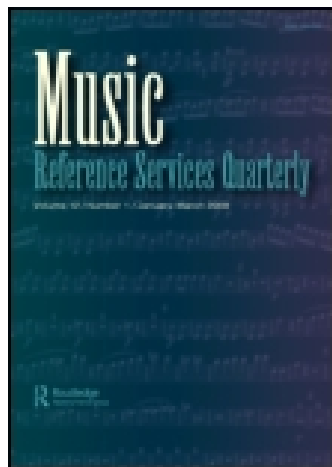


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The Pacifica Radio Archives

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The Pacifica Radio Archives

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The Pacifica Radio Archives chronicle the political, cultural, and artistic movements of the mid-20th century through today. The archived radio programs include documentaries, performances, discussions, debates, drama, poetry readings, commentaries, and radio arts.

The Archives are located in North Hollywood, California, housed at radio station KPFK. The archivists give me a tour of their offices and the Archives' climate-controlled audio storage space. I have to say that the Archives' offices boast arguably the most brightly painted walls that I have seen in an archive. I admit to being envious; I want rainbow walls.

Today we are speaking with Jolene M. Beiser, Archivist, Pacifica Radio Archives (see [Figures 1](#) and [2](#)).

MR: For those unfamiliar with Pacifica Radio, can you tell us a bit about its history?

JB: Pacifica Foundation was founded in 1947 by Lewis Hill; he was a World War II pacifist. He and his pacifist friends decided to start a radio station that was noncommercial. He worked for several years in radio and hated that he had to promote products and things that he didn't believe in as a broadcaster. He wanted to create a venue where he and other pacifists could talk about what interested them and they didn't need to worry about corporate sponsors. The Pacifica Foundation was founded in San Francisco, but began broadcasting out of Berkeley in 1949. [For a brief history of Pacifica Radio, see http://www.pacifica.org/about_history.php] The tricky thing about it was that they had to broadcast on FM radio. At the time, no one had an FM band on their radio, only AM. In fact, KPFA was one of the first FM stations. They came up with the idea of a cooperative-based, listener-sponsored radio station. They asked other pacifists to become members of the radio station, and then

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FIGURE 1 Pacifica Radio Archives logo.



FIGURE 2 Jolene Beiser, Pacifica Radio Archivist, holding a 1/4-inch reel tape found in their vault—a Women's program from 1977.

they would send them a radio that had an FM band with only Pacifica station KPFA 94.1 printed on it. We have some very early broadcasts in the Archives. The original programming featured dialogues about pacifism, objections to war, and other political questions. Eventually, they built quite a following. In 1959, Pacifica began its second station, KPFK-FM, 90.7, in Los Angeles. Then in 1960, Pacifica was given WBAI, 99.5, in New York by philanthropist Louis Schweitzer. In 1970, KPFT, 90.1, in Houston went on the air. Finally, in 1977, WPFW, 89.3, in Washington, DC, went on air. And we are still those five stations today.

MR: Thank you for that brief history. Now can you tell us about the Archives?

JB: The Pacifica Radio Archives and Pacifica Program Service were established here in Los Angeles (LA) in 1972. Pacifica producers had to re-use much of their tape, but thankfully, we still have a lot of the older broadcasts. The nature of broadcast was that you put it out there on the radio waves and that's all that mattered; it wasn't about keeping a copy of it. The whole nature of that has changed so much. The Pacifica Program Service was a place where people could call up and say, "I want a copy of that program that I heard," and we would send them a copy. The Archives/Pacifica Program Service became kind of the clearing house. WBAI would send us a tape and we would make a copy, and we'd send it to KPFF or send it to KPFT or send it to other community-based radio stations that wanted to broadcast Pacifica programs. It was a kind of a duplication house and shipping center and, also, the Archives. Although, honestly, in 1972, I'm not sure what archiving meant to them. I think it was more like "we have to have a copy in case somebody requests it." Luckily they had catalogers, so we have beautiful catalogs of our recordings from back then. [See [Figures 3 and 4](#).] We would send people the catalogs with descriptions and the year when it was broadcast. Thank goodness we did that.

MR: Do you know when someone got the idea that "this is important" and we should be archiving it, preserving it, and making it accessible?

JB: My guess is that there were a handful of producers who had to continually urge the Foundation to hold onto the tapes. I know that one of my supervisors, Adi Gevins, who was a producer at KPFA Berkeley, went to Library School to learn best practices for preserving the Pacifica Radio Archives. She has been instrumental in holding onto them since the 1970s. And she is still very involved in the work that we do here. We keep running out of money, and everyone knows it costs a lot of money to run an archive. So many people work very hard to keep the Archives alive. One of the things that has changed was that in the early days, the Archives provided content for the stations to fundraise. We would do duplication for the stations. We would make their premiums, and send them out to their donors. But slowly they found that it was cheaper if they just did it themselves. So our role as a distributor became less and less and less. Now we have to do a lot of our own fundraising to keep ourselves alive.

MR: What is the Archives' primary function these days?

JB: Our mission is to preserve and make available Pacifica audio, like any audiovisual archive. But what we do day-to-day is pretty segregated. We have archivists working on the grant projects, cleaning up the catalog records, picking materials to be digitized, applying for grants, all that stuff, and then we have this whole production department that most archives don't have—they have to hustle constantly to try and promote



FIGURE 3 KPFA Folio, March 1975.

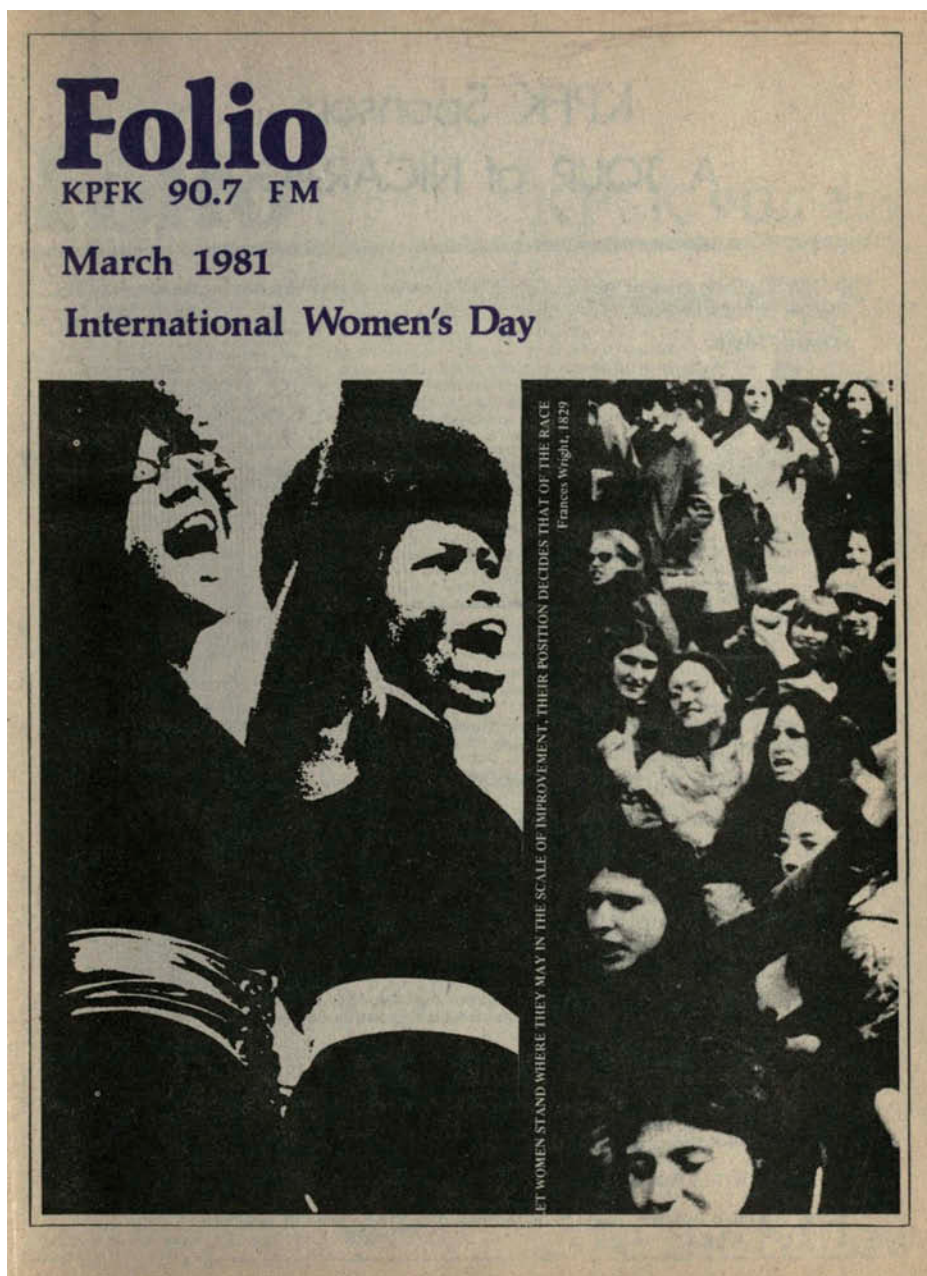


FIGURE 4 KPFK Folio, March 1981.

what we do, what we have, try and pitch it to the programmers and the different stations, to the program directors at the different stations . . . “We just found this great recording.” For example, heaven forbid, when somebody dies, “We have the best recording of that person, you

should use it for your premium.” And if they let us make the premium, the Archives can make some money off that.

MR: You do have an impressive history of grants. I assume your primary funding for digitization is grants.

JB: Our first big grant was a 2007 Grammy grant. Then we did a series of NEA grants (2007, 2009, 2010, 2011), and another Grammy grant in 2013. And in 2013 and 2014 we have been participating in the California Audiovisual Preservation Project (CAVPP). We have received a generous amount of grant funding. [See <http://www.pacificaradioarchives.org/preservation-projects>.] The NHPRC [National Historical Publications and Records Commission] grant that we are currently working on is by far the largest that we have gotten. For the most part, previous grants were used to digitize 100–300 recordings. The NHPRC grant is to digitize 1,700 recordings.

MR: Is that the “American Women Making History and Culture” project? Would you share more details?

JB: Sure. It’s called “American Women Making History and Culture: 1963–1982,” and we are digitizing all of the Archives’ recordings related to the Women’s Movement. [See [Figure 5](#).] Basically, we are preserving the Women’s Movement as it was broadcast at the time, because no other radio stations were doing what Pacifica was doing. This was the one place where women could come and talk about what they were learning about themselves as women and about feminism. We are so lucky that we have as many tapes as we do. [See [Figures 6](#) and [7](#).] We are digitizing 1,700 tapes all together, and then we are combining that with another 300 or so that have been previously digitized through other grant projects, and then we’re going to be taking that whole collection of 2000-plus recordings, cleaning up the catalog records, or adding new catalog records. Many of the recordings that we just found on the shelves, they didn’t have any information on them, so we have to listen to them and do research in our Folios (station program guides). We are putting them in PBcore-formatted records, and we are going to create a finding aid as well. The crosswalks are being developed as we speak.



FIGURE 5 American Women Making History and Culture: 1963–1982 logo.



FIGURE 6 Pacifica's tape vault with paper shelf markers indicating tapes pulled to be digitized as part of the American Women grant project.

MR: That leads to my next question. How can people find out what's in the collection, and how can they access it?

JB: The plan is that we're going to have an item-level finding aid at the Online Archive of California [<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>]. The content will be available on the Internet Archive [https://archive.org/details/pacifica_radio_archives] and at OskiCat, UC Berkeley's Library's catalog [<http://oskicat.berkeley.edu/>]. We had a relationship with a librarian at UC Berkeley in their media library, Gary Handman; he recently retired.

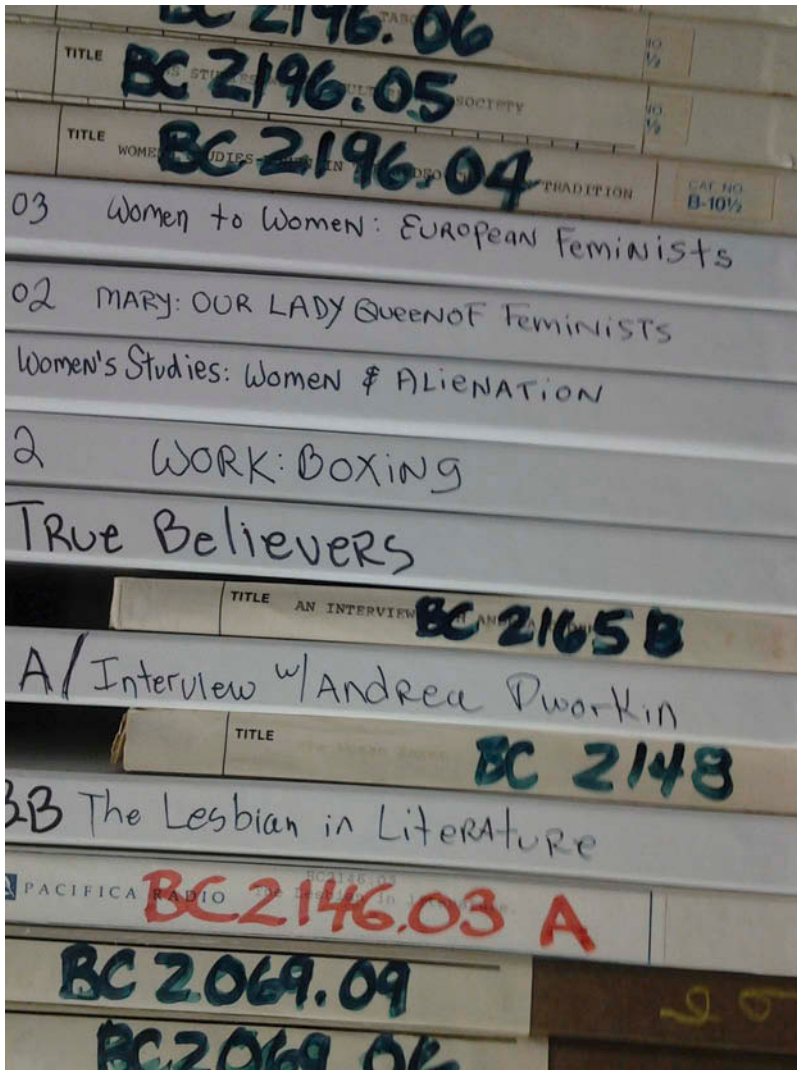


FIGURE 7 A selection of Women's tapes being shipped for digitization.

And we have done a series of projects with him, like the Black Panther Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, the Car Top Rally, the Free Speech Movement . . . so we have the recordings, and Gary Handman created a Web page so people could learn about the Free Speech Movement and listen to our audio [<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/FSM/fsm2.html>]. So then as we were applying for the NHPRC grant, we needed a trusted digital repository, so we talked to Gary Handman and he said, "Yes, send us your stuff." Then he retired, and we have a new contact there, Lynne Grigsby. We did a trial run of 50 recordings that

were previously digitized. We sent them the recordings, the .wav files, plus the metadata on an Excel spreadsheet, and they put the records up in OskiCat, in Berkeley's catalog. So if you look for "radical feminists," a Pacifica recording will come up in the UC Berkeley catalog, which is a public catalog—you don't need any passwords to listen to it. It's not only an honor, but it's appropriate because so much of the collection is from KPFA in Berkeley.

MR: Earlier you mentioned CAVPP, the California Audiovisual Preservation Project, [<http://calpreservation.org/projects/audiovisual-preservation/>]. What have you done with them?

JB: We have many recordings that were digitized on earlier grants, but we haven't had much opportunity to make those really important recordings available. So for part of the CAVPP, we sent a batch of recordings to be digitized, and we sent a batch of recordings that had been previously digitized to be preserved and made accessible on the Internet Archive via California Light and Sound [<https://archive.org/details/californialightandsound>]. We have a treasure trove of recordings related to California. For example, I know we had a program about the hippies living in Topanga Canyon. There was also one about massage parlors in San Francisco [https://archive.org/details/pacifica_radio_archives_cavpp_2014].

I should mention the Pacifica content. It's a lot of public affairs and politics. We pre-dated NPR by 20 years, so basically any leftist movements that happened in the United States happened on Pacifica's radio waves. I don't know if younger people understand how important radio was. People weren't watching TV or looking at the Internet to get the news—they were listening to the radio, and Pacifica provided an alternative source of news.

Pacifica also has amazing programming about the arts: interviews, poetry, so much poetry, as radio is a great avenue for poetry, and then we have great dramatizations, Radio Theater. We have lots of concerts. We went out to concerts, we sponsored many concerts, and many musicians came to the stations, so we have live studio performances as well. One of Pacifica's most popular series is Bob Fass's Radio Unnameable show from WBAI in New York. Fass was one of the first people to have Bob Dylan on the radio. All these musicians came to his radio show from the 1960s on . . . he had musicians from folk, psychedelic, and rock. His radio show was the one you listened to if you wanted to hear counterculture at the time.

MR: I know the Archives started in 1949. Do you have copies of every broadcast? Do they currently save recordings of every broadcast?

JB: We do not have recordings of every broadcast. We have what they made a tremendous effort to keep. And what happened to be left behind. And the Archives have some combination of really, really, really great

stuff and then this other stuff. Currently, we are not preserving everything that is being broadcast, except KPFFK. The Archives have a direct connection to KPFFK, literally, where we are recording their broadcasts. So if someone calls the Archives and asks for a copy of Ian Masters's show from Monday, we can give that to them. We sell that on a cost-recovery basis—the cost it takes us to make it, we don't make any profit. We usually use the Web site, like Ian Masters's Web site [<http://ianmasters.com/>] to find the metadata and the description of what happened during the program. We don't do that for everything; we do that on an "as requested" basis.

MR: Do you get recordings from producers, performers, other?

JB: Mostly producers, especially now that many of them are aging and moving out of their homes or passing away and their families want to donate their archives. Of course, as you know, donations of materials cost us money to process.

MR: How many full-time staff do the Archives have?

JB: Eight [<http://www.pacificaradioarchives.org/whos-who>]. There are three archivists. We all started on a temporary basis as part of a grant project. Archives Director Brian DeShazor does an amazing job of keeping us on.

[DeShazor happens by at this moment.]

JB: I was just telling Maureen how we get to stay here because you work very hard.

BD: Thank you, because I do try very hard. Always trying to tell the Board of Directors why it is important to have professional archivists at archives of this magnitude.

[DeShazor exits.]

JB: It was really interesting for me, coming from an archival education—archive for posterity—to a radio station and realizing that the culture was so focused on, "Hey, I found this really cool recording. Let's make a program and raise some funds with it," and having to realize that it is just two different worlds happening. And I think we've struggled and finally found a happy medium where those two worlds can come together. Right now, we are having a fund drive. Back in 1974, as then-President Nixon was releasing the Watergate tapes, the radio station would read the transcripts of the tapes on the radio, performed by different actors and radio personalities. One of those people was Harry Shearer and so he played Nixon then, and now he has a Web series where he plays Nixon [<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLtjme5if5dJWW5sUeSQc7ZbLqaSq7unQy>]. And so we are going to be interviewing him as part of our fund drive. We will be playing what we have on him playing Nixon in 1974 and compare it to what he's doing now. It's so much fun. But the metadata is a challenge. There were 20 episodes of this series, and each one has a different title, not in

a purposeful way. Thank heavens we have the tapes, and I can look at the actual tape box and some angel wrote on the tape box, what day it was performed, what day it was broadcast, and then what is the day of the transcript of the tape that they're reading from. So they're reading in May 1974, a conversation Nixon and Dean had in 1973. That's pretty typical. The stations also repackaged a lot of stuff, so they will make a new documentary out of the old one.

MR: So you do a lot of detective work.

JB: I do a lot of archival sleuthing. But my point was that these guys, the Archives' staff, get excited to create some traffic on our Web site and interesting premiums for our donors and then my reaction is, "Did you look at the record? What about the metadata? You can't give this away!" One of the biggest struggles here as a cataloger is how things get used and re-used and re-used in radio.

MR: To remind everyone, Pacifica is listener-supported radio . . .

JB: Correct. We have no corporate sponsors, no commercials. It's all listener-supported. Pacifica invented listener-supported radio. Matthew Lasar [http://history.ucsc.edu/faculty/profiles/singleton.php?&singleton=true&cruz_id=mlasar] wrote two wonderful books about Pacifica: *Uneasy Listening: Pacifica Radio's Civil War* (London: Black Apollo Press, 2005) and *Pacifica Radio: The Rise of an Alternative Network* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999). Pacifica has had a hugely tumultuous history. There's an argument that exists to this day . . . If it's public radio, then everybody should have a chance to be on the public radio, but we also need to encourage people who can help us stay afloat, who bring in more listeners, so we can continue to exist. And that's been a conundrum for the Pacifica Foundation [<http://www.pacifica.org/index.php>] since forever. And it still is. So what do you do about a programmer who brings in a lot of listeners and therefore a lot of money, but not everyone agrees with his politics? Also, it is public radio; shouldn't we be able to say whatever we want on the radio? But the founders really wanted to be respectful and have a forum for civilized debate and for people to be able to talk about their beliefs. But in the 1960s and 1970s, it just went crazy, and everybody was on the air doing drugs and talking about things that the founders would never have agreed with. But Pacifica was the place where you could talk or do or say whatever you wanted. But not everyone agreed. Many people thought Pacifica should be about culture and politics. And it's still today the debate—what are we supposed to be doing? There are a lot of people who are very passionate.

MR: What do you think is different about being a radio archivist versus an archivist who deals with paper or an audiovisual archivist who doesn't work in radio?

JB: I say an audiovisual archivist is different than a typical paper archivist. Because we don't necessarily know what is on that item until it's digitized, and there is a whole other layer of discovery and accessioning and cataloging that you don't have to do with paper. And I just want to shout it from the rooftops, "It's so hard!"

MR: Yes, it's mediated media.

JB: Also, it disintegrates faster. And we have to keep it cold and it's expensive. Here we are, broke as a joke, we are the archive for listener-supported radio—we don't have a university or some other institution that is caring for us—and then we have to keep everything cold and buy a new air-conditioning system and pay for its use. It is so expensive. And it's expensive to maintain the playback equipment. And it's expensive to maintain the servers once we digitize the tapes. I think being an A/V archivist is a different animal. Reading a manuscript or a document is so much faster than listening. Even listening to a single program introduction, I realized that I was listening, hitting pause, rewind, listening, hitting pause, rewind, "Wait, what did he say?" It can take me three times listening to be able to comprehend one sentence. So I, personally, think it's harder. And then being a radio archivist is different from being an A/V archivist in that we have to balance with the radio world. And the radio world is a different animal. Producers come in, producers come out. We broadcast other people's stuff. Other people broadcast our stuff. There is so much duplication. And then we have so many versions of things. Finding your way through that madness is definitely a special skill . . . keeping your sanity when you realize, "There is another copy of that recording. Is it different, or is it exactly the same? Is it related? Should it be its own thing?" This is my biggest struggle with the "American Women Making History and Culture" grant. I find something great, and then I find multiple copies of it that have just been changed the slightest. I think that is unique about radio. The different versions of the recordings and their production, re-production, re-re-production, etc. is a special quality of broadcasting.

MR: For people who are interesting in listening to what you have, what would be the best advice?

JB: Go to <http://www.pacificaradioarchives.org/>, and then there is a tab that says "Search our Collection," click on that [<http://www.pacificaradioarchives.org/keyword-search>]. And you can put in a keyword, like "Martin Luther King" or "feminism" or "music," and it will pull up a bunch of recordings, so you can see what we have; however, you cannot listen from there. We are working on it. It's a new Web-based catalog, so we now have the capability to add the links, but for the most part, you can hear our content at the Internet Archive [https://archive.org/details/pacifica_radio_archives]. We have both documents and audio. You can also listen to our weekly radio program,

“From the Pacifica Radio Archives Vault,” at <http://fromthevaultradio.org/home/>. Those are special recordings that have been pulled from the vault and produced into a radio program. And people can contact me; I can search our catalog and help people find programs. I also need to add that people should check out our “American Women Making History and Culture, 1963–1982” blog [<http://womenmakinghistoryblog.wordpress.com/>].

MR: Can you tell us about your background? What brought you to Pacifica?

JB: This is a second career for me. I worked as a psychologist with developmentally disabled adults in New York for five years, then moved to California and had some time off, and during that time off I thought, “I need to figure out what I really want to do, because that job was the hardest job I will ever have.” So I did some soul-searching and decided that if there was any job I could have, it would be related to music and preferably old formats. I have a thing with cassettes; I love mix-tapes. So if I could do anything, it would be work in audio, old audio. I “Googled” old audio formats and it came up with “archives,” and I thought, “Oh, archives. What is an archivist and how do you become one?” I had never even thought about archives or what archives were. I found out that you went to Library School, so I went to UCLA for my MLIS—Go, Bruins—and focused on A/V archiving. And by some great miracle, I actually got a job as an A/V archivist right out of school. I mean, how many of us do you think there are? In LA, there are maybe 10 institutions with A/V archives, so it’s amazing that I got the job here doing exactly what I wanted to do.

MR: What do see for the future of the Pacifica Radio Archives?

JB: That’s a good question. We rely heavily on Pacifica Radio funding, and it is dwindling. We also depend on our stations and they are certainly struggling financially, too. But I feel like the Archives have been at worse points. I feel that our work is on the up and up. The “American Women Making History and Culture” project, when it’s up and done, will put us on a different level as an archive. I think people are going to know about us. And we will have guidelines in place for how to do these kinds of massive projects, which will help us get more grants, and continue with more preservation projects.

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