more and more that I got involved in climate justice communities, the more that I met people from communities who were sharing their stories. I watched them on stage or I'd talk to them one-on-one and then we'd exchange contact info, I'd follow them, and I'd start to get more of their worldview. Over the years, I'd say I've radicalized more and more, but I don't think radicalized is the right term. It makes it sound like "Ooh, I'm so radical, so special." It's really more like awakened to the truth and how unaligned it is with the mainstream and being ok with being seen as radical, or "too much", or unrealistic, when I'm just prioritizing truth overall and understanding that the same ethnic cleansing that took place and is taking place on Turtle Island, Abya Yala, which is the Native name for South America, and all over the world is the same thing that's causing the climate crisis, the same thing that's causing all these other crises. Once I learned that the climate crisis is the everything crisis and that the same monster is at the root of all of it, my activism is less "Rah rah I love the earth, save the trees", which is yes, we love the Earth, all of that, and more like dismantle the systems destroying it as opposed to recycle.

¹⁰ Democratic organizing principles

¹¹ Native American Nations and Tribes in what is now known as Washington State

¹² Youth climate organizing group

Environmentalism became a lot less palatable to what the United States establishment wants us to view environmentalism as, and that's how I've progressed as a person, too.

CASSIDY: Yeah, definitely. I loved the way that you described climate justice and the environmental movement as an everything thing. That is truly what it is, that everything is interconnected, talking about dismantling systems, I think definitely threatens the US establishment. In that vein, this is a big question, but what would justice look like to you? What would a just world look like to you?

MARGOLIN: I think a just world would look like to me – I think this is really base-level stuff, but right now, as we are doing this interview, there's an ethnic cleansing happening in Palestine¹³ and that the USA is funding¹⁴ and founded by a country founded on ethnic cleansing, so I think it looks like a place where people have everything they need to live and are not murdered for who they are, do not have their land stolen, do not get pushed off of their own ancestral territories, where the people who love and take care of and have wisdom and ancient connections with the lands are allowed to return and be able to restore those ecosystems. That means in Palestine, that is also in what we consider Latin America, North America. Land Back is a way to summarize my political ideology. Not just ideology, but how I move through the world, and that scares people. I think there's a lot of white supremacist projection onto that, "oh, that means it's just reverse, flip side of the oppressor and the oppressed." But the goal is not to become the oppressor. Everybody can't "go back to where they came from." There's a lot of mixed people. You'd have to cut me into many pieces and ship me back to different places, you know what I mean. My dad, his Jewish folks come from what is now Ukraine. He can't go there, that's currently having the shit bombed out of it by Russia. I would really consult Native communities more on this than just me. I don't think I'm the right mouthpiece for it, but from my understanding and from what communities are saying and from just the movement, it's not about becoming the oppressor or the eviction notice for other people. A lot of people were brought to this land against their will, we're talking about the history of African American folks. You can't un-do or go backwards, but we can move forwards with justice for all, which means access for all, which means healthcare for all, which means a livable environment for all, which means cultural respect and rights for all. It's really basic, but unfortunately in this world, the basic threshold of people having what they need to survive is kind of where we're at right now, because a lot of people, way too many people, don't have that basic threshold of peace, livable environment, everything they need to survive and be healthy. So I think we need to start there.

CASSIDY: Wow. That's a really powerful vision, and it is disappointing to think that saying that people have these basic needs that need to be met and that being considered radical.

MARGOLIN: Yeah, or being seen as a threat, or "well, you're just a radical and you want to (insert whatever accusation or projection of something that has happened in the past)" that's been done by the systems in power. "Oh, you're just going to do the same thing we did to us" – the goal is not to, I'd say, to turn into the monster, but to fight it by being the alternative. That

¹³ Reference to the Israel-Palestine conflict that escalated beginning 10/7/2023

¹⁴ Reference to the US funding of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)

doesn't mean passivity, but that the world that we're building is just not the opposite of this world, but something entirely new, especially with the climate crisis. It's something that we need. Our world just physically can't be sustained on the current endless growth. It's essentially, the world has been turned into a Monopoly board¹⁵ and no one wins in Monopoly, you just play until everything becomes unaffordable, which is what is happening right now to our entire Earth. If you think about how Monopoly ends and how you win, there's no winning. And that's just what the world has become, so saying I'm an anti-capitalist, saying we should give as much land back to tribal and Indigenous communities as possible, we should uplift communities and make sure that everyone has what they need, all communities. That's not radical or woke or whatever people label it, that's just common sense because I don't want the world to collapse and I don't want people to die in horrible conditions. It's not as radical, it's more common sense to me, but I guess that common sense can be radical in the societies that we live in that are so inherently violent.

CASSIDY: On that note, of what you said as common sense being turned into radical, do you think that there's a way to have a cultural shift so that more people come to this agreement? How would you see that come to fruition?

MARGOLIN: I think honestly, I've gone to a lot of protests and people are saying "Palestine is freeing us", in the sense of, I think there is a shift happening already of people waking up to, like right now what's happening in Palestine, what's happening in Congo, what's happening in Sudan, what's happening to Black and Brown and disenfranchised poor people in this country and all over for a long time, is being brought to light and there's more and more people protesting, making art against it. I think a cultural shift happens first, and I think there is an awakening. If you just look at the way that people are questioning what they see, they're resisting, they're marching. Obviously marching can't be the only tactic, but actively blockading weapons shipments that are going out right now. Different things like that. There is an awakening, and there has been an awakening, and people have been awake long before me who have helped awaken me. Right now I'm studying film and TV and I really want to use animation and art to draw that awakening in other people about protecting land, every single person no matter what culture, no matter what whatever, we all depend on clean water, land, peace, livable society, clean air. Just fighting through these basic things for people and the systems that are actively killing us, there's ways that people are questioning things that previously weren't, questioning the whole narrative of settler colonialism, of America as the "good guys" and the world police that everyone needs to save the day, questioning the police, questioning just everything, questioning why do some people have nothing –it's getting colder outside, sleeping on grates. I just passed a guy sleeping over a grate in the cold, in the winter, and then there's a place called Billionaire Row, -- I'm in New York City right now – that's just empty high rises. There's empty luxury apartments and there's homeless people on the streets, you know what I mean. It just doesn't make sense and there's so many artists and thinkers and activists who are calling attention to this and I do think that there is an awakening, but I do think it needs to happen faster and it does need to be more.

¹⁵ Board game

CASSIDY: Wow. Again, I keep saying wow, but that is my genuine reaction. It gives me hope to hear you talk about this cultural awakening, also it does feel like a call to action, to be like “How do we make this happen faster?” What are things that you have done and the people around you have done to promote this awakening, or things that you think people can do to make it happen faster or more effectively?

MARGOLIN: So what was your question again?

CASSIDY: So, my question was – now I have time to rephrase it – how do you or other organizers that you know – what are ways that you are making this awakening happen and what are ways that it can be made faster or more effectively?

MARGOLIN: I think for me personally, I’m trying to make art and media that really encourages that, but it can’t just be through the art and media. I think it’s also through more actions and mobilizations, but not just marches, a lot of different, more creative mobilizations and community building. There are so many different tactics that have to be used. It can’t just be one tactics, so it’s like “Oh, if we all mobilize and do this it’ll be all perfect and we’ll have convinced everyone.” I think it’s just everyone doing what they can in whatever sectors of life and influence that they have and also the more people that come out and show that having this political awareness and understanding and fighting back is ok. People don’t like to be isolated, people don’t like to be alone, people generally have a herd instinct, so if more and more people are showing you that it’s comfortable and ok and in fact encouraging you to question things and open your eyes to other ways of seeing and being and interacting with the world, I think that allows the transition to happen faster. I obviously would like to make it happen a lot faster and I’m frustrated. I get the feeling that I’m not doing enough or that I’m not working fast enough or smart enough or that there’s something that I’m missing, there’s some puzzle piece, something that I can move or some strategy that I’m not seeing. I don’t have the answers, but I think it takes everyone doing what they can. This isn’t a one person, individualistic effort, this is going to be everyone sort of unplugging each other. If we’re going to use “The Matrix”¹⁶ – I know that’s a very cheesy, overused allegory. A lot of people use in terrible ways, you know. They’ll be like “Unplug from the Matrix, don’t get vaccinated” and you’re like “No, no, no, not that way! That’s not what I was saying.” Do get vaccinated. I mean unplug from the colonial Matrix and the Matrix of white supremacy. That’s the air that we breathe. You know the saying, you can tell a fish something about water and it’s like “What’s water?” because it’s just the reality. Most of us growing up in the United States and are given a very mainstream education, that sort of worldview, the general capitalist understanding of the world, the extractivist understanding of the world, the non-questioning, “Yay America is a country, these are our presidents, the military is cool, etc”, none of which I believe in. What’s considered mainstream is what most of us are sort of injected with at birth, via default growing up in this society, so it does take a lot of unlearning and I’m not claiming to be some sort of “Woker-than-thou, I know all the things”. Obviously, I’m breathing the same air. I’m still on a journey of unplugging and understanding myself, that the more that they’ll understand that something’s wrong, that our country can afford to drop Hiroshima levels of bombs on a tiny little strip of land across the ocean, but you don’t have

¹⁶ Science fiction film

health care and you're not housed and you don't have the food access etc. The disparities of people working so hard, working to the bone, the military being able to finance a massacre at the snap of their fingers like that and mobilize so quickly to kill. But any mobilization to save lives, whether it be from gun violence, whether it be saving our planet for ourselves to just survive on, then suddenly, it's too expensive. We can't do it, it's too hard. But when it comes to mobilizing for any sort of war project or -- it's not even fair to call what's happening in that war. It's just any sort of military operation, ethnic cleansing, overthrowing, you know, it's not just Palestine, it's all over, all over the world, you know, if you need your democratically elected, progressive leader overthrown, we got you, as in the United States. But if you need health care, I don't know, "Be rich or die", you know, so just questioning that is, I think, the bare minimum that we should do.

CASSIDY: You used a lot of very powerful metaphors. I think especially what was powerful about what you said about mobilization to save lives versus the mobilization to kill and what does that say about what we say our country's values are, what they really are in practice, what do most people want out of life versus what they are given or what is produced by our current systems? To speak about your own personal journey, I want to circle back to Zero Hour. I'd love for you to speak on Zero Hour and then also how you have grown as an activist from that experience and where you are now.

MARGOLIN: Picking back up when I was 15, I had turned 15, I was doing a lot of local community organizing work in the Pacific Northwest area. I've been doing that for about a year and I was doing a lot of lobbying. At the time I was thinking like, "Oh, Democrat equals good". That means that they are pro saving life on Earth. So that's great. So then I'd go lobby with other folks for different common sense climate policy. I joined the Youth v. Gov lawsuit in Washington State¹⁷, suing the state of Washington for a livable environment, of the right that we have the right to clean air, clean water, livable future for all. It was just a lot of lip service and a lot of doing a lot of work to run into walls from people who are supposedly on your side. And so when I realized that in the supposedly progressive state of Washington, in my super progressive hub of Seattle, things were still not getting done, and in fact, the opposite of not getting done, the fossil fuel industry was continuing to go ahead. These new projects, this new fossil fuel infrastructure was continuing to be built. These communities were continuing to be extracted from. So it's like, "Wait a minute, this is bigger". And around this time, this was 2017, so the Women's March¹⁸ had happened, and so big marches and mass mobilizations were on my mind. And I thought, "What if we had a mass mobilization of young people marching for a livable future?" It was the summer of 2017 where I joined, I posted something online. It didn't go mega viral or anything. It was literally seen by 20 people, but one of them was Nadia Nazar¹⁹, who is the co-founder of Zero Hour, and then Madelaine Tew²⁰ and Zanagee Artis²¹, who I met at this summer camp that I was at in 2017. And so we formed Zero Hour, because there's zero hours left to act on the climate

¹⁷ Lawsuit that was a part of a greater movement of youth suing their governments on the basis of climate injustice and unlivable futures

¹⁸ Worldwide protest and march in 2017 prompted by the election of Donald Trump as US president

¹⁹ Co-founder of Zero Hour, climate justice activist

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

crisis, and our goal was to organize a youth climate march in Washington DC on, and we did -- over the course of a year-- we built the organization, we learned from older mentors in the climate movement -- shout out to Natalie Mebane²² who still helps around the org -- so it became intergenerational in that sense, and we organized a march in Washington DC on July 21st of 2018. It was pouring rain that day, but people still came out, people still marched. A couple of days before that, we had a big lobby day. That was where we delivered our demands of why we were marching. We let them know that we were going to be marching and we called for no fossil fuel money in our government and other demands, and we handed them our zero hour platform, which is still on the Zero Hour website, thisiszerohour.org if people want to read the platform of the movement. We also had an art builds and festival to prepare for the march. People made signs, and then after the march, around the same time, there were also a lot of sister marches, so there were mobilizations happening all over the world, and then soon after that, the school strike for climate movement²³ started, and then there was more, the momentum for the climate movement grew and grew and we were continuing to do what we could. But over time, and as I got older and became an older teenager and was doing more work and getting invited to more conferences and Zero Hour got a little bit more notoriety and the movement got some notoriety it began to get really co-opted and now COP28²⁴ is being hosted by a literal fossil fuel mogul²⁵. If someone like the fossil fuel industry is literally running the climate talks -- they're not climate talks. They're just fossil fuel trade shows where some activists go try to do their best, but then it's really just like talking to a wall. Politicians will say "Yeah, climate action!" and then approve new fossil fuel infrastructure left and right. So now fast forward to where I am now, I'm no longer executive director of the organization. I stepped down right before college because I was starting college, the pandemic had been going on and I knew that the transition from being a high school organizer to going to film school here at NYU²⁶ is going to be taking up a lot more of my time. So I'm still involved with Zero Hour, I still organize, I still march alongside them. Zero Hour is still going strong. One of the co-founders, Zanagee Artis, is currently the executive director, so that's still my family, much love to them. I'll show up when Zero Hour has an action and stuff like that, but I just don't run the daily, day-to-day operations anymore because I'm currently I'm a senior in college and I'm also starting Pelea Animation²⁷, an animation studios that tells the stories to sort of help unplug people and be the cultural change part of what needs to happen in the cultural shift, so I'm really shifting more to focusing on art, trying to have the freedom to create the animations that I want to create as opposed to just fulfilling something for a studio that wouldn't let me, you know, tell the stories as radical, AKA true as I would want them to be, so I'm working on that and really like animation and using art and those mediums to help people understand and get them to see that the reasons that our suffering are all connected and that there's something they can do about it and to really rise up. And "pelea" means fight in Spanish, so like "fight" animation. We're working on our first film right now, just grassroots

²² Sustainability and policy expert, lobbyist

²³ Movement of youth striking and leaving school for climate justice

²⁴ 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference

²⁵ Reference to Sultan Al Jaber, head of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company

²⁶ New York University

²⁷ Independent animation studio

people from mostly Latin America, but from all over. That's what I'm working on right now. Right after this, I have to go meet with my advisor. I still have time to sign up for my last semester of classes, and then once I graduate, I'm going to just start working, I guess I won't be a student organizer anymore. I'll just be a person in the world doing things. I'm going to keep doing what I can organizing, especially with the front lines. I've met with a lot of Amazon defenders²⁸ and just people who are defending their land from extraction and I've become really inspired and motivated and radicalized by meeting with and connecting with those on the front lines, so just going forward, that's the work I want to do, especially with how disillusioned I've become with just the corporate climate co-optation and just in general, the way that you can essentially say "Drill oil for the climate" and that'll be like climate activism. You know, you can literally call anything climate justice at this point. It's lost all meaning. You get a corporation that's literally at the forefront of causing this, they can run ads, it's like nothing means anything, whatever. But the real work is the same resistance that has been going on for over 500 years. There are places that still haven't been destroyed, but are being destroyed that need to be protected. There is infrastructure that's being built that needs to be halted. There are new projects that will sink us further into just the problems that we have, climate crisis, et cetera, if we don't stop it, and there are communities just fighting the fight day in and day out. They don't choose to be activists. It's not like they decide or they're just born into a struggle and they don't really, a lot of these people don't even identify as activists. It's just their living and unfortunately their life comes with this constant fight because extraction is always happening, and so ending that and really trying to work to uplift and amplify the messages and worldviews of those folks who I feel like are the real solution in a world where there's a lot of co-optation. There's also just a lot of, you know, like Joe Biden says, "Yeah, climate action" and then approves the Willow Project²⁹ and the Mountain Valley pipeline³⁰ and is now full on being genocide Joe with Palestine. So it's just "progressive good" speeches and statements politicians make, they end up walking back or just doing the exact opposite of what they promised, so the real solutions lie with communities and that's what I want to do moving forward is working with communities and making art that ties in with real causes and using that to amplify and awaken people and get more people plugged into this fight and, and unplugged from the things that are making people suffer all over the world.

CASSIDY: It's a very powerful transformation and trajectory that you've been on. First of all, thank you so much for sharing so much of your story about going from Zero Hour to where you are now and talking about Pelea and also what you're looking for in the future. I just want to ask, what gives you hope and what are the people or things that inspire you and what keeps you afloat?

MARGOLIN: It's really the other people like my community, the people, chosen family you know what I mean -- the people that I work with, the people that I march alongside and then hang out with the next day, the people who, you know, will be out here in the streets with the megaphone shouting "Free Palestine", and then we'll be back and then we'll be taking care of

²⁸ Reference to people who defend the Amazon rainforest

²⁹ Oil drilling project on Alaska's North Slope run by ConocoPhillips energy company

³⁰ Natural gas pipeline from West Virginia to Virginia

each other, watching TV shows, making sure we eat. Those friends, those other people, both people who live close by, like right now the folks that I know in the New York organizing community and those further out who I know in Colombia and the Amazon just in all sorts of different places, just knowing that they're out there, knowing that they're fighting, seeing what they do and seeing their courage and the way that they've been, you know, continuing the struggle and it motivates me when I get tired or inspires me or teaches me new things. It's hard to really find hope right now in any of our political systems. Right now something that's been a blow to me, a disappointment has been the way Bernie Sanders³¹ has been happening, what's been going on in Gaza and I worked for his camp, I was a delegate for his campaign in 2020 and so I was very much like "Okay we just have to elect the most progressive." They censored Rashida Tlaib³², the only Palestinian American congresswoman. Then basically Biden, Trump and Bernie have the same take on Gaza, essentially, I think to the people on the ground, they're having bombs dropped over their head. It's not like, "Oh, this is funded by Democrats versus Republicans." What progress, lesser of two evils, that whole thing -- I'm getting really fed up with that. So it's really hard to find hope in even the politicians who are supposedly supposed to be our heroes, who are hailed as great progressive icons can't stand up to genocide and ethnic cleansing and I think what's happening right now as they speak, it's very much at the top of my mind because it's not just about that region, it's very much about the systems. It's, yes, people, it is about that region, but it's also so much more because that stuff happens and has been happening throughout history and is why we are where we are today, and so seeing history repeat itself and seeing the supposedly progressive heroes, some of which I really admired, fall painfully short and in the right response is making me realize that like a lot of my hope is with community and with the people who really have my back and I have theirs. I feel like there's a lot of idols falling or a lot of people's worldviews are being transformed and opened and there's just a lot of pain happening, so it's hard to pretend like I'm just so fine and full of hope. No, every day is difficult. I feel like it's only human to feel some sort of despair, but I'd say it's the people. I know that's a very cheesy response. It's like the real movement is the "friends we made along the way"³³. I don't know, the movies are right in terms of love and the people that you love and fight alongside of and your community and your friends are what keeps you going. In terms of, I guess "the friends we've made along the way".

CASSIDY: Well, thank you for your honesty, both about hope and despair. I really do think that community and love really are at the heart of everything. Art is a reflection of that, and it is a reflection of your desires in that way. Art also does keep me going. That is awesome. And it's so cool to hear about what you're doing with animation. I want to respect your time. As we wrap up this interview is there any other final thoughts that you would like to share anything that you want to say for the record? Any other final thoughts to share for the record?

MARGOLIN: I guess. There's especially the whole youth activist, youth changemaker phenomena thing was and still is definitely -- it's a phenomenon. There's an obsession with

³¹ American senator and former presidential candidate

³² US Representative from Michigan

³³ Reference to how a popular ending to fantasy/adventure stories is that the true treasure was "the friends we made along the way"

prodigy and child stars in general, and so obviously, I'm not saying it's the same as like a mainstream child star, but there is some level of, I don't know, but the whole "the youth will save the world thing and the whole "look at these inspiring youth climate activists! That's so cool." On one hand, I am proud of young people standing up and that was and is me. I can't be like, "as an old lady". I am 21. I'm not far from my youth, I am still in it, but just more of the later stages. I think that the emphasis with like achievement, prodigy, just the commodification of "Wow, inspirational activists" can sort of cloud from the real mission, which is building together and community people of all ages and solving the problems that we're up against. There's a lot of distractions. The more that something becomes popular, for example, climate justice, that's something that's really popular. The more that that language and that symbolism is just used to continue selling products and keeping us on the path to destruction where we are on and without actually solving things. I'm proud of the work I've done, but I'm also sometimes like, "Oh, God, I helped create a monster" you know, in the sense of the whole youth climate phenomenon and how that sort of turned out and what it's become. Not saying it's all bad and not like trying to crap on the great work being done, but it just feels like there's been all this press and all this attention and all of this like "Oh, wow, the climate movement, the youth climate movement. Look at these marches, look at these mobilizations that we're doing." But when I look at the state of the world, I'm still like, how much are we actually changing? I didn't sign up for a pageant show. This isn't pageantry. We're trying to actually move the needle and sometimes it just feels like all of these events and conferences, they just feel like a weird pageant where everyone who's already on the same page congratulate each other they hand each other awards, applauds each other calls each other inspiring and prodigies and etc. depending on how young, and then we go along their merry day and lose more fights, so I just feel like there needs to be a lot more strategy momentum, like imagine if all those people who are just marching in the streets are instead also blocking pipelines. If we had the same amount of people who would go to, I don't know, a COP28 they're stopping the Mountain Valley pipeline. How much more effective would that be? Then we all fly out to a conference and sip fancy champagnes and are like, "Yes, climate action" -- not saying that there isn't a place for conferences and meetups and all of that. But I've just, I've been to enough of these things. I've actually never been to a COP, but I've known enough people who have and I've seen the results and I'm like, "I'm good". But enough conferences and enough sort of these events, enough extended period of time and seeing the fights get lost, seeing things get worse, seeing people on the front lines express frustration. If we could have that level of people, that level of funding or amount of people on the ground or like something to the level of Standing Rock, but that level of mobilization happening more often where people are actively blockading things actively getting in the way of actively disrupting the status quo instead of doing a pageant about how the status quo is bad. That's what I'm thinking -- there needs to be a lot of shifts in strategy and over the years I've sort of been to enough of these things and sort of been in that world for long enough that there has to be a shift because we are running out of time and I don't know, it doesn't seem to be working. Maybe I'm just impatient and cynical, or maybe I haven't been in this long enough, but those are my observations of where the movement is at now and where it could go.

CASSIDY: Thank you for sharing that. I'm not really sure what to say, except for thank you. And I think you bring a lot of wisdom and insightfulness, especially about the pageantry aspect of youth activism, and I want to thank you for bringing that to the table, thank you for your honesty.

MARGOLIN: One more thing to add. It's not so much the youth's fault. I've been a 17-year-old excited to be in these big spaces. Like, "Wow, this is so cool. People are listening to me." I get it. I really do. It's not I'm not trying to trying to hate on the people who are just sort of trying to do what they can, it's more of this system that it takes advantage of people, and also just the general nonprofit industrial complex of it all, that takes a lot of well-meaning people with well-meaning aspirations and who are really trying to make a change. But then what you're doing is just, you're just fundraising to keep the office open to fundraise, to keep the office open, to fundraise, to keep your office open, to keep the status quo going, and then you haven't actually changed much. Not saying that all nonprofits are bad, obviously – Zero Hour is a nonprofit and there's so many great nonprofits out there, but the general nonprofit industrial complex, the general way that activism, do-gooding, is essentially its own industry now, and there's awards for it, there's all this stuff, there's a lot to be gained from being perceived as someone who is doing well, doing good for the world. There's just a lot of like new nonprofits popping up, you know, how do you know what's actually fighting for folks? Are you just starting a nonprofit just to say that you started a nonprofit? There's so there's so much of that, that I always want to straddle the line. I'm not trying to be a hater or trying to discourage people from taking action or crap on people for doing their best. It's no bad intentions. I see and I've seen and I've been the person with good intentions for the world, sort of been caught up in just the general rigor, morale, the day to day of the nonprofit world. And then you look around and you're like, "Wait a minute, what have I actually changed? Am I just now just a part of an industry?" So that's just something to think about.

CASSIDY: Right. That's a very nuanced perspective that I feel like gets lost and I really appreciate you bringing that up because I think there is this kind of the stratification of like, "Oh, you're part of this industry or you're not part of this industry" and there's just a lack of nuance in general. And I really appreciate the way that you spoke about that with such love and care and also insight. Thank you.

MARGOLIN: There's so many people who are on the front lines, who don't consider themselves activists, who don't think of themselves as activists, -- there are people from communities who don't live as it in their minds. They're not like, "I'm an activist", but just simply because of where they're born and the resources that they happen to be born on top of and the interests that want to take said resources from under their feet, their whole community and then they end up Probably literally being more crucial to the actual fight. 80 percent of the world's biodiversity is protected by Indigenous and tribal local communities, and a lot of these people, some of them are going to conferences and openly talking about, you know, activism out there. There's a lot of spokespeople and it's great, the work that they do, but some of the people on the ground don't even think of themselves as activists, didn't make that choice are just, like I said, they are just born into circumstances and their community happens to be in situated in a position where they're land defenders and that's who they are. Simply existing on the land that they do and upholding their cultures and maybe they don't see that as activism, but the whole world benefits,

you know, from the people protecting the Amazon and other places like that. So, you know, there's so many different ways to make a change and there's so many people out there who are really holding the line who maybe don't even use the term activism or view themselves in that light, but are doing the work.

CASSIDY: That is a very good point, in that there's so much work that isn't recognized or that is just simply going on around us, as you said, out of necessity, out of the cards that people were dealt and how that is essential to our ecosystem and people's wellbeing, so thank you for bringing that up. Well, I don't want to take up more of your time, but I really want to thank you for your story, for trusting us with your story, and if there's anything else that you'd like to add, or if you have to run, that's totally fine. But I just really want to emphasize: thank you.

MARGOLIN: Thanks, and I appreciate you reaching out and thanks for the last-minute scheduling thing. I'm serving school realness. This is very much my "I'm in the lounge moving when people are talking" look, so the under eyes are serving. But anyway, it's authentic. That sounds good. Thank you so much. I appreciate it, and let me know if you need anything else on my end and I'll keep up with the emails, I'll sign the consent form. Thanks for this interview. I think I've got to go to my advising meeting, but thank you so much.

CASSIDY: Good luck! And thank you so much.

MARGOLIN: All right. Have a good day.

CASSIDY: Bye, you too!

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