Nobel Voices Video History Project, 2000-2001

Interviewee: Jody Williams
Interviewer: Neil Hollander
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HOLLANDER:

If you could introduce yourself and tell us who you are and what you do.

WILLIAMS:

[Laughs] I feel like I'm in church, you know, and you're supposed to be very dignified and—

HOLLANDER:

No, you don't have to be dignified.

WILLIAMS:

I'm not dignified. Of course I'm dignified. But my name is Jody Williams. I mean, come on. That is so funny. My name is Jody Williams, and I won the Nobel Peace Prize. [Laughs] What more do you want me to say about me? I don't like to talk about me. I like to talk about work.

HOLLANDER:

Well, we can talk a little bit about you first.

WILLIAMS:

Oh, how boring.

HOLLANDER:

We want to know why you won a Prize.

WILLIAMS:

Well, all right, I'll try to be mature here. Well, I won't be too mature, although I just turned fifty. I just turned fifty on October ninth. It's my fiftieth birthday. Well-

preserved, huh? [Laughs] We have good genes in my family.

Anyway, in 1997, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and myself were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I certainly am pleased that I was individually recognized. I was the founding coordinator of the campaign, but as I say when I talk to people all over the world, young people, presidents, it doesn't matter who, when you look at me, through my face you should imagine thousands of people around the world who have worked together to try to deal with this problem.
You know, the Peace Prize is not about Jody Williams; it's about me and other people working together to change the world.

HOLLANDER:

How did you get into this position where you decided "What I'm going to do with my life is I'm going to try to change the world," instead of being a plumber?

WILLIAMS:

Good god. Plumbing can change the world. Have you ever had your septic tank freeze in the winter? I have. [Laughs] You've got to dig it up. It's horrible. Let me tell you.

You know, those are hard questions that are often asked. I was actually a psychology major in a previous life. Who knows why one actually chooses the road one chooses. I think that I've been very fortunate in life, because I did have a choice. I recognized, for whatever reason, quite young, that I wanted to do life a little bit differently, that I didn't want to just grow up to be a teacher or a nurse, the two things that when I was a kid you most often thought of for women to do. My mother had wanted to be a nurse. My sister is a nurse.

I was a teacher briefly. But it didn't feel right. I wanted to do something different. I didn't know what that something was. I just knew that I wanted my life to be different from how my parents' life was, not that I don't adore my parents, and they've been wonderfully supportive. But I didn't want to get married and have two children and, you know, the white picket fence and that lifestyle. It wasn't for me.

I think part of it is my older brother. My oldest brother was born deaf in 1947, which I know for young people is a million years ago. But he was born deaf at a time where the philosophy of educating the deaf was to force them into the hearing world. They didn't allow families to learn signs so they could communicate with the child, and my brother is stone-deaf. And kids made fun of him because he couldn't communicate. So I grew up defending him. I was his—you know, the voice he didn't have. It's just because you defend family. You defend people you love.

After a point, my brother developed schizophrenia, which obviously made the whole deaf problem that much more dramatic. At some point in life, I think, for me, it was

impossible to—quote, unquote—"save" my brother. You can't save a deaf schizophrenic, so I decided to save people out there in the world who had less emotional impact on me personally. It's one side of the coin. You know, if you start defending and speaking for one vulnerable person, why would you not want to speak for other vulnerable people?

I remember an incident in fourth grade. I consider it as formative as my brother. There was a new little boy in fourth grade whose name was Michael Fine, which I'm amazed I remember, since I remember so few names. This was in Brattleboro, Vermont, a tiny town of 13,000 people, and Michael came to fourth grade. He was geeky, you know, just your total geek kid, big ears, crooked glasses, you know, just couldn't walk a straight line. I mean, he was totally uncoordinated.

During recess, he came outside to play kickball, and we had David Jeever [phonetic], you know the big, strong—you'll excuse the expression—stud of fourth grade, if you can have a stud in fourth grade. David Jeever was the blond-haired, blue-eyed, smart, physically, you know, fit, and he ruled. You know, he rocked, he rolled, he ruled in the recess period. And he wouldn't let Michael Fine play kickball, because Michael was a geek. And I remember trembling with rage, you know, like "Who are you, David Jeever, to say Michael Fine can't play kickball? So what he's a geek? How's he going to learn not to be a geek if you don't let him kick the damned ball?"

I was terrified to confront David because I was a really quiet and obedient child. My mother considers that my downfall was college, psychology, the sixties. It's probably partly true. But I was a quiet kid, afraid of authority in fourth grade, but I just couldn't tolerate the fact that David was being mean to Michael Fine. So I stood up to him and said, "You know, no way you can decide that Michael Fine can't play. He's going to play." And he backed down, "he" being the fourth grade stud, David Jeever. And Michael Fine played, badly, but he played.

The feeling that you get from standing up to your own fear, you know, it felt so wonderful to deal with David Jeever, even though I was terrified to do it, and then have success and have Michael Fine have the right to do what he wanted to do, then you just—the next time you feel fear, you work through it and you confront it and you do what you think is right. I think that those little incidents were the real formation of my belief that no matter what it costs, you have to do what you believe is right, or how can you live with yourself?

HOLLANDER:

Do you remember the first time you defended your brother?

WILLIAMS:

Yes, yes. We were born in an even smaller town in Vermont, the town of Poultney, P-O-

U-L-T-N-E-Y. Who's ever heard of it? I think at that time it had about 1,200 people in it, really tiny. My father owned the town grocery store. My grandfather owned the town printing press.

We were riding bicycles by a hill at the end of our street, and there were kids on the hill, and they threw tin cans down and hit my brother in the head and cut his head open. I remember, you know, getting off the bicycle and screaming at them. I mean, it wasn't a very effective intervention on my part, but you know, shouting my rage. And, you know, he ended up with stitches and he survived. But it was a very unpleasant, you know, how evil kids could be to each other, people, you know.

I take a Manichean view of the world, you know, the big struggle between good and evil. It's so much easier to give in to the negative. I mean, look at World War II. It takes a lot of strength to stand up and say no. It's a lot easier to just be quiet and, you know, let things take their course and hope they turn out okay, instead of standing up and making sure they turn out okay.

HOLLANDER:

Do you think it is getting more and more difficult or more easy to do this?

WILLIAMS:

To stand up and do the right thing? For me, it's easy. Individually in the world, I think people—I think kids are overwhelmed with there's so much information in the world today. You know, it's so different from how we were when we were kids, you know. We saw the *Howdy-Doody Show*, you know, *Walt Disney World*. There wasn't MTV and, you know, all those—I didn't know about girls in bikinis till I was like fifteen, for god's sake, you know, to say nothing about what kids see on television today. I find that kind of horrifying, myself.

And the language, even though I have colorful language myself, I think there are times and places to use it. I think that not just kids, I think that people are overwhelmed. You know, there's so much. Look at Africa, look at Asia, look at the Middle East now, poverty, inequality. So often when I speak, people say, you know, "What can I do?" I think we make the biggest difference in life when we do something that matters to us. It doesn't matter what it is, just be the best at what you care about.

You know, I think people think if they can't be a full-time activist, you know, if they can't work all the time for change, then why bother at all? I don't subscribe to that at all. Some of the most impressive people to me in the landmine work I've done are people who give a little bit when they have the chance, but they still lead their—quote, unquote—"normal life."

An example of some people in Canada. About a year ago, I got a call from a classical

musician in Canada. I think it was November. He called me and he said, "In two weeks, we're launching a CD." What was it? Verde's *Requim*. "When we were in Prague, we taped it, and we're now going to launch it. Every penny that we raise from that CD, we're going to donate to mine victims. We're going to launch it with a concert in Canada. Can you come?"

Normally, my schedule is a little full so that, you know, with two weeks' notice I can't go running off to Canada, but I was so impressed that these musicians did this on their own. Nobody contacted them. Nobody asked them. They saw this problem. They found a way within their own life, within their own work context, to make a difference. So I decided to go. And it was, I have to say, awesome. It was sold out, 2,000 seats sold out, and the musicians, the singers just donating their time.

HOLLANDER:

I'm fifteen. [inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

I would ask you, what do you care about? Are you a young girl? Do you care that women should have the same opportunity as men? Are you a minority group in the States that's having a hard time? Do you care about poverty? Do you care about better education? Do you care about daycare? Be a mentor. You know, if you care about education, help other kids who don't have the advantages you do. If you care about gender equality, either form a students' group and educate in your own school or go join a group that already exists.

One thing that amazes me around the world, is people when they're talking to me will say, "I want to start a group to deal with X, Y, or Z." In 99.9 percent of the time, a group dealing with X, Y, or Z already exists. So go join it. You know, I'm a little amazed sometimes that people think they have to start their own. You don't have to start your own. Find out who's doing work on things you care about, and go see if you fit in. If you don't, at least use the group to learn, and then do it your own way.

HOLLANDER:

Let me jump to a totally different subject. What about the Nobel? What do you think the Nobel means?

WILLIAMS:

Let me talk to you just a little about the campaign.

HOLLANDER:

Don't forget, I'm fifteen.

WILLIAMS:

Let me talk to you a little bit about the campaign and why we care. There are kids all over the world who every single day of their life have to worry about getting their leg blown off when they walk out their front door. Can you imagine? You're here in Washington, D.C. Can you imagine if you're walking around the museum, if you want to go from this museum over to the Washington Monument, and every step you take, you have to worry about getting your leg blown off? We're very fortunate in our country that we don't have to worry about that, but in seventy countries around the world, kids every single day have to worry when they walk out to get water or food for their family, when they walk the cattle out to feed the cattle, that they're going to lose a leg. Imagine that.

I've talked to kids all over the U.S. about this and get some amazing letters from them. "I live in Maine. I can't imagine that I would have to walk to school and every single day worry that my leg is going to get blown off. I want to do something to help other kids. I want my country to be part of this movement to get rid of this weapon."

We understood this problem, "we" being the thousands of people, including kids, all over the world who came together to deal with this problem. We didn't know what the outcome would be. When I was asked in 1991 if I wanted to see about the possibility of creating awareness, making people understand about the problem, and finding a way to get governments to work with us to resolve the problem, I thought, "Wow! What a wonderful thing to do." I don't know what we will accomplish with this campaign to ban landmines. I do know we can make a difference in the lives of people around the world, and that's what counts.

So we started it because we knew it was the right thing to do. Ultimately, we formed one of the most dramatic partnerships between people and governments that has ever existed, created a treaty to get rid of this weapon, we're taking the mines out of the ground, we're making lives better every single day around the world. That is the real prize.

The prize, if you will, for this campaign, the greatest achievement of this campaign, was the day we negotiated that treaty and governments said, "Yes, we accept what you want, and we're going to do what civil society—we're going to do what Jody Williams and Steve Goose and Mary Warham [phonetic] and Marissa Wogeena [phonetic] from Africa and Toon Chongora [phonetic] from Cambodia. All you guys have pushed us and pushed us, and actually we're going to listen and we're going to make a treaty and we're going to get rid of this weapon." We cheered and cheered and cheered that day. It was awesome. That's the prize.

The Nobel Peace Prize is a wonderful, wonderful award. Obviously, it's supposedly the most prestigious award in the world. I'm thrilled that they recognized me and the work that we have all done for this campaign. But it's not the prize. The prize is that we did

good to make life better for other people. The Prize has helped us make our message stronger. It gives us access now to presidents when we used to have to meet, you know, the second cousin twice removed of, you know, the secretary of the vice president or something. Now we can go anywhere in the world and meet with whomever we wish. That's certainly helpful, obviously.

But I'm still me. I still vacuum my own house. I dust my own house. I go to the grocery store. I shop, I cook, I clean the cat box. I know I do good work. I haven't changed. The Peace Prize has given me new access. It's excellent. But I'm still me.

HOLLANDER:

Do you consider yourself a creative person?

WILLIAMS:

Yes, I like to write poetry. I've written a novel. I haven't dealt with it yet, but, yes, I think I'm multi-talented. [Laughs]

HOLLANDER:

Creative in the sense of finding new strategies to put people together?

WILLIAMS:

Sure. Sure. We put together a campaign where nothing existed. We created what is now being called citizen diplomacy. We created what is, you know, being called the new superpower in the post-cold war period, you know. We're civil society, which is such a big word. All it means is people like you and me. Civil society, people like you and me, actually dialogue with governments, people we elect to do what we want. We dialogue with them, we work with them to bring about the change we want to see happen in the world.

You know, government—it blows me away. Government isn't something I vote now and then suddenly government is not part of me. You know, those people are being paid to do what I want them to do, and it's my right and my responsibility to be involved. If you want the world to be a better place, you can't just sit back and whine about, "Oh, my god, how come the schools in my neighborhood are so rotten? How come people are mean to, you know, Latinos and Asians?" If you don't want them to be mean, go out and talk to them about being different. If you want your school to be a better place, get off your butt and go and work to make it a better place. If you really care, you work to bring about change. Change doesn't happen just because you want it to happen. Change happens because you work for it.

HOLLANDER:

What I'm trying to get at is do you think in the way that you've been working for change, with landmines, that you've developed and you've created new strategies for, different means of approach for, in that [inaudible]?

WILLIAMS:

Well, when the Nobel committee awarded us the Prize, what was their statement, something like "for making reality of a vision," and that vision was an international treaty banning landmines, but also "for creating a new model of cooperation between civil society," people like you and me, "and governments, to bring about change in a very rapid way." That had not been done before. Generally, you know, we see governments as our adversary. They see us as the adversary. This is really innovative, in that we sit down and meet with them and plan strategies together. We're in the negotiating room.

That doesn't happen, generally, and they don't want to see it happen again, by the way. But they thought we were creative, and they want to confine that creativity to landmines only. I mean, part of when I speak, this isn't just about landmines. I mean, obviously landmines are horrific, and what we've done will have a huge impact on that problem. But for me, it's much bigger than landmines. It's about any individual, any person in the world, can do something to make the world a different kind of place. Better is a, you know—one can use the word *better*, but different. Anybody can.

Who would have thought—when I started the landmine campaign as the coordinator, I was the only person in the world working to create a campaign to ban landmines. And look, we went from that to 1,400 organizations in ninety countries working together on this issue in five years. Anybody can bring about change if you work for it. It's just working for it. Change is hard work, but it's fun. [Laughs] It is fun.

HOLLANDER:

I know you've been asked this many times, but why when you were the only person working on it, why did you step into this role? What brought you into that role?

WILLIAMS:

I went to college during the sixties, late sixties and seventies, during the Vietnam War. I know for most kids today, Vietnam is something, you know, they study in civics or whatever they call it these days in high school. You know, it's a history, a point in history. It has nothing to do with them. But it had everything to do with my generation. Vietnam marked the whole thinking of people my age, the baby boomers, you know. You were either for the war or against it, but it did mark how you think. You look at some of the politicians today who were against the war, and that marks how they—

[Taping interruption]

HOLLANDER:

What was it exactly that brought you to landmines? Why did you step into this role and not confront hunger or any of a dozen other things?

WILLIAMS:

I went to college during the Vietnam War. It marked my life. I was there at a time when the draft shifted to—do you remember when they put everybody's birthday in a fishbowl and pulled it out? My boyfriend at the time was number five, which meant, obviously, he was going to be going. He managed to find a way not to go. But I mean, that shakes you, you know. I was at the University of Vermont then, hardly a hotbed of activity, like some of the other schools, but we did do things. We mobilized and went down to the state capitol and, you know, went in to the legislature and ranted that they should be doing something about the war, and the moratorium on classes and all that stuff. So, you know, it touched some something in me that then, again, was dormant for quite a few years.

I was a psych major in college after changing my major five times. I wanted to do everything. But obviously, if you're going to graduate, you've got to focus on one. Mom and Dad said, "Enough already, kid. Focus. You know, we're not going to make a career out of putting you in college. You have other brothers and sisters." So I finally decided on psychology. I graduated in 1972, I'm sorry, liberal arts degree, what can you do?

I was a surgical assistant to an oral surgeon. I fainted seven times the first day on the job. Really, I'm completely serious. And to make it even worse, poor Dr. Gellender [phonetic], the first day, you know, the overhead light, it was broken, so I had to hold the suction thing and the flashlight. That meant every time I fainted, he'd have to stop surgery because me and the flashlight would go lay down. [Laughs] I stayed in that job for a whole year, though. I overcame my fainting. But that's what I ended up being after school, yes. Surgical assistant to an oral surgeon? Why did I bother to go to college, for god's sake?

Then that was not particularly fulfilling, so I decided to—what do you do in America when you're bored? You go back to school. Maybe you'll be something else. Who knows? I got a master's degree in English as a second language. Sorry. I got a master's degree teaching English as a second language in Spanish and then I went to Mexico. I lived in Mexico for a couple of years, teaching.

Then I came back to the States, and I just wasn't excited about teaching language, because
you have all the information. It's not an exchange of views, you know. You're trying to teach adults to say, "My name is Juan." You know, it's not exactly stimulating, at least for me.

So I became a temporary secretary for the next three years. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I wanted freedom to come and go. I went and taught in England for a while, came back, and did temporary work. I had no idea what I was going to do.

Then I got leafleted at a subway stop here at Washington, D.C., in February of 1981. I think it was the Metro right down on K Street and Connecticut, one of those. I was coming home from whatever thrilling job I had at the time. And by the way, my parents at this time are bordering on hysterical. "You're pretty smart. You have a couple of degrees. Why are you a temporary secretary? When are you going to grow up and get a real job? You know, you spent a lot of money on education. What's wrong with you?" kind of thing.

"Don't worry, Mom and Dad. Someday." So I get leafleted, and because I'm a polite person most of the time, I didn't throw the leaflet away immediately, I took it because I didn't want to be mean to the person leafleting. I planned to go around the corner and throw it away in a garbage pail, but not in their face to make them feel bad. I look at it and it said, "El Salvador, another Vietnam?" with a question mark. It was that juxtaposition, I guess, of just having lived in Mexico, so I was familiar with the region, and Vietnam. Obviously the question is, is the United States doing another intervention in Central America like it did in Indochina? And that made me agitated, so I decided to go to the meeting in a basement of a church, something I had never done in my life, couldn't imagine I would ever do. If they had had anything on that brochure differently, I wouldn't have gone. It was the Vietnam.

I went. I was totally amazed about what I learned at that meeting, about what the United States was doing, and decided that I couldn't sit back and do nothing, that I would help educate people about U.S. involvement in Central America. I became a full-time activist, worked in that issue for eleven years, trying to stop U.S. intervention in Central America, Nicaragua and El Salvador, during the wars.

Then peace broke out in Central America, not because of the brilliant work of the various organizations that I was involved with, but because the cold war ended and the U.S. didn't care anymore. You know, the reason we were involved in Central America, if you remember Al Haig drawing the line against Communism, it was, you know, a cold war theater, as the Horn of Africa, Central America, different regions of the world. Once the cold war ended, we didn't care anymore, and the U.S. helped facilitate peace talks then, just to get out of there.

Since by this time I had a decade of dealing with the war side, my expertise, if you will, is not in post-conflict reconstruction, it's trying to stop war or make combatants apply the laws of war. I felt I needed to try to do something else, and I was actually invited by two organizations to consider working on landmines, one in Germany, one here in Washington. I thought, "Well, this is interesting." You know, landmines are awful. It takes about three seconds to understand, "Landmines, bad."

But then I recognized that it was a prism through which you could look at huge issues of war and peace, the laws of war, you know, how war's conducted, how it actually has been conducted during the cold war. You know, when we're all worried we're going to be blown up by a nuclear weapon, people are really being killed by mines and guns, and that's what killed lots of people. I thought it was a fascinating thing to do.

We had the one European and one U.S., so we could call it the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. That's hysterical. It was me. [Laughs] That's how it started. I thought it was an interesting thing to do and a good way to try to help people. And the rest is history, as they say.

HOLLANDER:

Speaking [inaudible] how do you see the future going?

WILLIAMS:

The future of the world? The future of landmines?

HOLLANDER:

The future of landmines.

WILLIAMS:

Oh, we're going to keep winning. I mean, come on, we came out of nowhere, and in five years we had an international treaty banning the use, production, trade, and stockpiling of that weapon. The fastest arms control treaty in history, it has already been ratified by 100-something countries, signed by almost 140, more than three-quarters of the world. I mean, it's really amazing what has been accomplished.

Also, the partnership, as I said, the new way of diplomacy has made people everywhere in the world believe that we can do things differently, that we can make an impact on the world quickly, that we don't have to wait for decades to go by before change happens, and that can happen if we work together. You know, one person alone can have a vision, but it's pretty hard to make that vision reality unless you partner up with other people who share your views. That's the hard thing of, you know—the hardest thing in the coalition was giving everybody space for their own voice and still moving forward to the one goal. It's hard. It's hard work. But it's worth it.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

One thing about to kids, you know. When I think about my parents and how worried they were about what I was going to be when I grow up and, you know, how many times I changed my major in college, I went back to school yet another time, by the way. I went to Johns Hopkins in 1982. I have lots of degrees. I'm not sure what they mean, but I have lots of them. Every time I got a new one, my parents would be so excited like, "Wow! Now she's really going to go get a job I can understand." Right? "She's going to be a lawyer or go work for the State Department." They didn't kind of want to accept that I was kind of on the other side of—I wasn't really State Department career path. I was kind of the other side.

I was saddened to make them agitated. I love my parents very much, and my family's very close. It made me feel bad for them that every time I got a degree I couldn't be what they wanted me to be. But I think that we need to be who we are, and if we are true to who we are and what we want to do in life, we will be the best we can be, and we will ultimately make our parents happy and proud of what we are. My parents are certainly happy and proud of who I am now. I've been vindicated with the Nobel Peace Prize. Now they can explain what I do. [Laughs]

It was really funny, when I did Central America stuff, I mean, I was really working in opposition to U.S. policy, and my parents were so slick. They never really understood what I did, so it was easy to confuse their friends. Their friends, every time I would come home, their friends would say, "So where's the State Department sending you this time?" They really let their friends think that I was working with the State Department to deal with Central America. "Mom, you know I'm not," you know. It was really funny. It was funny. But now I'm okay, in their book.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

Well, my whole family came for the ceremony. You know, when you get the announcement—I happened to be in Vermont when the announcement—I'm sorry.

I happened to be in Vermont when the announcement was made. My birthday is October ninth, and I had gone home to celebrate my birthday. I try to do that every year, because the foliage is awesome in Vermont. The next day was the announcement of the Peace Prize, and by gum, if we didn't get it, me and the campaign. I was in Vermont, and we were just hysterical. I had journalists on my front doorstep, and my house in Vermont is on thirty acres of land in the middle of nowhere at the end of a private dirt road, unmarked. And at five in the morning, I had five journalists sitting on my wooden front steps waiting for the announcement. And by ten o'clock in the morning, we had, I think,

nine of those big satellite feed trucks and journalists from everywhere. I mean, it was unbelievable. And Mom and Dad just sitting there going, "Whoa. Whoa." They came to the ceremony, and it was really fun.

It was quite a year. From negotiating the treaty in September, the Peace Prize announcement in October, signing the treaty on December third in Canada, was amazing. And three days later we're in Oslo for the Peace Prize. That fall is never going to be replicated in my life. It was pretty great.

HOLLANDER:
[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

I've never thought about it, quite honestly. Well, if you remember the history of Nobel, he was the inventor of dynamite. I was asked actually, obviously, immediately upon the announcement, "How can you feel comfortable taking the Nobel Peace Prize? He invented dynamite. Dynamite leads to landmines."

I said, "At least he decided to put his fortune to good use. He could have put it to inventing even more evil weapons."

I read quite a bit about the first woman that received the Peace Prize, Berta Von Suttner, who he actually was in love with for many years. It was an interesting book. It was a gift to me from the U.S. ambassador in Norway. When we went to Norway to get the Peace Prize, we went to lunch at the ambassador's house. He actually was somebody that I took to Central America on a delegation to find out about U.S. policy years before. Very small world.

You know, she, apparently, was the one who talked Nobel into creating a Peace Prize along with the others. From what I understand, he thought in creating dynamite that he would have created the ultimate horrible weapon that would make people wake up and not continue to, you know, war. And then we have nuclear weapons. But look at how many of the nuclear people now come out for peace, you know. I think there is some weaving of the technology side and the peace side. But I haven't thought about it an awful lot. I think there should be more.

One of the first things I did was a hemispheric laureates conference here at the OAS, and there actually were a couple of the scientist types. I expected they would be talking strictly about their discoveries, and they didn't. It was really wide-ranging discussions about issues of the future, technology in the future, and a better world, not, you know, just technology for pure technology's sake. It was interesting. I think there should be more interaction, actually. I think we're too isolated.

HOLLANDER:

The book that he gave you, was that *Lay Down Your Arms*? Was that her book?

WILLIAMS:

No, it was a biography of her. It's quite good, quite interesting.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

[Laughs] That's great. There are two issues in the world I cannot work on because I would become a raving, frothing maniac. One is the environment. I'm so afraid of total destruction of our environment that I don't know how to deal with it, which is absolutely counter to what I've said. You just pick a little thing and you work on it and you contribute to making it better. But the environment freaks me out, just that, you know, the loss of species every year, I can't handle it.

Women's issues is the other. I am totally terrified that if I became a spokesperson for gender equality, I would froth so much that no one would listen to me, because I would just go off the page on it, you know, because I think there's no reason that women—I just don't even understand the debate. I think that human beings are equal. So I have a hard time with that one.

Therefore, if I were to discuss why women have not been more recognized throughout history, I would froth. Now, I think it's obvious. For a whole range of reasons, men have been in positions of power for time immemorial, and when you're in the position of power and you're thinking of other powerful people to recognize or whatever, you think of the people you hang out with, and they're all other men. It's just the reality of our society, the world.

I think it's changing a lot. I think it's changing quickly now, along with everything else, but not quite quickly enough, from my point of view. I mean, there have only been ten women who have received the Peace Prize out of, I think, something like 115. I don't quite remember the number. In the United States, only three. I'm the third, and I'm the first in fifty years. So that's kind of sobering.

When I was asked to come do this interview and was told that thirty-one laureates had been interviewed, of course they're all men, because they're all science, technology, economics. They're all men. We were trying to figure out how many women, you know, other than Peace there were, and, what, we came up with three or four. That's pretty scary. How many people have received the Nobel Prizes in the last hundred years? Do you guys know? Seven hundred. And we have like less than fifteen women, maybe

twenty, out of seven hundred? What does that say to you?

Could get me frothing. I'm not a pretty face when I froth. [Laughs] I can froth really bad. I can be very obnoxious.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

I think it's a really hard one. I recently got in a debate/fight with my partner over this. He's an extremely sensitive modern man. He's actually a partner in the landmine campaign. We were talking about the pressures on young women. I don't know if you saw the cover of *People* magazine this week, *Dying To Be Thin*. You know, it's liposuction and pills and bulimia and all the things that young girls do to, you know, try to look like today's models, which are, you know, if you look at them, they look like they could have come out of some of the concentration camps, for god's sake, and that's supposed to be the standard of beauty.

You go shop at Safeway or the Giant store, and what are all the magazine at the checkout? Every one of them is *Cosmopolitan* or *Vanity Fair* or something like that, and they're all very thin women in very revealing clothing. The titles of the articles are ridiculous, "Sixty-seven ways to make your man love you," you know, "Forty-two ways to lose weight before Thanksgiving so you can gain weight at Thanksgiving to then lose weight after." I mean, it's just absurd stuff, but that's what you look at. The message, even though in general we're more equal, I think we are, I think it's indisputable here in the U.S. at least, the message to women is still, "Even if you're equal, you've got to be a babe." Right? You've got to be a babe. You've got to know how to, you know, wear a dress with a low-cut thing, and you've got to wear the high heels and you got to paint your face. There's nothing wrong with being attractive, either as a woman or a man. But if that's all you are, it ain't enough. You have to be a human being first and a sexual being second, from my point of view, or you're never going to amount to a hill of beans, you know. But I think it's a hard, hard struggle.

Until the Peace Prize, I did no media, because, quite frankly, I don't care about media. I don't care if my name's in the paper. I didn't care if people knew who I was. I cared about coordinating the campaign and getting the job done. There were other people in the campaign who had experience with the media, who liked the media, whose organizations, because we're lots of organizations—whose organizations had a whole media development section, and so, let them do it. They like it. It helps their organizations to have their name in print, excellent. I don't care.

Unfortunately, with the Peace Prize, I had no option. I struggled with it a lot. It made me really agitated to have to be, you know, a spokes—I was always a spokesperson, but on

my own terms and with governments and the military, not the media. I didn't care. Suddenly, you have to care. I fought with it a long time, and I said, "Okay, fine. I'll use it. It's a tool."

But the first articles about me were, "Good god, she's wearing a limp sweater. Doesn't she comb her hair? Miss Williams, who just won the Peace Prize, has limp dishrag hair. She wears no makeup."

I'm thinking, "Does that matter?" I mean, and excuse me, I do wear makeup. I just don't look like somebody on the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, and I'm not going to put on makeup and change my hairdo and change my clothes to make you happy. I do this because I believe in it, and if you don't like the way I look, go buy *Cosmopolitan*, you know. But I found it really shocking.

I was just in Japan. I got home a couple days ago. I did a women's seminar, Women in the Media. We were talking, and there were journalists from Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong—she was a babe—Hong Kong and some other countries in Asia. We were talking about how women are presented in the press. I had just thought about an article recently. Mrs. Ogata, UNHCR, who has just been replaced by a guy from the Netherlands, I guess. The qualifiers, when they talked about her, was "the grandmotherly Mrs. Ogata, head of the UNHCR." Now, excuse me. Would you introduce some senior U.N. male as "the grandfatherly Kofi Annan, secretary general of the U.N."? When it's a woman, you're allowed to say all these stupid things to either diminish her power or remind you that women are supposed to be a certain way.

It's quite remarkable, and I think it's very, very hard for young women to know how to deal with that because the pressures are so constant and so subconscious, as I say, with all the magazines in the store, with MTV. What is the message of MTV? I hadn't watched television, I'm not kidding, in fifteen years. I didn't even have a television. The person I live with wanted a television, so we got a television and I've seen a few things. That sounds like a new discovery, right? I watched a little MTV. I mean, I have to say I was stunned. It's so sexist. The women are just all treated as, you know, trash, arm candy for the men. What message is that for young women? What are you supposed to be when you grow up? You're supposed to want to be, you know, somebody from Hollywood, Madonna or Gwyneth Paltrow or Elizabeth Hurley or one of the supermodels. That's what you're supposed to want to be when you grow up.

How do you develop as a full human being when you're just supposed to be a body? It's pretty tough. It's pretty, pretty tough.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

I think it does, absolutely, yes, yes. To be, you know, to be who you are. You don't have to be—makes me furious.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]. Unless you look at us in a particular way, we can't use you. I mean, there's no reason for that. There's no logic. Except there's an inherent logic in the media which says that—

WILLIAMS:

Yes, that's why you guys, that's why I hate—no, I don't. I think I'm very mellow about it. I was pretty rabid in the first few months.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

Yes, I know that. [Laughs] Media lite? Do you know they now have Spam Lite? I'm serious. I saw it in the grocery store. I was stunned. I'm going to have to get it just to see what it's like.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

Spam Lite. [Laughs] I thought it was hysterical.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS: Sure. Whatever.

HOLLANDER: [inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

Sure. Our campaign is different. And I can't say *was*, because it still exists. I think people don't recognize that the International Campaign to Ban Landmines still is

slugging away day in, day out. I work 100 percent of my time on the campaign. I donate all my time to the campaign. Whatever I do in addition is in addition.

We succeeded because for the first time in a long time, I'm sure it's not the only time, but in recent memory, that nongovernmental organizations, you know, groups like Human Rights Watch, church groups, UNICEF, all the ones you know about, got together to work to get rid of landmines, but also got together to work with governments to make it happen. That's really unique. And we still work with them even though we have the treaty, even though we're taking more mines out of the ground than are being put in now. We still have to, every single day, remind the governments that signed the treaty of their responsibility to carry out their obligations.

Just as you aren't supposed to jaywalk or just as you are supposed to put money in the parking meter or you'll get a ticket, governments have to understand that they have to obey the laws that they create. So the campaign works every single day with governments around the world to make sure that the laws are obeyed, because there are some governments that are better on this issue than others, and you can work with them to put pressure on those who don't want to obey the law. We have to be vigilant in pressuring them every single day. So the partnership continues. We meet regularly with governments to plan, "Okay, this guy's being bad. What are we going to do about it? What are you as a government going to do because you have different power than I do? And what am I going to do, because I have different power than you?"

HOLLANDER:

Are you trying to expand in any way? What other issues would you [inaudible]?

WILLIAMS:

Me personally, or the campaign?

HOLLANDER:

Well, you.

WILLIAMS:

I work on many other things.

HOLLANDER:

The approaches you developed with the landmine issue, where would you use that?

WILLIAMS:

There are many different coalitions now that are attempting to use our model, the model of government cooperation in civil society, to bring about change.

The ones that I can think of immediately are child soldiers. I don't know if you know. It's a really horrible problem around the world. Young children are forcibly recruited and/or come into some of the military through their fathers at increasingly young ages—nine, ten, eleven. They're carrying guns, and I mean, you know, not just street guns; war guns, and fighting wars in Asia, Africa. Little kids. So there is a movement to try to stop that, to try to pressure governments to not allow that to happen, because they're part of the problem. The nongovernmental organizations, the U.N., they're trying to use a similar model to what we did to make that happen.

he movement to create an international criminal court so that governments and individual politicians who do bad things can be brought to justice, they have used our model as well.

There's another campaign on to try to deal with the proliferation of light weapons and small arms around the world, that is trying to use our model. So, yes, we have given people everywhere the belief that they can use this model on many different issues and bring about change, which is another reason why so many of us in the landmine campaign feel a quite overwhelming sense of responsibility to make sure our treaty and the campaign works.

From my point of view, every time the landmine campaign succeeds, it's not just success for the mine victims, it's success for everybody in the world that wants to believe that this model can work for them on other issues. That's why it's so important that we keep working every single day to make people believe that it works, and if you keep working, you can make it work for everybody.

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

Sure, you can ask whatever you want. There's no such thing as a stupid question. I say this when I speak. Ask anything you want. There's no such thing as a stupid question. And then I get some stupid questions. [Laughs]

HOLLANDER:

[inaudible]

WILLIAMS:

I am pretty fanatical about working out. I believe that it is a really clear cliché of a

healthy mind and a healthy body go together. I walk my dog for two miles every morning, and I work out for an hour every afternoon. I lift weights. I work out. Sweating is a good thing, you know, makes me feel good. But you know, I do things to take myself completely away from it. I don't think about it all the time. I did in the beginning. I used to live, eat, breathe landmines and the campaign seven days a week. I don't have to do it quite that hard now, thank God.

But I read. I'm a bookworm. My way of escaping, my idea of an excellent weekend, is to lay down on the sofa and read three or four books in a weekend.

HOLLANDER: What was the last book that you read?

WILLIAMS:

I've just read Ursula Hegi—I think that's how you say her name—*Stones Under The Water*, something like that [*Stones From the River]*. I'm terrible with names. It's about World War II. It's about Nazism. It's about when people give up their power and through their silence let evil take over. It's a wonderful novel. *Stones Under the Water. Stones Under the River*, something like that, H-E-G-I, Hegi.

HOLLANDER:

What's the best book you've ever read?

WILLIAMS:

That's right up there. I like that one a lot. I am terribly fond of the Shakespearean tragedies. I hate the comedies. I love his tragedies. I love Margaret George. She wrote *The Autobiography of Henry VIII*, a novel. It's fabulous. It's absolutely fabulous. She also wrote one on Cleopatra that's wonderful. These are historical novels. I love those.

I'm also very fond of Ellen Gilchrist, southern writer, southern woman. I like pretty much anything except science fiction and mysteries. I hate science fiction and mysteries.

HOLLANDER:

Thank you very much.

WILLIAMS:

You're very welcome.

[End of interview]