


32 Page 21



*"My country 'tis of thee . . .
Our land of bi-go-try . . .
Land of black slaves . . ."*

The art of awareness

'Outrageous' activist brings her awareness to Sinclair

By KATHERINE ULLMER
Daily News Staff Writer

Flo (Florynce) Kennedy is singing again — one of her "crazy songs" with made-up radical lyrics.

"Dayton's not quite ready for that," she decides after singing a few more hard-hitting lyrics in her radical-humor-down-home style. "I'll sing the more conservative songs in Dayton."

At age 66, "I've lived six years beyond what I call my deadline," the lawyer, authoress, feminist and civil rights activist said in a recent phone interview from her New York City apartment. She peppers her language with the usual four-letter words and others she's concocted.

Ms. Kennedy — who has a penchant for storytelling — says she had planned to die at age 60 but that her younger sister Joy talked her into buying a house on Fire Island and then into buying "a decent coat."

Flo Kennedy:
'We are saying we are entitled to a decent life'

See FLO, Page 22

Flo and Pepper Book 1

Clipped By:



MidSouth_Investigator
Thu, Aug 8, 2019

Flo Kennedy to speak for awareness

Continued from Page 21

"I BOUGHT A COYOTE coat at age 59, and when I had my 60th birthday, the coat was still almost brand new. I thought — if I die this year, Joy will wear the coat. I'd see her walking the dog with this coat. I gave myself 18 months more to live. I don't want to be sick. I want to be dead . . . I've never smoked or drank. It's hard to die when your general health is good."

But now, she says she has "a real problem. My coat is worn completely out. It's worn to rags at the elbows. Now what do I do?"

No doubt about it. Flo Kennedy is not about to give up the ghost or the struggle against oppression — be it racist, sexist, or just plain "power politics." She describes the establishment and the Reagan administration as a "pathological group of compulsive gamblers" who are willing to gamble on their grandchildren's future. " . . . racism, sexism — don't make sense." Nor does nuclear war, battered women or job discrimination, she adds. Flo Kennedy speaks out against all such injustices.

Born in Kansas City, Mo., Ms. Kennedy grew up in "a little frame ugly house in a poor neighborhood" with three sisters, her mother and taxi-driver father.

"WE WERE WELL-BEHAVED, but my parents taught us to defend ourselves and to fight for what we believed in," she says.

"My dad was a mild-mannered man, not a combative person." But when members of the Ku Klux Klan came to their house and spat on the sidewalk and "said we would have to move," her father showed a different side of

his nature. "He went inside and got his gun. 'I'll shoot the first man that comes on this porch,'" she says he told them. " 'After that you can shoot me.' They left and he never had any more trouble. That incident became a family legend," Ms. Kennedy says. "(He taught us) there are certain things that you have to be ready to die for."

Her childhood spirit of independence stayed with her into adulthood, she says. In the '50s she decided it "would be fun to be a lawyer" and worked her way through Columbia law school as one of the first black women. "There are people who don't necessarily want to get married and ooch out babies," she explains. "Law books are not as heavy as babies."

MARRIAGE DID NOT HOLD a strong attraction for her, she says, but at age 41 she married "a drunken Welshman. He was 31. He died at 33 and we were separated at the time. He would get completely drunk and crazy." She did not marry again. "If I got married, I decided I would always have a divorce fund that I would hide in a cookie jar.

"Struggle always pays off," she adds. "The more you have involved in the struggle, the more it pays. After making only \$3 an hour in Kansas City, I've made \$60,000 a year. Personally, I have avoided much of the oppression but, socially, I feel a part of it."

Since giving up her law practice, Ms. Kennedy has been busy lecturing and writing. She has numerous books to her credit, including *Abortion Rap*, with Diane Schuler; *The Pathology of Oppression*; *Color Me Flo*; and her latest book, *Sexual Discrimination in Em-*

ployment, a law book written in collaboration with William F. Pepper.

A FOUNDER OF THE Feminist Party, Ms. Kennedy said her latest book is meant "to disrupt the complacency of the business community. I hope to do as much damage as the ERA might have done good."

Why fight for the ERA?

"We are saying we are entitled to a decent life. Once you realize people may be unfair even though they had authority — that parents beat kids . . . and husbands beat wives, you realize that this is not necessarily the world it should have been."

Before the feminist movement got going, "how often did you read or see a story in the media about women being abused by their husbands?" she asks. "Women are not taught to fight back. We're so busy perfuming ourselves and smelling good, we don't know how to fight . . . We're taught to grow up sweet, smiling, innocent and impotent."

Listen to Flo Kennedy for any length of time, however, and you realize that her words are anything but impotent.

"I LIKE TO BE SHOCKING," she says. "It's fun. I don't have the time or opportunity to be otherwise. I have to say memorable things to make people remember."

"I tell stories that are funny, outrageous and embarrassing, but you don't forget it so readily. I think the technique pays off."

Ms. Kennedy will be speaking outrageously Tuesday at Sinclair Community College's Blair Hall as part of Women's Awareness Week. Her speech will be at 8 p.m. and is free to the public.

Flo and Pepper Book

Clipped By:



MidSouth Investigator

Thu, Aug 8, 2019