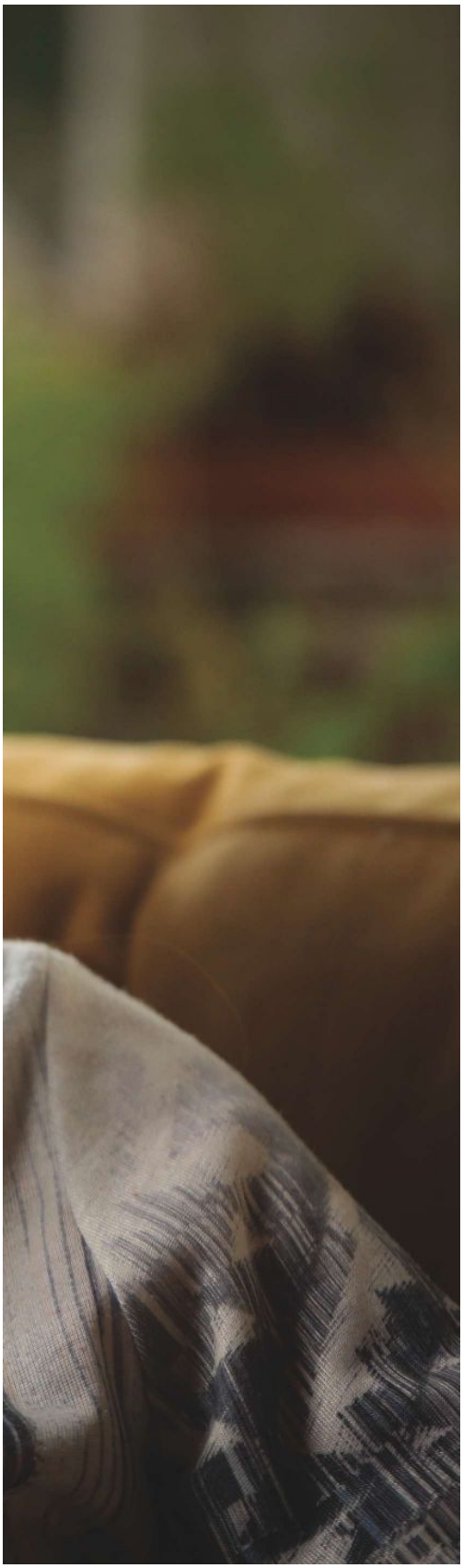


"I'M NOT A GLIDER"

By Mary Chellis Nelson
Photos by Jessica Ebelhar

Veteran activist and former ACLU head Suzy Post discusses her spirited life.

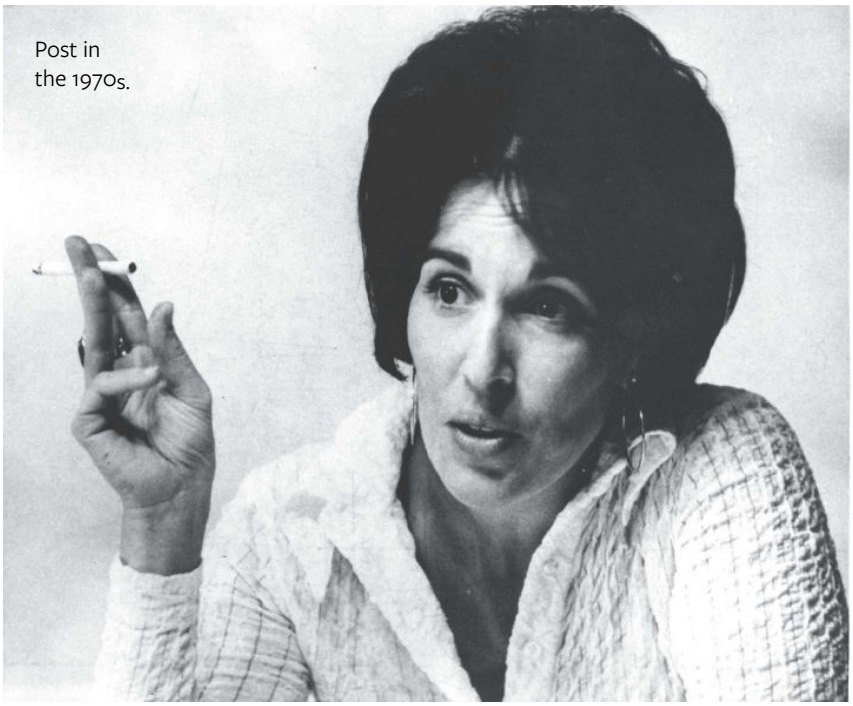
Somebody once left Suzy Post a voicemail, saying, "You Jewish, lesbian, anti-Christ, communist bitch."

"And she was like, 'I think that's actually one of the best compliments I've ever received,'" says Michael Aldridge, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky. "I tried to make that my ringtone."

Post is not all of those things, but she has spent her life defending minority and so-called deviant groups and ideas through her work with the ACLU, drawing a lot of racist and homophobic (and the like) hatred along the way.

Post has never been one to shrug her shoulders and reason that life isn't fair. Injustice eats at her. Born in 1933 and having grown up during World War II the daughter of German Jews, she says she was always aware of freedoms being essential in a democracy. Her uncle Arthur Kling helped found the local ACLU chapter in the '50s. (Kling was also the first white board member at the Urban League in Louisville.) Post, then in her 20s, joined the ACLU board when she and her husband Edward returned to Louisville after his stint in the Navy out West. The ACLU of Kentucky had formed following the group's legal defense of Carl and Anne Braden, a white couple who in 1954 famously bought a house for an African-American family in an all-white neighborhood and were later charged with sedition. But, overall, the ACLU wasn't doing enough, according to Post. In the '60s, she became president of the local ACLU chapter and vice president of the national chapter, where she worked with Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was teaching at Rutgers at the time — but more on that later.

With the ACLU as her platform, Post volunteered herself as the only white plaintiff in the 1972 public school desegregation case (her five children attended public school); organized a nearly 6,000-person march in downtown Louisville protesting President Richard Nixon following the Cambodia bombing, on Inauguration Day in 1973; and ran a tight race for state legislature in 1975. She has given several oral histories and has said, "It's a slur on my reputation that I was never able



Post in the 1970s.

to get arrested." Her name appears nearly 700 times in the *Courier-Journal*, mostly attached to her letters to the editor. "She can motivate a crowd and have the momentum and get people fired up about issues, similar to (Louisville Urban League president and CEO) Sadiqa Reynolds today," Aldridge says.

In the '80s, Post became executive director of the local ACLU and worked herself so thin that she had to quit after eight years, the second-longest executive director tenure after Aldridge, who has held the role since 2008. Her parting gifts: securing seed money from pro-choice philanthropists in the Bingham and Brown families; starting the Reproductive Freedom Project (which turns 30 this year) as Kentucky and other states were attempting to chip away at rights granted in the Roe v. Wade decision; and reviving the organization from lean times and giving it the grounding to become the 11-person staff that's currently in four lawsuits against Gov. Matt Bevin concerning abortion access. The ACLU is in the midst of moving into offices at Waterfront Plaza on Main Street, and Aldridge says that a meeting room will be named after Post. "She was like, 'Couldn't name the whole building after me?'" Aldridge says.

After leaving the job at the ACLU, Post went on to become the founding director of the Metropolitan Housing Coalition, which works to secure affordable housing for those in need. But she has remained tight with the ACLU. "She's talking a lot about death right now," Aldridge says. "She kept trying to get me to use her death as a fundraising opportunity. She's like, 'I've raised money. I know you can do this. Let's think about who can give you a lot of money on my death.'" For her 80th birthday, in 2013, she helped raise nearly $200,000 for Louisville Central Community Center (a west Louisville nonprofit she's worked with for decades) during a Suzy Post Roast and Toast.

When I visit her in mid-November, she's got red and blue star-shaped foam stickers on each of her cheeks. They're a way to cushion the oxygen tube she's worn since she had a cancerous lung removed years ago. "Usually when you see people that wear these, you'll see these indentations," she says. "It's a dead giveaway. I also think they're a little more festive-looking than just showing up in one of these ghastly... The only trouble is I have to go into one of the stores that I tell everybody never to shop in to get (the stickers). It's one of the stores that is anti-choice? It's a chain?" Hobby Lobby? "Yeah, that's it."

Post, now 85, appears decades younger as she bounces from room to carpeted room, barefoot. It's a postmodern dream inside her Craftsman-style home in Crescent Hill. Two giant tiger-print sofas face each other in an art-filled sunroom. There's a sculpture of a dancing couple that Post bought from former University of Kentucky basketball player LaVon Williams, though she didn't recognize the name until her son mentioned it. She calls her bedroom "the vagina room" because she had a friend paint it in a swirl of coral, orange, purple and peach, making it seem like you're inside a Georgia O'Keeffe painting. Maureen Womack, a friend of Post's daughter, helps out around the house, keeps Post company and drives her places.

Post says, "I moved in going through a divorce when I was 47 and I'm eighty-…?"

"Five," Womack says.

"Eighty-five?"

"Mmmhmm."

"God, I can't believe I got so old so fast. So I've lived here 20-something years. No! Thirty-something. Jeez."

Post takes a gulp of iced Coke, sets it down on a glass coffee table and wrings life stories from her sharp memory, for the first of three interviews, condensed on the following pages.

When I return a few weeks later, a woman with Home Instead Senior Care answers the door and asks if I'm with Hosparus. Inside, a loud oxygen tank hums and gurgles. Post is on the coiled landline in her kitchen, talking with her neighbors who are in China. Once we sit down, the phone seems to ring every few minutes.

"We're trying to figure out how long I've got to live," Post says, "I've never been here before. I have a lung disease that's gonna kill me, and we're trying to think about when the best time for that would be. It's interesting. And a little strange, to sit around thinking, *When's the best time to get her drugs?* It's hard for me because whenever I have to have a discussion about my death, which is gonna be coming up soon — I mean, I have just loved life. It is gonna piss me off to have to die before I really want to.

"And the one thing I wanted in my life, after I decided that I was not gonna end up just planting seeds and growing little gardens, is that it was really important to me to have an interesting life, because an

interesting life really gets ahold of you. I think an interesting life is very important, including one's own death. I've spent an awful lot of my time and energy trying to encourage people to become activists in their own lives and to take a hands-on approach — because I do think life can be extremely interesting and I do think that we have more control over parts of it than we let ourselves believe. And to the degree that we have control over part of it that will make our lives interesting and other lives more humane or kinder, we should do it. It's hard. It's hard when you sit down and start thinking about the thousands and thousands and thousands of people who just have nothing. Nothing. And you don't know whether poverty does 'em in or their lack of attention to their resources or lack of access. You know, we've all got something. We've all got things that we can use with a little imagination. And our lives are a big imagination — big."

What have you been up to lately?

"Yesterday I had a meeting here, a lunch for 12 or 13 volunteers for the Louisville Central Community Center, which is a social-services center. I've been on that board for ages. And I was trying to think of somebody we could choose for next year to honor who would bring in money. The kids are doing theater down there (at LCCC). Oh, it's so cool. And I get bored in bad theater. I went to the last one. It was fantastic! Some of those kids are really musical! I had a fundraiser (here) one night two or three years ago and there were some children — girls, about four or five of them — who came and they were kind of bored and we were outside and I asked them if they wanted to go in and watch TV. They came in the house — they loved it. They could not get over the (drawing of the) naked woman in the kitchen. That did it. They just stood there like they were shocked. They were looking at somebody's pubic hair! In the kitchen! It was an education. But they loved to go through the house because it's so different. They're from the projects and this is a really rich lady's house. It's a good house for little kids. When I bought this house I purposely wanted to make it interesting for children because my grandfather's house down in Old Louisville was one of those three-story things, cold, dark. I hated to go. It was so depressing. It was just awful and I thought, *Make it fun for kids.* I love color. I guess you can tell. These windows are why I bought this house. This house was in shit shape and the woman who had bought it to be a fixer-upper had no taste. There was fake brick linoleum on the kitchen floor and the walls were covered in royal blue and silver wallpaper and I thought, *ugh*, but I have friends who told me that the reason I felt the way I did about this house wasn't just the windows, it was the feng shui in the front room.

"But I stay minimally busy with the ACLU, which is my main passion and has been. I was an English major, so of course I went to the ACLU. And that's about it."

Connect being an English major with gravitating toward the ACLU. What do those have in common?

"One of the things that in this part of the country the ACLU was useful for were times when books and libraries in schools were being removed on the basis of being too scatological, too un-American, too bad, bad, bad. And the ACLU is the primary defender of the First Amendment of the United States. The First Amendment prohibits communities and libraries from (removing) noxious, according to one entity or another, literature. So immediately when you have a school board, say, make a fuss over *Slaughterhouse-Five* or whatever book is now being attacked, the ACLU is the organization in that area, if there is an ACLU, to stand up and say, 'No! The First Amendment prohibits that.' It says government may not make any law restrictive of a person's right to read. And that's like mother's milk, it's just a given. It leads to a disproportionate number of ACLU members who are English teachers or just plain readers, you know?"

What was your time as ACLU executive director like?

"I was a one-person operation. I had a half-time person who came in to open the mail — she was my best friend and didn't do shit. But at least there was some company. The reason I have this deck out here — when I bought this house I was the ACLU director. I used to get the lawyers that I knew together for dinner once a month, feed them to get them to take ACLU cases for free. So when I looked at this house, it ended right there. It's got two bedrooms upstairs; downstairs it's really small. I had moved from a big house over near Atherton (High School). Big, big rooms, a big den with a fireplace, a big living room with a fireplace. I had moved into this and I thought, *Oh, my god, what am I gonna do?* So I put that deck out there. I thought, *I can feed people; that'll take care of that.* That is really an ACLU-dedicated deck. Of course, then after a couple years I left that job. I couldn't survive in it any longer. One of the single most self-destructive things I've ever done was work there. Really, really hard. Really hard."

What was so hard about it?

"It touches everybody's hot buttons at one point and if they know where you are, they find you. Right before Thanksgiving one year I was having the family — my family, my mom and dad, my sister and brother — for Thanksgiving. I was in the kitchen cooking and I get a call from somebody who hated me and hated the ACLU and I answered the phone — how did I know? — and just hatred and vitriol. They find you."

What were they upset about?

"Anti-church stuff or they hate abortion. There are so many people who hate the idea of democracy and everybody having the same rights — and communists shouldn't have them and gay people shouldn't have them and black people. Oh, my god, the racism in this community is just — you could cut it with a knife. So I was very visible. I was in the newspaper a lot. I was on TV a lot. I was the only person. I had to. That's what you do in a little barely surviving nonprofit like that. So everybody knew me. In fact, I'd walk into meetings — big meetings — and I remember somebody said, 'Over there, there's that awful Suzy Post.' And I got that a lot. I mean, this is not a progressive environment in Louisville. It's very, very unprogressive. It's Christian rights — very Christian, very Catholic: *Abortion?* You know, and how can you be with the ACLU and not support choice? It's just a given. So they get you for that. How can you be for the ACLU and not support racial justice? For anybody who's gonna go into something public, spending a month in the ACLU office and hearing some of that would be a really good education and teach him or her about their community in a way that they wouldn't get just being on the ground. It's a lot of hatred."

It's hard for some people to understand, too, that the ACLU stands behind free speech from Neo-Nazis and KKK members.

"Yeah, exactly. And that makes the Jews mad. I had family members who hated the ACLU because it supported the rights of Nazis and they had relatives who were killed and murdered by the Nazis. They just don't get the concept. I mean, it's just hard to say, 'You've gotta let those people have their say,' unless you understand what happens when you don't. And this is supposed to be a democracy. It's the one organization that I will never leave because I think that, living in this country, it is really important — really important — to allow us to say what we think, to write what we think, to distribute what we write. And that's not a given in a lot of places."

What are some examples of racism you see today?

"All you have to do is look at the figures for new sales in housing and the disparity between white and black sales. Black sales of the same house that a white house sold for in a white community as opposed to a black community can vary as much as 15, 20 percent because one is a community at risk. And black people, when they're buying, there's a built-in disadvantage to their borrowing history just because they're black. It's sort of built into maintenance of the black substrata. Racism is — it's useful. It's useful for some things. For some economic things, you can cut the amount that you pay somebody because they're black. It's just a million things. It's a sickness that we're never gonna get over. Most people just glide along and that's perfectly understandable. But I was born at a time when it was all erupting in Europe. And I'm not a glider. I remember those camps and I remember that we had family killed in Germany — not immediate family but distant aunts and uncles that were killed just 'cause they were Jewish. We're all just animals and I can't forget that. I belong to a pack and my pack survived because some people went to the trouble of making sure that we did."

You were the lead plaintiff in the school-desegregation lawsuit that was filed in 1972 and won in 1975. Tell me about that.

"I feel very bad because I helped desegregate those schools. It was just hard and I don't know that there was a perfect way, but it needed to be done. School desegregation has caused me more grief than anything because when the judge ordered desegregation, I felt personally responsible to the degree that I thought I had to be everywhere to watch and to call out if I felt things weren't being done right. It was a killing. It was too much. No one person could do that."

What kinds of things were you dealing with?

"Well, if they sent kids to the wrong school or if they didn't desegregate the buses effectively or if the black kids in a previously white school got short-changed, the black parents would come to me and complain about how their son is now going to a school out there and they're not letting him take (a class) that they have because there's no blacks in that class. Just good-old racism. I didn't have any staff, you know, I had no status. All I had done was be the prime mover in the lawsuit. The ACLU filed the lawsuit. They didn't have any staff. So it was very painful, exhausting. It was just really, really hard to live through that period and tell myself every night when I'd come home and collapse that *I'll be OK tomorrow. I can do it again tomorrow*. I just thought it was really unhealthy to segregate on the basis of something as superficial as color. I think the greater the mix, the stronger the community and the society. And I probably think it was both the stupidest and the bravest thing I ever did in my life. Now that I mention it, it was both the stupidest and the bravest."

You once told a story about how Central High School, which had mostly or all black students at the time, was missing half its auditorium seats, had broken windows and a dusty, treeless outside area, and that before the start of the school year in '75, when desegregation went into effect, all of those things were fixed.

"I think that the American public, including me, cannot really emotionally or intellectually understand the depth of the effect that slavery has on the people in this country. Here we had for all those years a population that we were allowed to keep entirely separate from us, the white people, with all kinds of myths and stereotypes and crap about them. Just abolition didn't do it.

"If it happens it's gonna take more generations than we've already spent. It's like a curse if you're black. And I so admire the spiritual leaders and the African-American community who find their voices and their glory and can share it because they're beautiful. The black people I have known, because of the way they've been treated in this country, have developed something that I'll never have: a feeling about life and others that's just — it's very Christian. So part of it's that, but not all of it. I think we have not listened to them enough. And I'm not a religious person. That deep religiosity that you find in so many African-Americans is what has preserved their own sense of dignity in their own populations, and I just marvel at it. We've done everything horrible that we could do to a people. And they survive and they sing. I'm Jewish, so I have a little bit of the survival skill too, but they would put me to shame, the African-American community in this country. I didn't mean — I sound like a preacher, for god's sake."

You mentioned some of the leaders and voices. I think of people from your era like civil rights leader the Rev. Louis Coleman. You once said that since he died, you haven't seen any more agitators in the African-American community.

"Oh, I loved him. I miss him so much. Oh, he was a trip. He never came to a meeting on time. We always had to put Anne Braden or somebody on his trail to go get him if we were having a meeting. But he was a spiritual, you know the old — what is that spout that comes up? Geyser? He was like that. He just spouted love and well-being and belief in God. I'm a devout atheist, but it affected me. I mean, he was just beautiful and he had a beautiful soul."

What was Anne Braden like?

"Oh, honey, you'd have to come over one night and we'd get a bottle of wine. I've got nothing but Braden stories. She was a fascinating woman and she did fascinating things. Louis (Coleman) worked with her, hand in glove. He was

a staff person for the Louisville Urban League at the time that Anne was out there fomenting rebellion. She was very dour. Any white person who wasn't working for social justice, she wanted to make feel guilty. She was very Christian in her approach to it. I mean, she thought if you weren't working actively for social justice for people of color, you were against it. She took a very it's-all-black-or-it's-all-white point of view, and she had no sense of humor. None. And Jews have the best sense of humor, next to the Irish, you can imagine."

Tell me more about your childhood.

"We lived over in Strathmoor Village, Byron Avenue by Bowman Field. Grew up there. It was the country, practically, and my mother had twins right after me, and so she found somebody who would come in for a few hours every day, African-American woman — *black*, in those days; *African-American* was not in. And I remember sitting on the ground in the front yard when a black woman across the street walked up the stairs to the house directly opposite mine and went into the house. I went to my mother and I said, 'Mom, there's a n***** that went into the' — and my mother grabbed me by the back of my neck in this kitchen, which wasn't huge, dragged me over to the kitchen sink and washed my mouth out with Lifebuoy soap. Never used that word again. I was about seven or eight. The woman who was helping her take care of the twins, I'm sure she used (that word) because Mother and Dad didn't use it. I use it now if I'm just telling a story. I can't even tell a story about it without getting a bad taste in my mouth. Lifebuoy soap in your mouth is terrible. You probably don't

even know what Lifebuoy soap is. It's awful. It's industrial soap. It's the kind of soap that nobody that wants to smell good would ever use."

What else do you remember about Louisville during that time?

"What I remember about the city is very romantic. We lived outside the city limits. If mother wanted to go shopping, we had to walk from our house in Strathmoor Village about six blocks to Wallace Loop to catch a bus (or to Bowman Field) to catch a streetcar. I can still remember the smell of the streetcars, the oil that you smelled when you got in. It's just a very different smell. And the noise that it made. It was really, really noisier, just rumbling along these tracks. It's, you know, going" — Post makes a growling noise — "and it was so exciting to me. We took that all the way downtown and probably got off somewhere near Jefferson Street, which was not one-way in those days. People didn't have as many cars. And Ben Snyder's was a big department store, which had moderate and inexpensive stuff. There were a lot of Jewish managers and they all played poker with my dad or bridge with my mother. We always went in there because they'd give her a deal, you know, they'd pick out something that was really good or that they thought was a really good buy. My mother was a wonderful woman who was constitutionally unable to buy anything that wasn't marked down at least twice. Twice. She was the daughter of German immigrants from Terre Haute, Indiana. They had the pot to pee in, period. And one day when I was grown — and Stewart's Dry Goods was the nicest store in Louisville in those days — she found a child's size-eight wool coat. No, eight was the price of it. It was $8. Kelly-green wool coat that was really a steal, and mother could not pass up steals. Nobody in the family wore that size. She brought it home, then she went down the street and rang doorbells to see if anybody on the street would use this coat. To say she was nuts is pushing it a little bit."

"Most people just glide along and that's perfectly understandable. But I was born at a time when it was all erupting in Europe. And I'm not a glider."

Your father was in the wholesale business?

"He sold stuff to dime stores. He had a place down on Main Street, Seventh and Main, and when I'd go down there as a girl, before they moved to 28th and Jefferson, and he had a freight elevator that had no sides and I'd get on there. I was scared to death. You're on this thing and it's moving and there's no enclosures. I was a little girl. It was terrifying! I had nightmares about that for years! I used to love to go down there because among the junk that they sold were huge gaudy rings with red glass in them that cost 98 cents. Oh, I thought they were gorgeous. And I think I sneaked one of them one day without telling anybody. I think I stole one of his rings.

"I had a colorful childhood. I had a colorful father. He loved me. When I took the ACLU job, it paid $10,000 a year. It's the hardest job in this city. I was not quite 50 because we had a 50th birthday party for me a couple years later. I had him meet me for lunch and we went to a place called Cunningham's (at Fifth and Breckinridge streets), which isn't there anymore, and I'm sitting across the table from him, and I said, 'Dad, I need $10,000 from you for the ACLU. You got me into this job, into this line of work, and I need help.' He gave it. And he gave me money all the time for the ACLU. I was expressing my father's feelings about not taking your government for granted, thinking it's gonna do good things, because my dad, as a German Jew, knew it wasn't always like that and I knew it too."

What do you like to do for fun?

"Movies! I wish they'd show some, dammit! I love the movies. When I was a little girl that was a big thing in my life. Every Saturday for 10 cents you went to the Bard Theatre, which you probably never even heard of, on Bardstown Road right where Bardstown and Taylorsville fork. It was built during the Second World War, of all things. It was the newest theater in Louisville. Oh, my god, we thought we'd died and gone to heaven. The Uptown, do you know where that was? That was on Bardstown Road and Eastern Parkway. Oh, the Vogue was great. The Vogue had foreign movies. But the Vogue meant you had to have a car to get there and we could walk to the Bard and we could take a bus to the Uptown. There's a place in one of the shopping malls. I go there when my son takes me. I haven't seen anything lately that really curled my hair."

Aside from having to carry this tube around, how do you feel?

"Only got one lung, but it must be huge because — I get tired more easily, that's for sure, but I'm kind of amazed that it hasn't had more impact on me. The lung is gone and it took the cancer with it. And this" — Post rips off her oxygen tube — "is a fucking pain in the butt! First of all, nobody who uses one of these things is happy about announcing to anybody they meet, 'I'm not well! Did you notice I'm not exactly top drawer?' And especially if you've smoked, it's like, *Oy, you did it!* It's like, come on, leave me alone. I was a little girl then, what did I know? We live with most of our sins.

"It's annoying that I feel so great and that this damn thing is gonna keep me from getting on a bike and taking a bike — I guess I could rig something up, but you know that may not be smart. My kids would move in on me if I got on a bike with oxygen."

What kind of physical activity do you do?

"Goin' up and down these stairs all the time. I used to do a lot of tai chi and did that until about six years ago. Tai chi's wonderful. I really recommend it. I used to be a runner, believe it or not. I used to go out, run five miles, come home and light a cigarette. And while I did that I thought, *You dumb woman. Dumb woman.* It's a terrible addiction, oh, my god. I don't really drink. I'll have a couple glasses of wine, that's it. *Cigarettes*. Sex would have been better! I never was fixed, though."

Who's your best friend?

"My very best friend died about 10 years ago. She grew up with me and we started in elementary school together, but she died. It happens. I've got a lot of really good friends. My niece, Julie (Kling), she's a very good friend and she's eons younger

than me. If you do the kind of work I've done and really believe in it, one of the things you need to do is pull the younger ones along after you so that when you die, it doesn't die. You have to be intentional about it because not very many people care about these issues. Because they're not sexy. They're hard. They're not popular. You can get in trouble if you're too upfront, out there, and so a lot of people who have good basic instincts don't have enough burning to keep them going in spite of the social opposition. When you go against the public, when you go against something as silly as moving into a new neighborhood where there are no blacks and you're black, they're not gonna bake cakes for you. So when you're doing that kind of work it's absolutely urgent that you have allies. Those of us who've done this kind of work have all had our lives threatened one way or another and it sort of goes with the territory. After a while, you accept it. And if it doesn't frighten you off in the first couple of years, you're OK. But the first couple of times it happens it's very scary, especially if you're trying to lead a normal life with a husband, wife and kids."

When have you been wrong about something?

"I'm never wrong. Never in my life have I ever been wrong. I've usually been wrong on the wrong side. For example, I never thought we'd have Donald Trump as president of the United States. I mean, that can't — I thought, *People will see through that bullshit*. Well, people didn't. They liked that bullshit and I'm still stunned, to tell you the truth. Are we that stupid? 'Cause I know we're not bad people, collectively. I mean, each of us has a little problem, but you have to have massive problems to have elected a man who is so bad. I don't see any socially redeeming value in him whatsoever. His attitude about women is terrible. His attitude about poor people is they're not workin' hard enough. It's just all bad, bad, bad."

You're on Facebook. Do you get on there very often?

"I never get on there. Most of that is my kids — my granddaughters! I have two darling granddaughters. One of them is Asian; her mother's Chinese. One's a nurse in Seattle and the other one just got married. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin. And those girls go on there. I think Facebook is the biggest fuckin' waste of time. I never say the F-word. But it certainly does makes some people's lives richer, I guess, so that's good. I oughta look and see what they're saying about me now."

I saw that a daughter or granddaughter of yours said they were reading your Wikipedia page and wondered if you had sheltered men who were protesting the Vietnam War and avoiding the draft.

"Yeah, that was true. Well, (Ed and I) lived in a house over by Atherton that had a finished basement and an extra bedroom downstairs that we put there when we bought the house new, so that we could get a schoolgirl to babysit. In those days you could provide room and board to any business-school girl that came in from out in the state or Indiana to go to Bryant and Stratton (which later merged with what's now Sullivan University) or one of the business colleges. You gave them room and board in exchange for them babysitting. We — all of us, the Jewish girls — discovered that years ago and we all had our own little basement slaves and it was a good deal for the family and it was a good deal for the girls. So after they left I had a — he was a soldier who was supposed to go to Vietnam and he hid in my basement for like two days. I really hated that war.

"You know, in a way, your generation I feel sorry for because, as bad as that war was, it fleshed out people like me, thousands of us who wouldn't have taken any public action or even involved ourselves in politics or the public issues except because of that war, which was so horrible and was killing so many young people."

You don't think young people have enough issues to generate activism? Climate change, shootings. People seem to be fired up.

"I hope so, 'cause we sure need ya. That's another thing I've done. I've mentored some young high school girls and young college girls on occasion who want to do social-justice work, and I love that. It's just so good for my ego. I'm just so smart. (We talk) about what they're gonna experience and just tips, so that they have somebody who knows when they run into trouble, because they will. It's hard. It's really hard."

Do you learn anything from them?

"Oh, yeah! Sex, honey! *(Laughs.)* Yeah, I learn a lot of things from them. What they're reading, what they think of this or that position. Who's hot, who's not, what TV programs, if any, are any good. We should never do what too many of us do, which is close ourselves off age-wise, race-wise or religion-wise. It's stupid. It's boring, too. 'Cause we've all got things we can learn from each other. And I steal. You know, I'm genuinely happy to steal ideas from other people. It makes me look really smart."

When you were leading the national ACLU board, you worked with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who went on to become a U.S. Supreme Court justice. What was she like?

"When I went up there (to the national ACLU board in New York), they had about a half a woman for every 10 men members. We were very underrepresented and in order to do something about that, to change that, my big contribution — and it was big and I don't have any false modesty about that because it was a very, very imposing and scarifying board. I mean, they're all super this, super that. And I was young enough and dumb enough to believe that I could make a difference in the composition in the national board. I was a troublemaker. So I organized a women's caucus and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, when she came on the board after me, was a member of the women's caucus and began to help us lobby for what we wanted to pass to get the participation of women enacted in a concrete way, so that we'd have some impact. She was a lot of fun, though. She was a wonderful, down-to-earth woman. She came to all our meetings.

"I must say I am in awe of what I did up there strictly on nerve because I'm a little — I'm not diminishing myself — I was a little housewife from Louisville, Kentucky. I was an English major. I didn't have great…experience on an intellectual level. I was just really pissed because of what these guys were trying and had been able to do, so I went on a lot of nervous energy and anger that we activist women weren't getting what we needed to have an effective presence."

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You ran for the Kentucky House in 1975.
"I loved it. The alderman ran against me. Gerta Bendl, very effective candidate, and I had supported her and I got in not knowing that she was gonna (run). If I had known she was gonna do that I would not have run. It was a close race. And I had worked so hard. I threw myself into that thing. For three months. It was the 34th legislative district over by Atherton. Very rich district, Democratic-wise. I walked every single damn day. I was smaller than I am now when I was finished; I lost so much weight from walking. I met wonderful people. I met people who worked in my basement addressing envelopes and doing all that shit work who, because of my civil rights history, were just always there for me. I still bump into some of them all these years later. I was walking over near Highland junior high and hit a right-to-life house that was having a Mother's Day picnic in the backyard. When they saw me they knew about me because I was pro-choice, and the guy who answered the door goes and gets them all and they all come out and they wanted me to watch a film. I was there 35 minutes. I didn't watch the damn film. It was awful. But I met some wonderful people. Let me show you some of the literature."

(Post heads upstairs to pull pamphlets and political buttons from a dresser drawer, along the way pointing out family photos on the walls.)

"This is my favorite son. He is a lawyer in California. He is so funny."

You have a favorite?

"Yes. You do. And it's very interesting. The way you get favorites is when my kids were nursed — and it's hard to get a baby to take to the breast. He lunged at me. What a compliment! I mean, that's such a fuckin' compliment! My hands used to sweat, thinking, *I'm gonna have a hard time.* You have to pull your nipple way out. I mean, it's really — they have nipple guards that you can use. And breastfeeding is very good for women, so I was very committed to the idea, but god, getting started. Not with him. I mean, it was such a compliment. I got great kids. It's just plain dumb luck. And my

five were — I wanted my five. The last one was a 'whoops,' and I was just damn lucky that that 'whoops' happened in a family where there was enough money that we could manage. But I can't imagine being pregnant and not being able to afford it and not being able to provide for it. It must be terrible. And I was never in that situation, thank god. 'Cause the conflict must be absolutely terrible for girls and women. I believe that every child should be a wanted child. That's easy. But back when we were born, not often the case. Before good, decent birth control, people had babies whenever. Whenever! And that's so sad. I can't imagine having to give birth to a baby that you don't really want. It just seems so sad, doesn't it? That for nine months you're carrying around this thing in your body and you don't really want it. It must be awful."

What do you think is the most pressing issue in our community right now?

"I think the schools continue to be a real problem. I'm not happy, but this is very peculiar to me, what I perceive to be the compartmentalization of economic classes in Louisville. You go out to Norton Commons, it just makes me sick, and I don't think that that's healthy over the long haul. If I were gonna live a little longer, I would like us to be more involved in the racial injustice in this community, 'cause it's plenty.

"This thing we're in, this life thing, we're all in it together. And because we're all in it together, it seems to me it would be a good idea that we get to know each other well enough to know what it is about each other to furnish the respect and acceptance that we need to be together, because, hey, it's us against the godless world. But there is always somebody who thinks you separate the races and somebody's gonna end up on top and they're gonna be the winners."

Well, thank you for having me over.

"Great to meet you, honey."

(Post reaches for a hug.)

I don't want to break you.

"You won't break me. I am tougher than you can possibly imagine."