

JW: I'm Joan Wagon, and I have with me Elaine Schwartz, who is the wife of Howard Schwartz who we just interviewed. There's a unique relationship between Elaine and Chief Justice Kay McFarland. Since we can't interview the Justice, I thought I'd ask Elaine a little bit about how her relationship with Justice McFarland developed. How did you get acquainted?

ES: In 1995, Howard and I started dating. I had just finished my last term in the legislature. We met through his brother. We started dating, and he said to me, "When you go to judges' conferences with me, your #1 job is to entertain the Chief." So I got to know her real well. I found out that we had a lot of things in common, whether it was sewing or gardening, animals, just everything, really. We got along very well. We started having her over for holidays because she had no family. Over time we became very, very good friends.

Before she passed, she said she wanted me to be the trustee of her estate. I said, "Well, Chief, what do you want to do with your estate?" She didn't really know. She said, "That's what I have you and Howard for." I said, "No, that's a big decision." I was on the [Topeka] City Council, and I told her that maybe she should look at the zoo and doing something there.

We showed her the master plan for the zoo. I was on the City Council when we came up with the idea. There was an Asian garden in the middle of the zoo. We decided for her estate to pay for the Asian garden. She didn't want the garden in the middle of the zoo because she wanted to keep the gardens pristine. Because of this we moved the gardens to the outside of the zoo. We worked with the zoo to bring this idea to life. The chief worked with the zoo for approximately a year and a half before she died. She was a big part of what that was going to be, and it was so great to get her involved.

JW: I think the whole community has benefited from that. I go to Rotary meetings on Thursdays in Kay's Garden. It's good there are no small children running through. They have the employees carefully move the rocks around with these little sweepers to make sure that the designs are the way that they ought to be. But there's an interesting story about how you managed to raise the money to put all that together. Being a City Councilwoman helped, didn't it?

ES: Yes, it did. Since it was city property, we were able to only take a partial amount of her estate and pay off a municipal bond. When she passed away, there was a certain amount of money dedicated to this project. We went through two million, and we still had the amount when she passed. We still had the money to spend because we invested the money wisely. But it's always an effort. If you've been to our zoo, it is so awesome. The project they just finished, the Giraffe and Friends, actually was more than the seven million dollars that it cost for the garden. I believe the Giraffe and Friends was eleven million. We continue to work on making the zoo something very special in Topeka.

JW: I think her legacy to this community is cemented with the addition of that garden and the work that she did in the courts. I've just wanted to thank you for doing that. We've shared a lot of interesting things. We were in the legislature together.

ES: Yes, we were.

JW: We were both on the City Council, not at the same time. But, anyway, thank you for still working for the community, Elaine Schwartz.