A few months ago, I received a call inviting me to attend an event in Ashland as a founder of The Rogue Valley Community Health Network. It took a minute for me to I realize who was calling - at first I thought you were the Jackson County Health Department - but soon I understood that a tiny and tenacious seedling, The Ashland Women's Health Center, planted by a group of teenagers and twenty-something women in 1972, had grown deep roots, and county wide branches, had sprouted wings to become YOU. I was stunned and speechless and I could not hold in my tears. I look out at us tonight, gathered together across past, present and future, across fifty years of belief and building of women's health, people's health and planetary and universal health, and I feel that if we are here in this moment, in a patchwork quilt of possibilities, then everything is possible. Tonight my offering to you is, like we are, a patchwork quilt - a bit of my personal story - how the 19 year old me arrived in Ashland from Washington DC carrying a tattered and inspirational women's self help health document from Boston and the idea for creating something like that in Oregon and how a group of women made it so.

First a little about me: I am the child of Brooklyn, New York parents with working class roots in the Lower East Side. They moved to Washington DC where I was born and raised.. In the early 1950s, mom and dad were a young northern Jewish couple in the south, still reeling from recent Holocaust losses. The Civil Rigfhts Movement simmered, unfolded, and screamed in the 1960s, and in my 11th year, I stood on my father's knee at the Lincoln Memorial as Martin Luther King sang his "I have a dream" vision and the SNCC Freedom Singers belted out

harmonies that I still hear in my head. My consciousness was forged not just from what I heard but how it felt in my body.

This awakening translated into a life of activism - by high school I marched in countless anti-war rallies, witnessed the first Earth Day, and joined the youth division of SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). In between protesting, I sang with a madrigal ensemble and received organizational training at 17, when I served as the International President of the largest Jewish Youth group in the world, Bnai Brith Girls.

That year, 1970, Bnai Brith sent me to Israel, it was primarily a photo op - pixs with Foreign Minister Abba Eban and a photogenic camel. On the ride from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, I noticed the bullet-ridden shacks behind barbed-wire, and winding our way down to the lowest point on earth, I inquired, “Who lives there?”

“Those are refugees,” I was told.

Feeling confused because I assumed they were Holocaust refugees, I said, “Why are Holocaust survivors living like that?”

“They are Arab refugees” they answered.

“And where are those refugees from?” I asked. This is how I learned about the Palestinian people. In this moment my consciousness was depended: My people, who I had understood as victims, were also capable of victimizing others. As my term ended and I gave up my gavel as international President and received my high school diploma, I took what we now call “a gap year,” I stopped through Boston on my way to visit Goddard College, and, there I met a woman from The

Boston Women's Health Book Collective. For 75 cents, I bought their stapled newsprint women's health course. And though we had barely met, she pulled out a flashlight and a mirror and a plastic speculum and showed me how to use it. There is your OS, she said, (who knew I had such a thing- now we say external os because OS means operating system). In this unforgettable, liberatory moment I understood that my body was my own. I stuffed the pamphlet and speculum into my Kelty pack and promised to share the course and the knowledge that knowing ourselves includes our bodies. I had met one of the creators of what became Our Bodies Ourselves.

East coast colleges were too expensive and eventually, after hitchhiking to Oregon, a new gay friend from Klamath Falls, suggested a small college in Ashland. Ashland seemed like a good place to grab a college education that could be stitched improvisational around my activist priorities: women's health and gay liberation.

I was ready to pull out my now tattered Boston health document and find other women to organize around what we then called "self-help" and Kenny and I were already plotting to start a gay student organization at SOC.

I still remember driving into Ashland for the first time - The Klamath and Siskiyou mountain ranges formed a belly bowl valley. Dry desert brush and tall Douglas fir trees encircled a small artsy town. Just down the road, Harry and David's fruit orchards lined the highway with smudge pots that I would later tend, and a bit farther up Interstate 5, women would soon purchase 80 acres at $80 per acre to form OWL - Oregon women's landtrust.

First things first, Kenny and I found a place to live on Whiteman Street - actually in the alley- a one bedroom that we divided by hanging sheets draped over a make-shift railing. The next day we registered for classes and simultaneously petitioned to start a gay student union. Donna Taylor (who is here tonight) was with us from the outset. As I registered for classes, women's health was at the center of my thoughts. I had a college strategy in mind. I would earn college credits around my activist work. I found a sociology course that seemed conducive to starting a women's health center -and an abnormal psychology course that would fit the bill for the Gay Student Union.

I found faculty allies, like Bill Lyons, an anthropology professor who included the word gender in his course description and allowed for "Independent study" to entail research that created evidence of the need for a Women's Health Center.

It was easy to find others interested in creating a collective to start a women's health center. Genesis Ideas never originate with or belong to one person alone - that's the great male myth. Achievements that last are always collaborative and congregational. Women's health, women's liberation, women's solidarity was in the air.. I am certain that many of the Ashland Women's Health Center co-founders and volunteers had been envisioning the same dream. Julie Chapman and Debra Gordon (now Zaslow) are both here tonight and both of them were rooted in thinking about health care issues. Dorrit Ahbel, who is also here, became a medical doctor after her time in Rogue Valley. Nancy Woods, Judy Wright, Nancy Mittleman, Carol Dunning, Carolee Von Shillagh, Kathy Parks, and others all

pitched in. Our emerging vision of women's health encompassed accessible health care for all and saw health as reclaiming our whole selves, body, spirit, intellect, emotional world. Pap smears and poetry, music and meditation, support groups, pregnancy and abortion counseling.

In the beginning …. we did not have a physical space, we met in living rooms, on rocks by the river, in fields on Ashland Mine Road and in Takilma, at Lavelle and Sue's studio on Oak Street. We had acquired the contraband – somehow - plastic specula used to track our monthly cycles, holding mirrors and flashlights and lying on towels, rugs, flat rocks and kitchen floors, we joined the thousands of women around the country who were seeing their bodies for the first time and beginning to take charge of their own health.

My sociology class was quantitative, and so a survey assessing the health care needs of women in the Rogue Valley was required. I am certain that Julie Chapman got me through statistics. I typed out (on construction paper) a single-spaced rationale for a women's health center that I would present to the Jackson County Public Health Department, to Dr. Al Kearns.

"The women's health center effort consists of women from various backgrounds and political orientations. We all share a desire to establish a center that conforms the insufficiency of the present health care system. We cannot solve the gross errors in US health what we do is in addition to offering basic tests, is to offer classes and a place where women can feel free to ask questions in a relaxed atmosphere. The women's center will give substance to our right to understand and control our bodies and to learn and share medical information.

We expected a fight, or at least resistance.We found an ally and a ready partner. “Let’s do it,” Dr. Kearns said. Are you ready to go to Seattle for VISTA volunteer training?The position came with a stipend and a fancy blue car. Eventually, Dr. Kearns expanded the position so that Julie and I shared it. Dr. Kearns was more than an ally - he was central - on board is an understatement,

So I was off to Seattle for training. While there I visited the Rainier Vista Community Health Clinic. A few fellow hippies in an old house showed me around. They knew of a warehouse where retiring docs donated stuff. It was a vast, Costco-sized corrugated tin building with rows and rows of doc office furniture and equipment. It was all free. aisle after aisle filled with examining tables - not just tables - mahogany and leather with brass stirrups, quartersawn oak cabinets with 19th century glass, stainless steel instruments, huge tuning forks and multi-colored optical lenses. I could take whatever I wanted! I was not old enough to rent a car, much less a truck large enough to cart all of this booty back to Ashland. Oh and did I say, our Center did not have a physical site. It was Dorrit, who drove the truckload back - she was a few years older with a government drivers license, and somehow, with Dr. Kearns help we drove back to Ashland. When we arrived, Gary was leaning against a lamppost in front of the row of commercial real estate that he owned on Main Street. There was a shop filled with leather belts, and Nancy Woods, one of our founders, worked there. (I am wearing one of the belts she helped me make.).Turns out Gary not only owned the storefronts but also the walkup offices. There we were with a truckload of equipment and no home for it and there he was with a small suite upstairs - an outer room perfect for meetings,

classes, and two rooms for examinations. Someone had left a refrigerator and an old couch that sort of worked. I think we carried all that stuff up, we went from an idea to an outfitted center that day.

But how did we become a functional center and what services did we provide? The institutionalization and leadership of the nascent Center rests with Julie Chapman. I shared my VISTA stipend early on and Julie along with volunteers like Debra Zaslow, began gathering medical information. As Julie describes it: " In the beginning we picked up every form we could find, gynecological, sexual history, intake for pregnancy tests. At this time pregnancy tests were not available over the counter you had to go somewhere. Women didn't always want their doc to know that they were sexually active or had conceived. So we needed to understand more than how to give a test but also how to be discreetly supportive. we didn't just provide a pregnancy test. We tried to sense how the woman might want to handle the result. If they wanted to get pregnant, we counseled them on increasing their chances and how to stay healthy after conception. We counseled about STDs, we provided abortion counseling and referrals. After Roe Vs Wade in 1973, we helped women figure out how to get to Portland and how to pay for it. When Oregon passed legislation that allowed doctors to provide legal abortions in their offices, we networked locally.

Julie goes on, In the early days of the Ashland Women's Health Center, nobody had an appointment. We would have one or two people there. And we had a couple of exam rooms where we could provide gonorrhea testing and pregnancy testing. Soon we also had an evening clinic with a volunteer doc where we could

draw blood, fit and remove IUDs, and guys came in as well with back pain. Our deep mission was “let’s help each other.” The health department trained me and I trained others.

Soon after we unloaded the equipment, we heard about a people’s health clinic that was forming in Takilma and we headed up to see what we could learn. There was Dr. Jim Shames, recently from Multnomah. He spent the entire day with us and invited us to stay overnight. This would not be our last trip to the Takilma People’s Clinic in the Illinois valley nor our last collaboration with Dr. Shames.

We organized our first women’s cultural day called WomenSource at the Pioneer Building. Our health approach was holistic - women’s self-care -what we called self-help was physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual. Yoga, song, poetry, nutrition, astrology, birth control - the day was woven together with myriad workshops. It was so successful - we raised money, supplies and spirits and soon began plans for Womanspace an overnight festival up in the mountains.

My life’s trajectory took an unexpected turn. My friend David Zaslow who was working with an experiential learning environment at the college, was set to sponsor a semester’s study abroad for the fall 1973 semester. Long story - shortened, I was asked to travel to Israel to check on the students.

I thought I would take a few weeks off from my work at the Ashland Women’s Health Center and, of course, I’d get college credit for writing about my experiences . But The War broke out less than 24 hours after my arrival and my two week trip became six months.

Time had not stood still back in the USA or globally for that matter. A few days after the war broke out, Spiro Agnew resigned as Vice President and the Watergate hearings that had begun in 1972, were still in full swing - Nixon would not resign until a few months later in August 1974 - not before he signed legislation approving the Alaska pipeline. Women were allowed to serve on juries for the first time. The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Roe v Wade was the law of the land. And The Geneva Conference opened under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary General, in an attempt to negotiate a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

By the time I returned to Ashland, it was early March of 1974. The Women's Health Center was now a flourishing, well organized and well administered enterprise. I confess that it is a wonderful experience to help launch something and witness how it had transformed upon my return. That's what makes social activism so amazing; it spreads!

Back in Ashland, I joined the efforts to expand the Center's Womenspace project into more than an overnight women's health, music, and culture festival but to produce concerts in town. Womenspace became the local producer for national artists passing through between the Bay Area and Portland and the one day women's cultural day grew. And women's record companies were sprouting up in California and they soon heard of us here in Ashland. One of those artists, Holly Near, after performing in town, invited me to join her in Los Angeles and help run her record company. With my SOC diploma in hand and gratitude in my heart, I got in my yellow truck and joined the emerging women's music movement.

I end as I began, with how stunning it is to look out at you and to bask for this moment at what you have built in the Rogue Valley and for equitable and just health nationally and globally. I am prouder than you can imagine at who you are what you do - and most importantly at what you as a the Rogue Valley Health Network are poised to do in the coming years. Once there was a seedling called the Ashland Women's Health Center that grew into a deeply rooted and dazzlingly branched network of equitable health for all. We are always the seedling - and I can't wait to see what you will be growing next. As one of my mentors and comrades, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon once said, "if you feel something is missing, it's probably the sound of own voice" you are giving voice to those who may not yet have a voice. Bernice also told me: "You've got to leave a trail," bravo to you, one and all, for leaving a trail and for being trailblazers. And as for the 70 year old me who was once that 19 year old here in Ashland, you launched me into a lifetime of activism and I am eternally grateful.