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Interviewee: May MacDonald
Interviewer: Dawn Walsh
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Dawn Walsh: Hello May. I'd like to start just by having you talk a little bit about your background and where and when you were born.

May MacDonald: I was born April 26, 1915 in Flushing Long Island, New York of French parents, who were very interested in the cause of peace. In fact, that was why I was born in the United States, because they left Europe where the wars were threatening, and they wanted their children to be born in a country where they would not be subjected to drafts.

Dawn Walsh: And so, as you were growing up were there activism and meetings, and such, taking place around you and with your parents?

May MacDonald: I can just say that my parents were very interested in it and that the people who came to our home and our friends and relatives were all interested in peace, and we promoted it. My parents promoted that cause as much as it was possible. I can't remember any formal meetings. But that was the background that I had at that time.

Dawn Walsh: And so, how old were you when you first became aware of peace issues?

May MacDonald: I was just a baby. And I can remember—my mother says she doesn't know how I can remember this—but I can remember the dancing and the music playing "Over There, Over There." It was a war song. And I remember my sisters, who were older than I, being dressed in little Red Cross uniforms. It was a very patriotic scene. My parents didn't object to that part. They felt that nursing and helping the wounded soldiers was fine, but they didn't countenance other aspects of war at all.

Dawn Walsh: And so, do you remember what some of your first thoughts about war and peace were when you were old enough to really think about that intellectually—what your first thoughts were?

May MacDonald: Yes, I can remember going to Europe for the first time with my family, and I was 10 years old. And we landed in France. And then we came down to southern France where my mother's relatives lived to visit them. And we had to pass through the battlefields of Flanders in northern France, and I was appalled. I could not get over seeing these buildings in ruins—by the way, some of them are still visible today, from World War I—but these buildings were in ruins. And, it was quite an amazing thing to me, because I remember that when we were children we would have little mock battles and destroy each other's forts, but I never

thought that grownups could do this to each other's homes. And then, our parents took us to see spectacles for entertainment and recreation. And I remember—we went to the theater one night and part of the show was two young soldiers who had only one leg performing athletic feats, and it was wonderful what they could do, but it was also terrible to think that young men would be maimed for the rest of their lives. They jumped and did somersaults and they did all kinds of incredible things, but it was quite a shock to me to see these young men with only one leg performing these feats. And I asked my mother why so many of the ladies went around with black veils—France and Belgium are predominantly Catholic countries, and when you lost a member of the family you dressed in mourning—and why so many of the ladies wore black veils and black clothing. And my mother explained that it was because of the War, and they had lost all their sons, or their brothers, or their fathers, or their husbands. And that made me very sad because I realized how much it meant to us to have our father with us.

Dawn Walsh: And so, that was when you were 10?

May MacDonald: That would be 10 and then in my early teens—yeah.

Dawn Walsh: And so then, what age were you when you came back to America?

May MacDonald: I was 17 when we came back to America.

Dawn Walsh: And so, after you had those—that first encounter with war and its effects and you had those initial feelings about it, when was the first time that you took action on those feelings?

May MacDonald: Well, like most young people, I was very absorbed in my personal life, and my job, and my dating, and being popular—and you know, doing that sort of thing. I didn't have very many deep feelings. But when World War II came along, and my husband was inducted into the Engineer Corps and sent overseas, then I became extremely interested indeed. And we had four children—not right then, but subsequently we had four children. And three of our children were boys—are boys—and I was very interested in keeping them out of the Army and seeing peace prevail. And I had read so much literature about war and had realized that it is just a waste of time, resources, and human life.

Dawn Walsh: And so, how did that affect you? Did your husband need to move away?

May MacDonald: No, my husband willingly entered the War, because he thought that Hitler was a monster and that his way of thinking could not prevail. And he willingly went to war and fought for his country. In fact, all the men in my family are very patriotic. And I maintain that being a strong peace advocate has nothing to do with patriotism. You can be very patriotic and still be against war. Many people seem to equate a desire for peace with dodging the draft, and that is not so. I don't believe that is so at all. So when we were—when World War II broke out my husband went to war. I did what I could—I joined the Red Cross Auxiliary, and I helped

out as much as I could in war efforts to try and counterbalance the evil effects of war. We did what we could here at home.

Dawn Walsh: And where were you living at that time?

May MacDonald: At that time I was living in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Dawn Walsh: And so, what were some of the activities that you did at that time?

May MacDonald: Well, I worked for the Red Cross as a volunteer and continued with that until the War was over. And then my husband was transferred to Missoula, Montana, and while we were here the terrible war in Vietnam started. And I realized that we were not—as a nation we were not making progress in conquering war, and that we should really do something more concerted. So I joined...I originally joined the Peace Group here in Missoula—this was in the 1960s—and did everything I could. We baked cookies, we held marches, we wrote numerous letters, and did everything we could to help the cause of peace. And I'm dedicated to that—and I'm still dedicated to it.

Dawn Walsh: So, I understand that the Missoula Peace Group in 1963 was the first peace group in—not just in Missoula—in the entire state of Montana, and that it was started and led by Reverend Sanders in the First Christian Church. Were you involved with that group, or were you involved with a different group?

May MacDonald: Well, I think it was the same group. It was a group held in the Congregational Church. We used the Congregational Church as a meeting place. And Flo Chessin was the one who became the instigator. She was the spark plug that made it function so very well. And she was always recruiting people and asking them to join our group, and she still does—she's very active today. And she was the one that drew me into the circle. And I was busy with children—raising the children—and very busy with PTA and Scouts and other activities, but I always found time for the Peace Group. I felt that it was paramount. If every woman in the world joined a peace group, I just didn't see how there could be any wars. If they all held hands all around the world and committed our men to do this, we could have no wars.

Dawn Walsh: And so, was there a particular event or strong feeling or discussion of the time that drew you in to the Missoula Peace Group with Flo at that particular time?

May MacDonald: Oh, yes. The terrible films that would come about, and the documentaries that would be shown on TV were very striking. I thought they were very forceful in their nature. And seeing how the indigenous people of Vietnam suffered while we sat here comfortable in our homes with all the food we needed, all the heat we needed, all the medical care we needed, when those poor people had nothing and were subjected to bombings. I thought it was terrible, and it made a very deep impression on me, and I resolved to do what I

could. I wrote letters and protested, and we did everything that we could as lay people to prevent the continuation of the war.

Dawn Walsh: And how—what type of response did you get at that time?

May MacDonald: We received courteous—for the most part, we received courteous responses—courteous, but not very effective. Something like an adult telling a child: “Just wait...Just don’t be impatient dear, what you want will come, but you just have to patient.” We were stalled many times and never answered very...in some cases the answers were rather rude and indicated the lack of—the complete lack of understanding of what we were trying to do. And we were accused of...oh...fostering cowardice and draft dodging, and that was not the case at all. But we were accused of that. And we were accused of being soft on the enemy, lacking patriotism, lacking understanding, lacking the actual experience of seeing these things and believing propaganda—and we felt that that was not the case at all. We felt that we had talked to veterans who had returned from the war. And we had talked to people who had actually been through the war. And I had a slight advantage over some people, because when I lived in Europe I did talk to people who had actually suffered from the War [World War II], and that was bonafide material. And they did tell me how terrible it was when the Germans came into their villages and grabbed everything that was worthwhile, shot people on sight for very slight reasons, and made widows and orphans of the population. It was a very terrible thing. And it becomes more terrible when you talk with somebody who has actually been through it than when you read it in an article or a newspaper.

Dawn Walsh: And so, when you wrote your letters to Congressmen and went over Washington to speak to officials what was it that you were asking for or wishing for?

May MacDonald: We were asking them, we were begging them, to have influence, to try and influence our President and all the leading people in government to pull out of Vietnam and get out of there and let the people choose the form of government that they wanted. We advocated democracy—well then, what right did we have to go over there and say: “You are not going to have this kind of government.” We felt that it was very wrong. And we kept begging all the people in high office to pull out of Vietnam and to bring our boys, our men, home. We thought that the nearly 60,000 men that we lost over there was a terrible tragedy. We were very much against that. We were bitterly opposed to any recruiting and sending our young men over there anymore. We did not want that.

Dawn Walsh: So, that’s a very clear statement on your part. And then, in turn, as you said after you got the response in part that was saying, “Just wait and be patient,” how then, in turn, did you respond?

May MacDonald: We responded that we were tired of waiting, and that we wanted to see results. And that we just couldn’t countenance the continuance of this war at all. And we engaged in peace marches. In fact, it was comical because my husband worked for the Forest

Service, which is a government agency of course, and he'd see me coming down the street—he was with his friends out on coffee breaks—and he'd see his wife and the wives of other friends walking down the street carrying these banners, and he was quite embarrassed. I think he was proud in a way, but he was also very embarrassed. And my son—my young sons who were growing up and looking for work were quite embarrassed because one was seeking a job with the FBI, which he eventually got—but it appears that the FBI searches your background very thoroughly before you're engaged. And his background was searched, and he was told confidentially by one of his interviewers that his record was good – his scholastic record was good, his working record was good with jobs, various jobs he had held—but, oh your mother! Your mother walking down the street with those peace marchers that was something else. That was a point against him. So, he said to me: "Stop writing those letters to the paper and stop doing those marches." And I said: "All right, I would." But I didn't—I did for a short time. But it didn't matter very much, because all the other ladies in the Peace Group went ahead and did it, and he got the job eventually. But it was comical. Our church has a peace movement too. We have a church, the Episcopal Fellowship, and they have a peace group there, which I belong to. And it does much the same thing that our group right here in Missoula does. Same thing—we contact people in high office and beg them to desist. And each of us as an individual talks to all our friends—we talk to our friends, and we try to influence everybody we come into contact with to get them to into thinking like we do. Like this book, it was a wonderful book, and it is called the *March of Folly* and written by Barbara Tuckman, who is a brilliant historian. And she describes all wars, how they take place, what causes them, and what the results were. And the results were—there's a statistic in the book about how useless war is, because even the so-called victors have not won. They have lost men, they have lost materials, they have lost resources, they have wasted years, which could have been spent dealing with economics or helping the educational systems or helping medical research, creating jobs. And these wars accomplish nothing. And she shows this in her book. And if I had my way—if I had the power, I would present a copy of this book to every man in government, in our government and in all the governments of the world, because it has nothing to do with enemies, or liking people or disliking people—It's just plain, common sense. There is no such thing as a victory in a war. There is no victory; everybody suffers in the long run, and even the so-called conquerors. After the wars are over, there's an economic depression that invariably follows wars, and it affects everybody. It affects the whole wide world. The whole world suffers from the economic depression. Can you take this for an example? During war, you are producing arms and you are producing bombers. All right, what can you do with a B-2 bomber? You can't live in it, you can't eat it, you can't drive it to work. You are producing a vast, costly airplane that has as its sole purpose to kill people or to destroy their cities. Well, what good is that? When you place your wealth and your resources in something that is useless, naturally the population suffers. And Dwight Eisenhower, himself, who was a military man—primarily a military man—I didn't think much of him as a President, but as a military man he was a success—he, himself, said that "every bomb that is produced, every airplane that is produced, every tank that is produced deprives some child of a school, of medical care, or social advantages that he or she should enjoy." Even Eisenhower said that, and he was a military man! Why can't we all see it, if he saw it?

Dawn Walsh: I'd like to go back to 1970 when Missoula Women for Peace first became a group—and were you involved at that time in 1971?

May MacDonald: I was involved—yeah.

Dawn Walsh: And so, can you tell me a little bit about how that group got started in 1970, and how you were a part of that?

May MacDonald: I was invited to attend a meeting by Flo Chessin, who was very active in the peace movement. And I went, and I found the meetings very productive, and I approved of them. And I thought, we don't have great power, we don't have great influence, we don't have great connections, but at least we can make our voices heard. And if every woman in the world did this, there would bound to be some good come from it. So that's what I did, and I did it willingly and gladly.

Dawn Walsh: So there was a focus on the group being just women?

May MacDonald: Well yes there was. We were just women, but anybody was welcome to come, and men have attended our meetings. And many of the women brought their children, and many of these children grew up to be teenagers and became very influenced by our way of thinking. So we hope that it produced some good results that way. Anybody could join. And we didn't have dues—we just had a little kitty placed on the table and whoever wished to could drop a dollar in or a few cents or whatever they could. We never had that as a must or a requisite. Nobody had to pay dues, it was just a voluntary donation. And we did a lot of good with that money. We sent delegates to peace conventions, and we sent some to Washington, D.C. to protest to our Congressmen. And we did a lot of good with those donations—a few dollars here and a few dollars there, it mounts up—and we always did good with it.

Dawn Walsh: Can you talk a little more about any specific activity that you were involved in with Missoula Women for Peace—any particular march or particular campaign?

May MacDonald: Well, I remember one Easter we all went to Malmstrom Air Force Base to protest the arms that were built up. And we went to Malmstrom Air Force Base, and I was arrested for trespassing on military grounds, and I was placed in detention, and I expected this. I didn't really mind it, because I thought it was so ridiculous to put a grandmother in jail for believing that peace should prevail. So I was placed in detention. And I was kept there for a few hours, and they released me. But they gave me a letter, and they said that if you repeat this performance you will be fined—I think it was \$500—and you will be placed in jail for six months. And I thought it was rather comical that a peace-abiding, law-abiding citizen should be placed in jail for such a reason. And I thought it was so ridiculous that I came home, and I announced to my family that I was going to do it deliberately because I wanted to—I wanted to be arrested, I wanted to be put in jail, I wanted to pay the \$500 fine. But the members of my

family protested very strongly, so I gave into their wishes. But actually, I really wanted to go to jail, and I really wanted to make contact with all the people in jail and say this is why I'm in prison, and this is what I'm doing—what I believe in. Because I thought it was so ridiculous, but I gave into my family. They said: "Please don't do it. Please don't do it. It is very embarrassing to us." So I gave into them, but I did it reluctantly. I really wanted to do it. I thought it would have been very nice. And I had no illusions about prison. I know you'll meet some very tough customers in prison. You don't meet ladies who attend little tea parties or things like that. You meet very rough customers. But I really wanted to go and influence them and show them how ridiculous it was to put a grandmother in jail for thinking that peace should prevail.

Dawn Walsh: So you had a larger message in mind for what that would show?

May MacDonald: Yes.

Dawn Walsh: So what would the message say if the newspaper had written up that event—what would you hope that your message would be?

May MacDonald: Well, that a mother with sons and a brother and a husband who she loved very dearly that their lives are very much more important than outward appearances or convention. That she wanted to do everything she could in her power to prevent their lives from being risked in a war that accomplished nothing. War accomplishes nothing.

Dawn Walsh: Now, do you remember also in 1970 when the U.S. invaded Cambodia and there would be killings of four students at Kent State. Do you remember?

May MacDonald: Yes, I was at the university at the time taking some courses.

Dawn Walsh: What was your response and other students' response at the university at that time, and how did that affect what peace work you were doing?

May MacDonald: We were outraged. We were appalled. And we immediately made our feelings known, and we begged the authorities not to ever let this happen again. We thought that this was an outrage. We protested very strongly about that.

Dawn Walsh: Were there marches at that time?

May MacDonald: There were marches—yes there were. And there were fund-raisers, and we had bake sales, and Flo Chessin had rummage sales at her house. We spread books and pamphlets and literature. And we had little plays taking place in the library, and they were very—I think they were very effective. They were well attended, and we enjoyed doing them, and they were very good.

Dawn Walsh: What were they plays about?

May MacDonald: Injustice. Injustice caused by wars, and how much better it would be to negotiate and create positive possibilities for people to pursue other channels, other ways of settling their differences.

Dawn Walsh: And who wrote those plays? Was it part of the Peace Group that were writing the scripts?

May MacDonald: I think they were taken from the library—Jane Adams—and the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center had very good material, and we carried out their thoughts and acted them. And maybe even dressed up like Jeannette Rankin and quoted her—and came out on the stage, dressed in the way that Jeannette Rankin would have been dressed at the turn of the...well, it was during World War I. And she received a warm applause. Jeannette Rankin was one of our heroines.

Dawn Walsh: And about what year was that that you were putting on those plays?

May MacDonald: I think it was in the 1980s.

Dawn Walsh: You had mentioned distributing books and such. And I understand that part of the work that Missoula Women for Peace did was to donate books and pamphlets to public schools and public libraries. Could you speak about that and how that got started?

May MacDonald: Well, I personally donated one book to the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center, and that was the *March of Folly* because it impressed me so tremendously. Other ladies donated books—I can't remember their titles, but they were all pro-peace books, all anti-war books. We always recommend the teaching of Mahatma Mohandas Gandhi, who was wonderfully nonviolent. He was very strongly against violence. And we also urged people to...

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Dawn Walsh: Okay, so we were talking about books and pamphlets donated to the library.

May MacDonald: I donated some and the other ladies donated. In fact, if any of us comes across an outstanding book or piece of literature that is strongly pro-peace we bring it to the meeting, and we discuss it, and we see to it that it's given to the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center—we believe in that.

Dawn Walsh: So you're still doing that then today?

May MacDonald: Yes, we still do that.

Dawn Walsh: Well, in 1981 Missoula Women for Peace joined an international group called Women's International League for Peace and Freedom?

May MacDonald: That's right—yes.

Dawn Walsh: And so, how did that affect the work that you were doing locally by being involved in an international group?

May MacDonald: Well, it encouraged us. We thought that this association would be beneficial to all of us, and we welcomed being a member of their group. We felt that it was great. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is well known in the eastern states, and they have close connections with the peace groups in Europe, in Holland and Switzerland. And I joined. I went with Reverend Lemnitzer in person to the Malmstrom Air Force Base. And he and I, one Christmas I remember we went to the—we went on property, military property—where it was prohibited that civilians should walk or be there. But we went there, and the military came and took us off there and gave us a warning, which we disregarded. We said: "We would go off if they took us off, but that our hearts weren't in it. And that we thought everybody should protest the building up of the arms race."

Dawn Walsh: One of the outcomes of Missoula Women for Peace work was an eventual statue of Jeannette Rankin in the U.S. capitol in Washington, D.C.

May MacDonald: That's right.

Dawn Walsh: And I understand that the Missoula Women for Peace initiated that process.

May MacDonald: That's right.

Dawn Walsh: And were you involved in that?

May MacDonald: I was somewhat, but I couldn't leave my family at that time. I think that Connie Skousen and Alice Campbell, and Flo Chessin went to Washington, D.C. and saw to it that the statue was honored. We were very thrilled about that. We felt that Jeannette Rankin has never been given the respect and admiration that was due her. We are trying to see to it that she does get that respect and admiration. She was vilified in World War I with all these foolish accusations that never had a grain of truth in them—of being unpatriotic or being pro-German or being pro-cowardice. She was just vilified. And she must have—She was a sweet, little old lady, and she was not very tall. She was small in size and stature, but beneath that gentle exterior was a fierce will. And she never married. In fact, I think she never married, because she devoted all her time and her energy to this peace effort. And she would not back down. In both wars, World War I and World War II, she voted against it. She was a wonderful old lady.

Dawn Walsh: And so, Jeanette Rankin it sounds like then was a role model.

May MacDonald: Oh, she was—oh, she really was. We loved her very much. We thought a great deal of her. I had the honor of speaking with her not very long before she died. She lived to be a very old lady, and I had the honor of speaking to her. And she was fielding questions—she was at the university—spoke at the university—and some of the students taunted her, and she always remained a lady, always remained. She kept her temper, never lost her temper, and answered the questions very intelligently and very patiently and very peacefully.

Dawn Walsh: And what year was that?

May MacDonald: Well...When did she die—I don't remember? Not too many years ago. I'm sorry, but I can't remember...not very long before she died. I remember thinking after she died, I so glad that I had been at that meeting, and that I had had the chance to talk to her, because it would have been too late otherwise.

Dawn Walsh: So, what did you talk about—do you remember?

May MacDonald: Peace and the progress that the peace movement was making—and how we could never overcome the obstacles—and she just said to keep on trying that's the only way. I was very thrilled to think that I had spoken to her, and that I had shaken her hand and had had some connection with her.

Dawn Walsh: So she just said to keep on trying to overcome the obstacles?

May MacDonald: That's right.

Dawn Walsh: What would be an obstacle that maintains war today?

May MacDonald: Indifference and ignorance. Too many people think that war is a necessity, too many people think that war is inevitable, and too many people give up. They think, oh, you never going to change human nature. It is true that we will never change human nature, but we can change our government. We can change our ways of doing things. And we don't have to succumb to this kind of fatalistic thinking. We don't have to succumb to that. We can say: "I have brought many sons into the world, and they're fine young men, and I love them nearly, and I have a fine husband, I have father or a fine brother, and I'm not willing to see them sacrificed because of erroneous political thinking. I'm not willing to do that."

Dawn Walsh: So what would your advice be to the U.S. government right now in terms of working out conflicts without going to war?

May MacDonald: Well, to emulate the examples of our cities. You take the city of Missoula for instance. You have people here of different religions, different races, different backgrounds, and we are all getting along because we know we have to. We know that there's a law—if I place my fence in your ground illegally, you don't take a gun and kill me, you report me to the authorities and the police come to me and say "You have to remove your fence from Dawn's lawn. This is not legal. You must do it." And I realize that I must do it, because that's the law. If we could have all the governments get together and write a world constitution. And we have the World Court at The Hague—and if we could say to all the warring countries: "If you have a difference, submit it to the International Court at The Hague, and you will carry out their sentence as prescribed. If they say "no" to Yugoslavia, and the warring factions in Yugoslavia, "No you cannot do this. You cannot murder this group of people; you cannot have these arms and these terrible weapons to annihilate your fellow citizens. This civil war is wrong. You must wait to you hear from the International Court at The Hague, and you must follow and carry out their decisions." And the International Court at The Hague has for its members people of eminent judicial ability—legal experts—experts in their fields about what the law is and how it can applied. And we should—we must carry it out thereafter after a vote. We could have a democratic vote and say well, "This measure is acceptable or this is not acceptable" and then proceed. And we could have the United Nations be separate. You could have them—an international police force to enforce the decisions that are carried out by the International Court. That's how we could do it. Just as we do in Missoula. If somebody breaks the law here, they're forced by the police to do otherwise—to adopt a policy that is acceptable to everybody. And if we could carry it out in a small city, like Missoula, we could surely do it on a worldwide basis, I think—we all think.

Dawn Walsh: So do you think that the direction of peace is for it to be addressed at the international level?

May MacDonald: Yes, I do. I think it must. The world is not such a small place—such a great big place—any more; it's much smaller now. And there's no such thing as one country acting independently and saying "I'm going to this, and I'm going to do that," because it has effects on all their neighboring countries. The countries must work together for the common good of the world. There can't be any selfish reasoning and saying: "This is good for our country, and we are going to adopt this policy. We are going to do this, so that our people will benefit." It has to be for the general good of everybody on a worldwide basis. I think education is the magic key. I think that we must educate our young people to the fullest extent of their ability to absorb education. I realize that some—not everybody is a student, but everybody has common sense. And everybody could be taught that war is wrong. Everybody could be taught that there is a peaceful way to achieve your ends and your means, and we must not neglect those ways and must see to it that they're followed.

Dawn Walsh: Did Missoula Women for Peace do work with youth at anytime during its history?

May MacDonald: Yes, we offered—we had contests, and we offered prizes to young people who wrote good essays about peace, and I think that it was pretty effective. It seemed to arouse a lot of interest. Unfortunately, we are not a wealthy group. We never have a very large treasury, so we can't do it very often, but we do it every once in awhile. We offer children and young people—teenagers—prizes if they write a good essay on peace.

Dawn Walsh: Let's talk about the Peace Consortium dinners that were started in 1985. Were you a part of those dinners?

May MacDonald: Yes, I was—uh, huh.

Dawn Walsh: And what was the focus of those dinners at that time?

May MacDonald: Influencing the people in power. Influencing high officials—people who were prominent in upper government circles, trying to influence them.

Dawn Walsh: Were you working locally, nationally, internationally?

May MacDonald: We worked locally. And every time our Congressmen would come and visit Missoula, we would contact them and try to get an interview with them—have an interview—and most of them were very pleasant and most of them were very agreeable. They turned us down a few times. They turned us down a few times, because they were too busy or because they had previous commitments, but never in a disagreeable way—always polite and always courteous. I think most of them realized that we had to do something about war. We have to stop it. There is nothing...when you see these terrible documentaries about Vietnam and about all people, not only indigenous people, but you can imagine a bomb dropped on your house, and you have nowhere to go, no food, no water, no heat, no clothing, not medical supply—you can imagine what it would be like. Or can you imagine—we who have never been through it? But it's an outrage; it's an insult to humanity. It can't go on. We can't call ourselves civilized people and engage in this atrocity—impossible. Ignorance is no longer an excuse. We are not ignorant. Every newspaper, every television set, every radio set, every foreigner we speak to who has been through war tells about how terrible it is. We can't claim ignorance as an excuse any longer; that doesn't work. We cannot...we are not ignorant, we know what's going on, and we are aware of the suffering. We must do something about it.

Dawn Walsh: So, as you say, it's very easy in this culture to be aware of what's happening in other places around the world...

May MacDonald: Oh, yes.

Dawn Walsh: ...so young people today, they have that information. And they see it on television today, and then they know that it is happening. What words do you have for those young people?

May MacDonald: What words do I have for those people? Well, don't be like me—when I was young, I was very self-centered. I was very—I wanted to be popular. I thought that “having fun” was the big thing in life, and I realize now that's all foolishness, really, it is foolishness. You will be well liked if you pursue worthwhile activities. You will be honored, you will be respected, and you will have a happy life if you engage in some useful occupation. And I can't think of anything more useful, or more noble, than pursuing the cause of peace. It took me—I had to get married and have children of my own. I had to travel abroad and see for myself the devastation of World War I. In fact, my husband and I took a trip to Europe about 10 or 15 years ago, and we went to Germany and we saw the ruins of the old churches there, some of whom—some of which—have not been rebuilt on purpose to show people how terrible war is.

Dawn Walsh: And so, how would you relate that experience just 10 or 15 years ago to the one that you had in Europe when you were 10?

May MacDonald: I would say that it is very similar. It was a shock when I was a child. I was used to going to little birthday parties and having little cakes and little girls—my friends in their little party dresses, you know, and playing little games, and I had a happy childhood—and I thought that was the way the whole world was. I had no idea that children suffered from hunger and disease and that children, like some of the children in Vietnam have no arms, some of the children in Vietnam are blind, some of the children in Vietnam have no legs. And that is very, very terrible. There can be nothing more terrible than that – a child deprived of a normal life for the rest of his span on earth. I can't think of anything more terrible than that. It's very wrong. How can we look on that with indifference? How can we not be moved when we see these children. There's a picture in the paper the other day—not very long ago—a little boy in Yugoslavia, a bullet went through his head. It didn't kill him. I wish it had. And it took both eyes out—a little boy—he was about 10 years old. That child may live to be 70 or 80 years old. What kind of a life will he have? Do they even have homes for the blind in Yugoslavia? I doubt it. Yugoslavia has nothing now. They are concentrating on war. I don't think that they have anything, anything like that to help people in trouble. They are depending on the United States and other countries—the wealthier countries of the world—to help them. Help comes, but it's slow and it's almost invariably inadequate—not enough. In fact, people in Yugoslavia are trying to send their victims over to the United States for treatment, because there is nothing in Yugoslavia to treat them with. And I've seen pictures of Yugoslavian victims of war sent over here to the United States for treatment, which is fine—I mean that it is fine. But how terrible that it should have to be that way at all. How terrible that they can't stay in their own country and lead a normal life—all because they won't resort to legal means of settling their differences. I am strongly in favor of a worldwide constitution. We have a constitution here in the United States and everybody swears by it—well, most people swear by it—and why can't we have a worldwide constitution for the whole universe, that all the countries of world could be part of and belong to—say we will not tolerate war. We know that there is a civilized way to settle differences, and it can be done by voting and by a democratic process, and adhere to that.

Dawn Walsh: What do you think it would take for that to happen?

May MacDonald: I think it would take people of great mental and moral stature, people of great wealth who had the means to do this. And we do have people of great wealth who could do these things, and I don't see any of them doing it. I thought, for instance—Jackie Onassis is dead now—but when her husband was murdered, she had the world at her feet. She could have traveled from country to country and everybody would have listened to her—everybody. She was young, she was beautiful and articulate. I thought she could have done so much. I was very disappointed with her when she—all she did was attend little parties and belonged to the jet set. Well, she brought her children up. She educated them. She wasn't a wicked person. She wasn't a terrible person, but I thought that she missed the boat. I thought she could have done so much. And I thought other people could have done so much. Movie stars can do so much. For some reason, people like attractive faces and attractive personalities. Movie stars could do a great deal. But you do have to have money to do these things. And I don't know how many of them are wealthy enough, but it seems to me that if I made my—if I had made my fortune and educated my children and didn't have to worry about an income, that's how I would spend my time—traveling from country to country visiting all the people in high office and saying, "We have to go about settling our differences in a peaceful way." It could be done, and that's what we must do.

Dawn Walsh: Well, is there any last story or event that you want to talk about that hasn't been touched on?

May MacDonald: No, just reading good books, like the *March of Folly*, which to me is a tremendous book, and studying the writings of Woodrow Wilson, who I thought was an idealistic President. I was sorry when he became ill and ineffective—it's too bad. I thought Ghandi was a wonderful man. Ghandi was a successful lawyer. He could've played the social game. You know, gone to parties and just had a good time for himself, but he did not. He gave that all up, and he lived with the poorest of his people, and he showed them his example. He allowed—he suffered beatings, he suffered humiliation, he suffered disgrace for the sake of what he believed in—and he was murdered eventually by an insane person. But I think that these men are very—these people are very inspirational. I think that we should study their lives and try to emulate them as much as we can. And, of course, I believe that the churches are paramount in the peace movement. Our church is very much in favor of the peace movement. And I think that churches are at a disadvantage too. Their ministers have to be very careful, because if their ministers say we want peace at all costs, well then they are subjected to the same insults that Jeannette Rankin was subjected to, "Oh, you're for the enemy. Oh, you're advocating cowardice. Oh, you don't understand. You don't see the real picture. You're not realistic." So churches are at a disadvantage. I know, because ministers have talked to me. And Reverend Lemnitzer, whom I admired very much, told me—he said that it cost him his marriage, it cost him quite a few friendships, and he was subjected to quite a bit of criticism in

his own church for engaging in peace activities as much as he did. So there, you have it from one clergyman right there—that it was very difficult to pursue this cause of peace.

Dawn Walsh: Was it difficult for you to pursue the cause of peace?

May MacDonald: No. The people that I know whom I alienated by my views, I didn't consider friends anyway. I thought that the loss of their friendship was a very small matter. It didn't bother me a bit. And the people—my friends—the people I liked, the people that I admired, all seemed to think the way I did. So it didn't bother me at all. On the contrary, I enjoy meeting people who advocate peace. I enjoy the women in our peace group very much. I consider them my closest friends.

Dawn Walsh: You have know them for 40 years now—some of them?

May MacDonald: Yes, that's right, 40 years. We came to Missoula in 1960, and that's 40 years ago. I can't ever imagine not seeing them or not having contact with them, or not pursuing these activities. I can't ever imagine that happening.

Dawn Walsh: So you will be a peace activist until the very end.

May MacDonald: I hope so. I trust that I'm going to try to be. I'm just sorry that I don't have wealth and power, because that's what I'd use it for. If I had wealth and power...I don't have—I'm just a housewife, a retired housewife—but if I did have, that's how I'd use it. Instead of going to little parties or pursuing recreational things, I would do something more constructive, I think.

Dawn Walsh: Well, let's end on the constructive activities that you have done. We'll just end by having you share one of the most constructive events that you've been involved in. What do you think has had a great deal of effect?

May MacDonald: Well, I think that faithful attendance to a peace group is the best way to achieve your end—I really think. It's no good going to a meeting once every 10 years. It's no good applauding some peace advocate once every five years. I think it's the steady, continual attendance of peace groups; the steady, continual support of peace groups; the steady and continual support of writers who think that way. I think that's the real accomplishment.

Dawn Walsh: Any final words before we end?

May MacDonald: Yes, that I'm optimistic—that's my final word. I'm optimistic. I think that ignorance and apathy are the real enemies. And these people who engage in war are ignorant. And if they could be taught, if they could be shown what folly war is, they could not condone it. They could not engage in it.

Dawn Walsh: Well, thank you very much, May.

May MacDonald: Well, thank you very much, Dawn.

[End of Interview]