

A Conversation with Merle Hoffman '73 and Mary Lou Greenberg

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2023

3:30–4:30 pm and 5:15–6:15 pm | Powdermaker Hall, Room 102



MERLE HOFFMAN is an internationally known leader in the struggle for women's rights; a healthcare pioneer; founder of women's health, political, and reproductive rights organizations; and a prize-winning writer and publisher. Her work spans over 52 years and continues today, proving to be more essential and relevant than ever in the ongoing struggle for women's human rights, concentrated in ensuring the ability to make their own reproductive choices and to have access to legal and safe abortions.

Merle Hoffman established Choices Women's Medical Center, one of the country's first abortion clinics, in 1971, two years before the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion nationally in the Roe v. Wade Decision. Today, Choices is one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive women's medical facilities, providing abortion services, birth control, gynecology, pre-natal care, counseling services, Tele-Medicine, and specialized care for teens and the LGBTQ community, along with extensive educational outreach to schools, prisons, and women's organizations.

Based on her observations of doctor-patient miscommunication, Merle Hoffman developed the concept and guidelines of "Patient Power," an early model for the patient-centered health movement.

In 1982, Hoffman produced, directed, and wrote the documentary film, *Abortion: A Different Light*, and in 1986, she produced and hosted the first feminist TV show, *MH: On the Issues*, a syndicated 30-minute cable TV show. A documentary film, *25 Years of Choices*:

Feminism from the Ground Up, was produced to honor her and her work.

Through the years she has been outspoken in supporting women's reproductive choice and opposing attacks on abortion rights and access. In January 2022, when the US Supreme Court indicated it was on track to overturn the Roe Decision, she co-initiated RiseUp4AbortionRights.org which calls for massive nationwide demonstrations in the streets to prevent abortion from being outlawed and puts forward the slogan, "Abortion on Demand and Without Apology."

Merle Hoffman is co-founded and was first president of the National Abortion Federation in 1976 and founded the activist New York Pro-Choice Coalition in 1985 to counteract the growing threat of anti-abortion terrorism in New York.

In 1989, Hoffman and the Coalition also publicly challenged New York City's Cardinal John O'Connor's support of Operation Rescue, which she deemed "violent to women," by organizing the first pro-choice civil disobedience action outside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Several hundred participated, and nine pro-choice supporters were arrested.

In 1994, when Hoffman learned about the lack of birth control options available to women in Russia, she organized and led a trip of physicians and counselors from Choices on an educational exchange and began working with Russian hospitals to develop Choices East, the first feminist outpatient medical center in Russia. While in Moscow, she organized Russian feminists to deliver an open letter to Boris Yeltsin on the state of women's health care.

In 2015, Hoffman founded Choices Global Institute of Healing and Education, a nonprofit foundation to support projects in the USA and internationally that promote health services and education for underserved women focusing on shame and honor cultures.

One of her most recent actions was organizing support for the massive protests in Poland in Fall 2020 against a draconian abortion ban. She authored a letter of support "To the Great Women of Poland" which was signed by prominent feminists in the U.S., including Phyllis Chesler, Gloria Steinem, and Naomi Wolf. It was published in Poland's largest daily news outlet, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, on Nov. 10, 2020 and spread widely on social media.

Hoffman is the publisher of *On the Issues Magazine*, which began as a print publication in 1983 and went online in 2008. It featured provocative interviews with pathbreaking leaders in the feminist,

civil and human rights, and environmental movements, among other articles, including reports from the front lines of the abortion battle. Hoffman was awarded the prestigious Front-Page Award for Political Commentary in 2010 from the Newswoman's Club of New York for her editorial, "Selecting the Same Sex."

Merle Hoffman's memoir, *Intimate Wars: The Life and Times of the Woman Who Brought Abortion from the Back Alley to the Boardroom*, was published in 2012 by The Feminist Press. *Publishers Weekly* opined that "she eloquently chronicles more than three decades of struggles to keep abortion legal. Readers will learn much about her drive to recast 'reproductive freedom as a positive moral value.'" *Kirkus Reviews* called it "An inspiring story of a woman who participated in 'one of the greatest revolutions in history'—and is still at the forefront of the struggle."

In her new book launching November 2023, *Choices: A Post-Roe Abortion Rights Manifesto*, written after the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision, Hoffman sheds light on the catastrophic repercussions of overturning Roe and what we as a nation must do moving forward to ensure the safety and freedom of women and girls everywhere. Topics include: revamping the healthcare system to support women's rights, combatting rising authoritarianism, the

generation in the fight for reproductive justice. Pre-order is available on Amazon or Barnes & Noble now.

MARY LOU GREENBERG has been a revolutionary activist since the 1960s, including for women's liberation and abortion rights. She has organized support for clinics and providers across the country, defending them from anti-abortion protestors. She has written many articles about the struggle for abortion and how important access to safe, legal abortion is for women's freedom. Mary Lou has worked for Choices Women's Medical Center for many years, doing community outreach and education, including presentations in schools and community centers on reproductive and sexual health.



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