

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 83 TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Laura Nader/ Amy Berman

ANNOUNCER: From the KPFK studios in Southern California, it's the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

STEVE SKROVAN: Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman. Ralph is actually going to be joining us later in the program, but we are not going totally Nader-less today. We're keeping it in the family. On the show today we are going to be speaking to Dr. Laura Nader, noted anthropologist at the University of California Berkeley, who's going to be talking to us about her latest book, entitled "What the Rest Think of the West." We'll explain more about that in a moment. We're also going to talk to Amy Berman, a nurse who was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, and how she has been able to live a fulfilling life in spite of her serious illness. We will also, as always, check in with Russell Mohkiber, the corporate crime reporter, and we also want to talk to Ralph about the Democratic presidential debate that took place this week. So David, tell us about our first Nader.

DAVID FELDMAN: Dr. Laura Nader is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley. Her class, "Controlling Processes," is one of the most popular lectures in Berkeley history. Tens of thousands of Berkeley students, including my own daughter, have taken it, and according to my daughter, been changed by it. She is possibly the leading world authority in anthropology of law. Professor Nader has conducted fieldwork in Lebanon, Mexico and the United States. She is author or coauthor of over 280 published books and articles. We're just going to focus on one of those today. It's entitled, "What the Rest Think of the West," which is a collection of writings throughout history about what the rest of the world has thought about western civilization. Thank you for joining us, Professor Nader.

LAURA NADER: Well, you're so welcome. I'm glad to be here.

DAVID FELDMAN: Your book looks at the writings specifically from Japan, China, the Islamic world and India about the west. How do we define the west?

LAURA NADER: Well, that depends on the era, because this book is since 600 A.D., and 600 A.D., when the first Chinese went west you went to India. So for him, west was India. Or Ibn Fadlan, who went up the Volga to meet the Vikings in the tenth century, the west was straight up and west. So for the people from the Middle East, the Crusaders, they knew the west as French through time. But now it's quite clear what the west is, because it's used to refer to Euro-American societies.

DAVID FELDMAN: So you're specifically talking about Europe and America. Are there specific character traits we can attribute to the west that we can only find in the west and not in, say, China?

LAURA NADER: I'll give you an example of what I was arguing with a Moroccan governor here at the faculty club some years ago about nuclear reactors up and down the Moroccan coast that they had bought from the French were known to be faulty, and he got so irritated with me finally, because I kept pursuing it. He said look, the French, they have no culture. They have no civilization. But they do know technology. And that is said from Tokyo to Gibraltar. So we're thought of as very technology oriented. And we live near Silicon Valley, so the techno twits reign here. And there's some truth in that, but they add to that materialism. Materialistic use of materials and so forth.

STEVE SKROVAN: So they're saying the French have no culture. I mean, here in America when we look at France it seems like nothing but culture. But to the Moroccans, the French have no culture, they're just technological.

LAURA NADER: Yes. That's true. The Japanese say that. They Chinese said that. See, it's said all the way across from Tokyo to Gibraltar. That's what's interesting. And these are people, elites, right, who write.

STEVE SKROVAN: Sure.

LAURA NADER: And they are, some of them are religious, some of them are diplomats, some of them are missionaries. Some of them are cartoonists. But they all have certain things that they say about western society. Technology, and they have human rights violations in the west, but they point fingers at the rest. The place of women in the west, they have criticisms of that. Of course, we do the same. And they see us as in denial of what we are doing in the world today. We have no ancestors. "The Land Without Ghosts" is a book that was written from the Chinese point of view. We don't treat the young and the old very well. It was said in 1860 when the Chinese came to this country. And they said that means that this country will not last long. So I think these are, whether they're true or not is not relevant. What we should learn from this is they may be telling us something that we're in denial about. I mean, all you have to do is see what the kids are in debt today. What country that has a future is putting its youngest people in debt that they might not be able to pay off til they're retired?

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

DAVID FELDMAN: Watching the debates this week would you say that a western trait is that we don't care what other cultures think of us?

LAURA NADER: It's very deep watching the debates, because it's American exceptionalism. We know and we can teach them what they need to know. We are not interested in listening to them. We're interested in telling them. Let me give you an example. Hillary Clinton, when she was in Egypt after the incident where the soldiers had taken a woman by the hair and pulled her into the street, she pointed her finger at them and said, you should treat your women better. And the week before, the same thing happened in Berkeley with the head of the Townsend Center. And the next day five professors got together to see what we could do about that event. They pulled her by the hair and put her in jail, and she was totally peacefully protesting. And the next day, five of us got together to do something. But what happened in Egypt was ten palls and the women marched. So when we say those women over there have

no power, we do, it's just nonsense. We're kidding ourselves. You know, apropos of that, there's a woman at the St. Mary's University in Halifax that wrote about honor killings in the west. And she's talking about all the pieces that are written about honor killings in Pakistan, it's all blah blahblah, she says, your article says that since 2013, 859 women suffered honor killings in Pakistan. Compare this to the United States, where three women a day are killed by their male partners. By my count, since 2013, she said, that's about 1,095 women killed.

STEVE SKROVAN: So there could they call it honor killing, here it's domestic violence, but it's really the same result.

DAVID FELDMAN: But is it fair to say, and this is what I think Americans would say, is that an honor killing is institutionalized, whereas violation of a woman in the west is breaking the law. That's what the Americans would say to that.

LAURA NADER: It's cultural. But it's also comparative honor killings are cultural. And the difference, key difference is the honor killings are often done by the woman's family, whereas the violence here against women is done by their male partners. And yes, that is different, but the result is that women are killed, and that's for a lot.

DAVID FELDMAN: Right. So school me in this. I would think an honor killing in say a non-western culture is a tradition that is accepted by some. Is that a fair statement? Whereas in America, killing a woman for not having her dowry is frowned upon by everybody. There's no tradition of accepting that. Is that fair?

LAURA NADER: Well, it shouldn't allow too, because I mean it's accepted in Houston, Texas, if you kill your partner, the chances of your going to jail or being punished for it are very, about 50/50. That's been documented. So it is a difference, but that's not the only thing these people talk about. But that's what one of the people who writes in this book, Maysoun Sukarieh, she's from Lebanon and she's Sunni, and when she came to do graduate work at Berkeley, her colleagues would say to her, when you

get your Ph.D. you should go back there and liberate Islamic women. And she said, and you think you are liberated? They said, well we don't have arranged marriages. She said, here the corporation arranged the marriages. There, the family arranges the marriages. And when you look at that, she's got a point, right? So, but not all of it is about women. Some of it is about things like music. And there's one person, this is first contact. He hears European music for the first time and he writes about it and he doesn't like it because it sounds militaristic. And he said they probably don't like my music either. See, that's what's interesting about this, is it is a give and take. So when Al-Tahtawi goes from Egypt to Paris to study the French after the French had been in, Napoleon had been in Egypt, what happened there was very interesting because six years he stayed. He learned everything about everything that he could. He became a translator then got his degree in translation and so on. And he said things like, you know? Their baths are cleaner than ours. Our baths are steam baths and they're better for your health. So when they observe, they sort of go back and forth.

In the west, we've invented the concept of objectivity, which as Kardosal said once, there's no such thing. You may try to be objective, but no matter how objective you may try to be, you see the world with your own eyes. And they don't have the pretense of objectivity. They look at the persons or the culture and they say hm, we don't do it that way. We're more spiritual. That's really what the Moroccan governor was saying. We have spirituality, they have materialism. They have technology. So it's a back and forth that we are missing in our writing. And even anthropologists, I would say, have missed this. Because we used to say we need to give voice to the other. And I kept saying the other is speaking, just listen.

DAVID FELDMAN: There was a book that came out about 20 years ago, I think it's called "The Rise and Fall of Great Powers." It was written by a professor.

STEVE SKROVAN: Paul Kennedy, yes.

DAVID FELDMAN: And he said that empires always fail when they turn inward. And he talked about Chinese empires failing because they were busy building boats that could sail rivers but not oceans, and they were only concerned about themselves. Watching the debates, is America falling prey to just not caring about what other countries think about us? And are we an empire in decline? Is that a fair statement?

LAURA NADER: Well, I think there's no question that this has been commented by intellectuals for quite a while now that the west is on its way down. They like to posit that maybe China and India are on their way up, but I think it's not going to be one or the other. It's going to be maybe a planetary culture that decides to save the planet through climate issues and many issues that are facing all of us. But yes, I think that's quite right. American exceptionalism is getting us into so much trouble everywhere.

DAVID FELDMAN: Is the solution that we don't have to say they're right about us or they're wrong about us, but what we need to do is just, I think this is what your book is saying, is just what do they think of us? Just hear them and listen to other cultures to find out what they think of us. That's the most important takeaway from I think what you're saying.

LAURA NADER: Yes, I think that's key. The President of China, when he came here, he said, or maybe it was before he came, he said we need to sit down and talk. The west said, we don't know each other. He said, you don't know us yet. And that's true. We don't know other cultures. During World War II, anthropologists worked very hard on this. They went to Washington, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Clyde Cuckholn, all these guys, in order to help the government understand the enemy. We don't want to understand the enemy now. We don't want to know that every country we've gone into in the Middle East is Islamic. What does that mean? I mean, these are religious wars, I think, that are going on. They're religious wars that we call secular.

DAVID FELDMAN: You say they're religious wars between the west?

LAURA NADER: Which means these are modern day Crusades. President Bush called it a crusade when we went in Afghanistan.

DAVID FELDMAN: But we've had these wars, like in Vietnam and Iraq, we were always told it was a struggle between communism versus democracy, freedom versus tyranny. Are you suggesting that the wars that we're currently conducting are Christianity versus Islam? Is that? Or is there something larger, something bigger at play?

LAURA NADER: Well, clearly natural resources and the military industrial complex, etc., enter into it, but yes, I think it's true. If you listen to American leadership talk about Islam, it's really, Islamophobia is very well ensconced in this country, pre-9/11 as well as post-9/11 when it gets much worse. But some of these people that I quote in this book, in fact many of them, talk about hypocrisy, western hypocrisy. They say one thing, they do another. People in the Middle East had so much respect for the United States, land of the free for the unfree. And now, you wouldn't want to go there as an American. You might want to say you're Canadian, but you wouldn't want to go there as an American. The hypocrisy, even Ahmadinejad, the President of Iran, wrote a piece called "Letter to the U.S. President." It was about Bush. Ahmadinejad was no dumbbell and he was Mayor of Tehran, he's a transportation engineer. He's got a Ph.D. in engineering. And he says, you know, President Bush, you say one thing, you're a Christian, but you don't do that. You say life is precious but you kill people. You say the whole thing is about hypocrisy. And the British are also called hypocrites by the Indians. So one man who became a Christian convert and was brought to England to go around to churches and so forth, and at the end they said, maybe you'd like to give a talk on what you think of us. And so he did. And he said, if you are Christian, why are there homeless people in London? Why is there poverty here? Why aren't you helping these people as Christians? So the hypocrisy is talked about over and over again.

STEVE SKROVAN: Professor Nader, does every culture, civilization think that they are exceptional?

LAURA NADER: I think that's true. The Navajo say, we are exceptional because they say if you're not Navajo, you're not people. So I think that's true. But if you have power and you are exceptional and you do not want to know about the other, at least the Chinese come here and study us. And now they're publishing our human rights record every year, our human rights wrongs. And they've been commenting on our human rights wrongs before we even had the term "human rights." They were writing about lynching in the United States. They couldn't understand how a democracy with the Founding Fathers, you have to understand, many of these people have read about us. For example, in 1903, a Chinese intellectual, one of the most distinguished intellectuals wrote a piece. He had been trying to bring democracy to China. And there was a coup and he was kicked out of the country. He went to Japan and then he decided to come to the United States. Now he's already read de Tocqueville and he'd read the Constitution, they were prepared. And so he came here and he said, I want to see two people. I want to see J.P. Morgan and I want to see President Roosevelt. So he goes to J.P. Morgan, and J.P. Morgan, he said, taught me something about American capitalism. He said American capitalism will destroy American democracy. He's talking about not capitalism generally, he's talking about American capitalism. And then he went to see President Roosevelt, and he learned about American empire. And he went back to China and he said, we don't need democracy in China, we need a strong central government because American empire will try to destroy us. Now that's 1903.

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

LAURA NADER: It seems to me that would be important for us to know.

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

LAURA NADER: So works that, a lot of this stuff, the reason it took me about 30 years to do this collection, is there weren't translations. So Al-Tahtawi's six years, say, in France was published in 1836, around the same time when de Tocqueville was in the United States, and it wasn't translated until 2004. It was translated over a hundred years later.

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

LAURA NADER: There's an article in the New York Times about how India is becoming America. And it's about the Americanization. Of course, this is happening worldwide. It's happening worldwide because of technology, because of so many things that have happened with globalization. And people feel threatened in these countries now. And the Chinese, for example, are the only ones that recognize, to my knowledge, that young people can be addicted to technology. And they treat it like alcoholism. And I go up and down the elevator with students in this university, and nobody's talking to anybody. They're all looking at their cell phones.

STEVE SKROVAN: Right.

LAURA NADER: So that's bound to have an effect, no matter whether it's happening in China or here, but we don't think it's a big deal because we see technology as wonderful.

DAVID FELDMAN: And what is Americanization of the world? What specifically are we talking about? Technology? And what kind of values are we spreading?

LAURA NADER: Well, I think we're spreading the technology love, and also the materialism that often goes with it. And one of my godchildren in Mexico once said to me, I wish we could import the good things from the United States rather than the bad things. And she was referring to the impact of modern American culture, which I don't call American, I call it corporate culture, on young Mexican kids, their children. They don't like it. I mean, when I tell it in my controlling processes course, I was teaching the young how to see what was happening in their own lives in terms of control. And they had to pick a controlling process in their life and tell me how it works. I didn't pick it, they picked it, and that's what was transforming about that course.

STEVE SKROVAN: And what is a controlling process, an example, say?

LAURA NADER: A controlling process is something that you feel but you can't explain what is happening. For example, ADHD, and having to do well. And the ADHD kids that come here are really mad at their parents because they put them on these drugs. And they can articulate it. They say, you know, I don't know why they did that, because then I had to get off it and then this happens, and then I say, OK, write your paper about that. When were you diagnosed? Well, I was diagnosed when I was seven and I had had a test. What did the test show? The test showed I was over the top in math and science issues, questions, but that I was uneasy and I was moving around too much. And so he wrote his paper about that. He'll never be the same again. I have visits all the time from people who have taken the course in 1988 who work at the DOD or who work wherever, and they say it's changed my life. I say, you remember that course? They say, every day. And one of the guys in the DOD said to me, what Americans don't know is this is a Brave New World. And Brave New World is corporate. It's not traditional American culture. So that's why that course has a big impact. And I'm hoping that this book, "What the Rest Think of the West," will wake Americans up to how others see us. I mean, at the end of the last Chinese one, it was written by a guy who got a law degree here in this country, he was interviewed by an American journalist, and the title of it is, "Be Nice to Countries that Lend You Money."

STEVE SKROVAN: Yeah.

LAURA NADER: And here Webb on the debate is talking about, we have to rein in China, we have to do this to China, the communists, you know, and he then explained he was married to a Vietnamese, a communist and so on. And does he realize how much money they've lent us? Does he realize how much business interaction there is between the United States and China now? Is it all threat, threat?

STEVE SKROVAN: And there's also the question about if you were Commander in Chief, would you be able to take us to war, as if that was a strength, the ability to take us to war, as opposed to a sign of failure. Is that a particularly western thing?

LAURA NADER: That question, would you be able to take us to war, the only one that answered it properly, I thought, was Chafee from Rhode Island. He sounded more understanding. Interestingly, I didn't expect anything of him, he and O'Malley were much more understanding of the world that they live in, I felt, than the other candidates, although each one had their points, their good points.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, apropos of your godchild's question, what are the good things about American culture?

LAURA NADER: Well, of course, the reason why a lot of people want to come here from the corners of South and Central America is because they see it as the land of the free for the unfree. And then they come here, and of course some of that is true, if you're a citizen. Some of it is not, as some of these, Joseph Manning and Snowden have pointed out the worries that we aren't as free as we think we are. And that's what they feel about our country. It's a place where you can express yourself, you can be yourself. And some of them like to come here because they don't want family responsibilities, like taking care of their elders, for example. Some of them come because of NAFTA. NAFTA went into [inaudible 0:23:02.1] country where I work, and they can't sell their own corn. So what do they do? They pay somebody to get them across the border. And then what do they do? They become, you know, there they are in Los Angeles and Berkeley and so on, some of them become gang members, and NAFTA, these trades, have big effects. And I think that's part of what she's referring to.

STEVE SKROVAN: So you would say freedom of expression as embodied in our First Amendment might be the distinguishing feature.

LAURA NADER: Absolutely.

DAVID FELDMAN: When you travel around the world and then you come home, is there a, something that always happens where you say ah, now I know I'm home? Some exchange between another human being? What is it that tells you ah, I'm back in America?

LAURA NADER: Well, actually when I travel, I don't want to travel anymore because I get to the airport and it spoils it all, all that I remember. Mostly older people remember when they went to the airport and just got on an airplane. Now all this stuff. When I come home, it's basically the people I know, my family, my grandchildren, my children, that's what makes me feel I'm at home. And watching them grow and spread their wings. So is it a place where young people can spread their wings? Yes, but it's getting harder and harder because of things like student debt.

DAVID FELDMAN: Right.

LAURA NADER: It's true that we have a lot of problems, you can't deal with them all at the same time, but I do think if you are able to step out of your culture and look at how others see us, you begin to see what the problems are and what to do about them.

DAVID FELDMAN: There are two questions that I wanted to ask you. Are we a loveless society? Is that what distinguishes America from the rest of the world, that we put such a premium on success and materialism that we don't celebrate love? All the tens of thousands of children that you've taught, they come home and tell their parents, I got an A in Professor Nader's class, their parents will be thrilled. But if they call their parents and say, I found somebody who I love that I'll be able to love them for the rest of my life, 99 percent of the parents are going to say yeah, but how did you do in Professor Nader's class? Isn't that a problem that we don't put enough of a premium on love in this country?

LAURA NADER: I think what the former student was saying when he said this is Brave New World, there is no love in Brave New World. It's all about sex. And there's a lot of that here. And of course now it's a big issue having to do with sexual harassment and so forth. But there is something missing. Now what's interesting about your first example is I've had parents write me and say, my student, my child got a D in your course, but he's learned more in that course than anything he's learned at Berkeley. That's rather amazing. Now that fact that she was a lion adds to the complexity, but they learn things they never forget in their life. And so I think that I start the 1984 and Brave New World is the

way we start Controlling Processes course. And I think that's a lot of what's said and the feelings here. They look at women and men dancing and they think we look like monkeys when we're dancing. You don't see it as, I don't think any of these people talk about love, or they do talk about women and men and their relationships and so on, but they mainly, many of them, especially the diplomats and the anthropologists talk about what's happening to American democracy. That's what they admire.

DAVID FELDMAN: In your book, you include the writings of Qutb, who served as an inspiration for the Islamic Brotherhood. I know that he, I think it was he came to Colorado Springs after World War II, and was appalled by how American women just flashed their bodies and he kind of spoke about how sexualized the American people are.

LAURA NADER: Right. Well, when Ibn Fadlan went up the Volga in the tenth century, that's what he noticed. He watched these people. He said, they're the dirtiest people, and he couldn't believe the undressed nature of their bodies, the women. And in fact, it's very interesting because I feel like Ibn Fadlan on the Berkeley campus. You should see what people, how women dress here. And they think there's absolutely no reason why they can't, and there's no mystery to anything the way they dress. And it's the only culture in the world, western culture, where men are dressed and women are undressed. If you're undressed in the Amazon, male and female are both undressed. If you're covered in Saudi Arabia, male and female are covered. But after my trip to Saudi Arabia many years ago, coming back to the United States what hit me was the ads coming in from the airport where the women were undressed and the men were in suits. And that's a problem that I'm working on with an anthropologist who's also a designer today. Why is that, and what are the consequences? So if an international fashion design, western fashions start to penetrate India, let's say, and neither the Hindus nor the Muslims like it, then there are going to be some consequences. Well, you say but a woman should be free to wear what she wants to wear. The answer from Islam is to develop Islamic fashion. And now there's a very big deal about Islamic fashion. So it's really, it's an interesting competition as to whether you can dress fashionably covering your body, or whether you have to uncover your body to be fashionably western.

DAVID FELDMAN: Are there cultures in the Middle East where the burqa is not so much oppression of women but a celebration of their mind? Where you're not judged by how you look but rather what you're thinking?

LAURA NADER: In Egypt, they began to cover when women started to work. And it was the child's, it was the girl's choice. Her parents tried to dissuade her, but knowing it was her choice to do that, because she felt more protected. When my student, my Libyan student went to Saudi Arabia, she had to dress from top to bottom, and she said it was actually a very good technique for not being visible to the people she didn't want to be visible to. But if you go to Lebanon and you're on the beach, there could be a family with one person wearing a bikini and the other one covered. And they don't care. So in Lebanon there's been really very much openness to you can be whatever you want to be. And there hasn't been this retaliation kind of behavior that you find in places like India.

STEVE SKROVAN: Well, Professor Nader, thank you for joining us. The book is, "What the Rest Think of the West." It's from the University of California Press.

LAURA NADER: Since 600 A.D.

STEVE SKROVAN: So she goes way back.

LAURA NADER: Yes, since 600 A.D., so they can get a sense. And it's called "Selections and with Commentary" by Laura Nader, because I comment on every single piece and give it some context.

STEVE SKROVAN: Excellent. Well, thank you for joining us today.

LAURA NADER: Well Steve and David, I'm very grateful for you and I'm going to go to my seminar now and tell them what you were asking me.

STEVE SKROVAN: OK, very good. Well, that's quite a compliment, David.

DAVID FELDMAN: Thank you. Bye bye.

STEVE SKROVAN: We've been speaking to Professor Laura Nader, one of the world's leading anthropologists and coincidentally the sister of one of our hosts. I won't tell you which one. Her latest book is "What the Rest Think of the West" from 600 A.D., and that's from the University of California Press. You are listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Let's check in with the corporate crime reporter, Russell Mohkiber.

RUSSELL MOHKIBER: From the National Press Building in Washington, DC, this is your corporate crime reporter morning minute for Wednesday, October 14, 2015. I'm Russell Mohkiber. The Boeing Company has paid \$18 million to settle allegations that the company submitted false claims for labor charges on maintenance contracts with the United State Air Force for the C17 Loadmaster aircraft. Federal officials alleged that Boeing improperly charged labor costs under contracts with the Air Force for the maintenance and repair of the C17 aircraft at Boeing's Long Beach Depot Center in Long Beach, California. The C17 Loadmaster aircraft is one of the military's major systems for transporting troops and cargo throughout the world. The allegations were originally brought by former Boeing employee James Webb under the whistleblower provisions of the False Claims Act. For the corporate crime reporter, I'm Russell Mohkiber.

STEVE SKROVAN: Thank you, Russell. If you have missed any of this episode on the radio, remember you can go to RalphNaderRadioHour.com and catch up with our conversation with Laura Nader or any of the other informative conversations we have had on our previous 82 episodes. We're up to 82 now, guys. We provide links to guests and their work there. You can submit questions, and I'm very happy to announce we have added a new feature, a downloadable pdf transcript of the show, starting with the episode from two weeks ago we did with software expert Eben Moglan and Paul Hudson of Flyer's Rights. So you'll see the link posted to the transcript just above the audio player on your computer. And you may have to give us a couple of days to get the transcript up there, but that's another way to be in touch with what we're doing here on the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. Now I promised you topics of health and history today. We've covered the history, now we're going to move on to health. David?

DAVID FELDMAN: Our next guest is Amy J. Berman. Amy is a registered nurse and a senior program officer at the Hartford Foundation based in New York City. The Hartford Foundation is dedicated to improving the health of older Americans. Amy is intimately familiar with end of life issues ever since she was diagnosed five years ago with stage-four breast cancer. Amy's going to be talking to us about how she has dealt with that, and how others can make choices to improve and maintain their quality of life in light of a serious illness. In fact, she said that those end of life discussions saved her life. Welcome to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour, Amy Berman.

AMY BERMAN: Thanks so much. It's a pleasure to be on.

RALPH NADER: Welcome, Amy Berman. I was drawn to your remarkable article on the Washington Post at the end of September. The headline was, "A Nurse with Fatal Breast Cancer says End of Life Discussions Saved Her Life." And you proceeded to make the point that conventional treatments of breast cancer are not all beneficial. So to our listeners, why don't you explain the point of your article and what kind of response it got after it was published in the Washington Post?

AMY BERMAN: Thank you, Mr. Nader, and let me just say what a tremendous fan I am of yours. You're such a great consumer advocate.

RALPH NADER: Thank you.

AMY BERMAN: So about five years ago, I was diagnosed with stage four inflammatory breast cancer, which is a rare kind of a cancer that has the worst kind of an outcome. Only 11 to 20 percent survive to five years. And I went to two very different doctors, and they suggested very different approaches to the care. One wanted to help me hold on to feeling well, trying to hold back the cancer but only choosing medications with the least amount of side effect. So how to hold on to what I have. The other doctor wanted to do a Hail Mary pass and have the most intense chemotherapy, mastectomy, radiation, and more intense chemotherapy. He was going to treat incurable cancer like it was a curative disease. And what he was going to do was basically remove all of the quality of my life. You know, I

would be debilitated, sick, weak, probably not working and very much tethered to the medical system. I wrote in this article that having the kind of conversation about what care was important to me, what were my goals of care, especially given that I'm terminally ill, having that conversation really helped save my life. It really helped me choose with my doctor, with my healthcare team, the kind of care that was going to help me get the best life for as long as I have.

RALPH NADER: You certainly have proved for five years that you made the right decision. As you put in your article, you wanted to live a life where you could do what you do so well. You're a nationally recognized expert in care of the aged and seniors at the John A. Hartford Foundation. You are a registered nurse. So you were quite familiar with the routine, full blast treatment that is presented to breast cancer patients, which is, as you mentioned, surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, all of which have serious side effects and reduce the quality of life. So you decided that you wanted the quality of life, which is more important to you than quantity of days if they are miserable days. And you certainly have achieved that in the last five years. You say in your article, I could quote, and I'm going to quote you, "I continue to work full time, have redoubled my efforts to improve the healthcare system for older people, and I live a good life with serious illness. I've climbed the Great Wall of China, ridden a camel in the Jordanian desert, and waterskied to the Statue of Liberty, and I continue to enjoy time with my family and friends." End quote. Are you sure you're not trying the decathlon next, Amy Berman?

AMY BERMAN: [laughs] If I could be a better runner, I would try a decathlon. But it really is true that I, you know, trying to focus on the kind of care that's going to be helpful and avoid the care that's not going to be helpful. You know, and as a good consumer it makes for a better life. In fact, the research would suggest that I'm actually going to live a longer life, and so far that's actually bearing out. I'm in five years and I haven't been in a hospital.

RALPH NADER: Tell our listeners what kind of treatment you did get. And remember, listeners, this is a stage four metastatic cancer. We're not dealing here with stage one. What kind of treatment did you get?

AMY BERMAN: So I take a single pill at night. The pill is called Femara, and it removes hormones from my system. Those hormones are the things that fuel my kind of cancer. And I also get an infusion to help keep my bones strong. That medication is called Zometa. That helps keep my bones as strong as possible, because the cancer happens to be attracted not just to my breast, but to the bones, and eventually it will start weakening the bones and eating away at the bones. So the Zometa helps me keep as much calcium in the bones as possible. So I am getting treatment, it's not that I'm foregoing treatment. But these are the treatments that have the least amount of side effect, and I guess you'd say the greatest value. They're keeping me going and they're keeping me feeling well. I also seek out palliative care, so I do have a provider who, a team that focuses on management of pain and symptoms, and that also helps me stay as well as possible.

RALPH NADER: Yeah. Describe, one time you had rather severe pain, and you took a heavy dose of radiation, once. Why don't you describe that?

AMY BERMAN: About six months ago, I started getting pain in the middle of my back, which is not a place that the cancer had been before. And when I went and had a scan done, the cancer had spread to this new place, the fourth and fifth ribs in my back. And to get rid of the pain, my palliative care team suggested that I could have one large dose of radiation, a larger dose of radiation, instead of what most people get, which is ten to twenty doses of radiation. And this is also a recommendation of a campaign called Choosing Wisely. These are from all, about seventy different medical societies made recommendations about the kinds of care that have, you know, they produce better outcomes for people. And they help you avoid things that don't tend to get good outcomes for people. So they suggested that one dose of radiation, it's called single fraction radiation, and I went and I got that one larger dose. And it was like a light switch, it just turned off the pain. And the next day I was on a train and going off to a business meeting. Fantastic.

RALPH NADER: A remarkable point you make in your article, which is it saved the healthcare system a lot of money. You said, quote, "Chemotherapy alone would have cost upwards of \$500,000.

Insurance would have covered much of this but not all.” End quote. Which leads me to a widespread impression among consumer health analysts is that this over-diagnosis, over-treatment that pervades our entire healthcare system is incentivized by greater sales. You know, the drug companies sell more, the hospitals sell more, the doctors sell more. So there’s an economic incentive sometimes to go beyond prudent medical knowledge and really envelop the patient in an enormous number of procedures. Did you find it remarkable that your doctors were not tempted by this, that they knew that they were contributing to what is a new wave of caution in care with cancer patients, even though it may reduce the cost of over-treating and over-diagnosing cancer by billions of dollars a year?

AMY BERMAN: I think the most stunning thing for me was that my healthcare team, my providers, my oncologist, for example, really talked to me about what it is I was trying to achieve for my own health. I mean, especially given that I’m terminally ill, that the cancer’s out of the box, it’s not going to be cured and it’s going to be life limiting. You know, the fact that this doctor would sit down and have a meaningful discussion with me about what’s most important, and in my case it’s important to me that you control pain, that I feel well, that I’m able to work and live as normal a life as possible, while trying to hold the cancer back but not to do the burdensome treatments if they’re not going to give me a real benefit. And she listened to me. I think this is the piece that is often missing, having that kind of a structured conversation. There may be cases of over-treatment. There are cases of over-treatment. There are also pockets of under-treatment. But you know, for the healthcare system to get it right, it requires that we stop and ask people what they’re trying to achieve for their own health.

RALPH NADER: And this is contrary to the computerization of medicine, where a lot of patients come in to a doctor’s office and the doctors hardly ever look at them. They’re asking questions but they’re looking at a computer screen, and they’re not listening enough to the patients. I know a lot of older, experienced doctors have told me that the younger doctors are too over-computerized. They’re not as skilled diagnosticians. And a recent report just came out that said that at least one out of ten diagnoses in America today is completely wrong, which of course can lead to pretty serious consequences. Just to

put this in context, Amy Berman, roughly 1.3 million women in the U.S. die per year. 22 percent die from heart disease, 18 percent die from cancer excluding breast cancer, 5 percent die from Alzheimer's and 3 percent die from breast cancer. I don't think that's the normal impression of people, especially those who read obituaries. There's an extraordinary number of people who are described as having passed away due to breast cancer. What do you think's going on here?

AMY BERMAN: Well, truth is that people, most of the people who die in this country are older adults, and since I'm a geriatric expert I can weigh in on this one. And they tend to have more than one condition. So while there might be something listed as the cause of death, they may, in fact, have heart disease and cancer. They may have the beginnings of Alzheimer's. They may have a whole confluence of things. So that medical examiner, that coroner, that doctor is putting a cause of death for a person who probably has a whole array of things that are contributing to that person's mortality.

RALPH NADER: You know, just coincidentally, did you see the cover of Time this week?

AMY BERMAN: No, I didn't.

RALPH NADER: The cover of Time has a woman holding her breast and the commentary on the cover is, "Too much chemo, too much radiation, and way too many mastectomies." And the title of the long article is, "Why doctors are rethinking breast cancer treatment." And it starts with a patient who asked her doctor, after being diagnosed with stage one cancer, DCIS, it's called, she said to her doctor, "What if I decide to just do nothing?" And the whole article is on minimization of treatments depending on what the patient wants. And of course, that's what you went through. Your doctors basically said to you, Amy Berman, what do you want? What kind of life do you want to live? So I think this is a, beginning to be more than just a few people speaking out, such as you. I think it's beginning to be studied. There are controlled tests underway now by a doctor at Duke. There have been recent books on over-diagnosis and over-treatment by distinguished members of the medical profession. There have been criticisms of the pharmaceutical industry for massive, deliberate over-medication, including children, by

people like Marcia Angell, the former editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, a very distinguished physician. And of course, our health research group under Dr. Sidney Wolfe has pointed out again and again how much overmedication exists and how the side effects have produced serious debilitation and death in patients. Let me ask you a personal question. I notice you say outright that you have a terminal disease. It's easy for you to deny this because you've been so successful in how you have addressed the proper treatment for your ailment. Does your realization, as you expressed it, lead to your having nightmares at night? Does it affect you psychologically?

AMY BERMAN: I don't have nightmares at night. At the beginning I cried when I first heard the diagnosis. It was a terrible, terrible thing to hear, and I wasn't with my family and I wanted to share the news with them and to think about how I was going to share the news. The most worrisome time to me was thinking about how I was going to tell them. But I don't have any nightmares, I don't have anxiousness about my mortality. It simply is. I mean, everyone has an expiration date. I may have a little bit more information about when mine is going to be, but everybody has an expiration date. I didn't run from that. But helping my family understand that, that was probably my biggest challenge. And they've been just so wonderful and so supportive. And by the way, that term, terminal illness, a lot of people would say that's not the correct term. They call it advanced illness. But I think terminal illness is clear to people, to consumers, to families. I think terminal illness is explicitly clear. And I think a lot of people wouldn't understand if their doctor said to them, you have advanced illness.

RALPH NADER: You know, I once had a friend who had a serious cancer of the blood, and he survived for fifteen years. And from time to time, I would ask him, how are you doing? And he said, great. Dying is a great way to live. His way of saying he became more productive. Do you find that's true?

AMY BERMAN: Well, I really haven't changed very much, except I did get the dog that I thought I would get in my retiring years. That's about the only change that I've made. My wonderful

puppy. And there's a plan for who's going to take the puppy after I go. But other than that, I mean, I was already living a full and happy and rich life. So I really didn't need to change my life.

RALPH NADER: Our listeners may be wanting to know these facts, but if you don't want to say it, don't say it. How old are you, and what is your family members' situation? Do you have children? How old are they?

AMY BERMAN: I am 55 years old. I have a daughter named Stephanie who's in her upper 20's. She is single, she is my one child, and of course a puppy named Lola. My parents are still alive. I've got siblings and tons of friends.

RALPH NADER: What a productive outlook. I want to conclude with this broad gauge question. I think as your type of treatment begins to catch on, in other words, doctors don't over-diagnose and over-treat, they listen to the patient, what kind of life do you want to lead? Would you rather live five years quality rather than fifteen years with constant treatment and corrosive side effects from radiation and chemotherapy, etc., there's going to be a little backlash I think against this by established medical gurus who are going to say watch out, don't listen to these people, because they are going to persuade you to under-treat yourself. And then they'll give all kinds of cases where people who have had breast cancer and decided to forego treatment, we've all known people like that, and they go to herbs, for example, or diet, and they're dead in two years. Do you think there's going to be a backlash to this by doctors who practice traditional treatment and basically say you're going to encourage people to under-treat themselves?

AMY BERMAN: I don't think there's going to be a backlash. And in fact, this is really about people having conversations with their providers and documenting their choices, their wishes, and being part of the plan. You being part of the treatment decisions. And if people are not having these conversations, you are 100 percent guaranteed to only get the care somebody else wants you to have. That's the real tragedy. But here, if people are able to participate, have discussions about their care, their

treatment, their end of life wishes, this is the only way that we're really going to get it closer to right. This is our opportunity to get the care that we want and avoid the care we don't want.

RALPH NADER: And I think you're going to be bolstered, because in this Time Magazine article, they talk about the beginning of some systematic controlled studies by doctors at Duke University School of Medicine and a doctor at the University of California San Francisco, where basically they are trying to determine exactly what you have experienced and bring it down to a systematic level so other doctors, who haven't been listening to their patient, can be more likely to recognize that these latest findings are extremely life-sustaining and life-giving if properly conducted. One last question. In your work with older adults, do you find that we tend as a culture, and this is a little separate from your own case, we tend as a culture to downgrade the potential contribution of retired people in their 70's, 80's and 90's vis a vis younger generations, in terms of connecting the young with the wisdom of older people, and there's a sort of cultural patronizing attitude toward older people in our culture?

AMY BERMAN: We certainly can do more to incorporate and benefit as a society from the leadership, the wisdom, the love, the experience of older adults. This is an opportunity that can and should be tapped to a much greater extent. There are a lot of people that are doing intergenerational work in communities that are really looking to benefit, you know, have older adults come into the school system to tutor, building retirement communities with elementary schools. There's so many opportunities to really leverage the power of older adults. And thinking of my own parents, my dad is such an advocate in the town that he lives in in Florida, they asked him to run for the Board of Governors for the city. He's just a dynamo. And I see such power in the opportunity of older adults in this country.

RALPH NADER: Well said. And let me ask you, have you been on public radio at all? Have you been on Diane Rehm or Terry Gross or PBS Charlie Rose or any of these programs? You have a very compelling message.

AMY BERMAN: Oh, thank you. It's such an honor to just be with you, Ralph. But I did have the great pleasure of being with Diane Rehm. She's the only one that you've talked about that I've been with. And that was really wonderful.

RALPH NADER: Well, that's very good. I hope your voice is heard throughout the land and throughout the world. It's a very important, compelling one, especially since you're a registered nurse and you've worked with so many people who have had ailments, and you're also an expert on geriatric care. Thank you very much, Amy Berman. Would you like to give our listeners any contact information if they want to feed back on this program directly to you?

AMY BERMAN: Well, I would encourage them to follow the blog. I write on the blog and they're certainly welcome to comment, and I can get back to them through that. But the blog is called Health Agenda, and it's at www.jhartfound.org. And I welcome people to follow the story.

RALPH NADER: Thank you very much, Amy Berman.

AMY BERMAN: Thank you, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: You're welcome, Amy.

STEVE SKROVAN: Thank you, Amy, that was fantastic. We've been talking to nurse Amy Berman, diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, about how end of life discussions save her life. Go to the Washington Post of October 9th or the Hartford Foundation website, that's jhartfound.org, to pick up the article written by Amy about her experience. Gentlemen, we have a couple minutes left, just a couple, so we can't go on too long. Ralph, Democratic debate was this week. What was your take?

RALPH NADER: First of all, I think Hillary Clinton made the most with the least of her record in politics, and Bernie Sanders made the least from the most of his record in politics, which means he didn't do well. And he's going to have to prepare better for the next debates, there are five more. He's going to have to challenge her. If he doesn't, these aren't really debates. They're just unilateral interviews by the

reporters who toss the questions at them. She attacked him, he actually exonerated her on the illegal email scandal, and didn't go after her. If he keeps doing this, he's going to lose traction quite seriously. And I think he's got to more likely use Vermont to counter the socialist libel, because Vermont has been a Republican state for many decades and it's a conservative state, and he wins overwhelmingly from Vermont, which is full of small businesses and independent farmers who like what he stands for. But he didn't even use Vermont in that way, other than to indicate that he was not as strong as Hillary was verbally on gun control.

STEVE SKROVAN: Wow. Well, if you were advising him, that would be your advice. Well, that's our show. I want to thank our guests, Dr. Laura Nader and nurse Amy Berman for joining us today. For Ralph's weekly blog, go to Nader.org. Remember to visit the country's only law museum, the American Museum of Tort Law in Winsted, Connecticut. Go to TortMuseum.org for more information. Remember, a transcript will be posted of this show on RalphNaderRadioHour.com. Subscribe to us on iTunes and Stitcher. The producers of the Ralph Nader Radio Hour are Jimmy Lee Wert and Matthew Marin. On behalf of David Feldman, I'm Steve Skrovan. We'll talk to you next week, Ralph.

RALPH NADER: Thank you very much, Steve. Thank you, David, and thanks to the listeners. As always, get active, spread the word and get more people to listen to this program, and encourage your local radio station to carry it.