

INTERVIEW: JANIS LEE  
(REVISED)

Q: I'm Sara Tucker. This is the Kansas Legislative Women's Oral History Project. You are Senator Janis Lee from the 36th Senatorial District. Your hometown is Kensington?

A: That is correct.

Q: You understand that this is being recorded; that you will receive a transcript; that a transcript will be on deposit at the Kansas State Historical Society and the Washburn Library and it will be used for scholarship, possibly leading to publication.

A: I do understand that.

Q: Good. Let me start the way I usually start by asking you how you came to be involved in politics?

A: It probably goes back to my childhood. Politics was always part of our life. We're Democrats. Both sides of my family are Democrats and it was just always part of what we talked about--government and the importance of being involved in what politics did. When I was eight or nine, I don't know the exact years...I'm forty-five now, so it was thirty some years ago, my dad ran for State Senate. In fact, for the seat that I now have, and he didn't win. He lost. He didn't have the time to invest in campaigning like I did and our district is so overwhelmingly Republican that it's virtually impossible for a Democrat to win. But it's always just been part of my life. More recently, when my husband and I moved back to the farm in the mid-70s, in '79 I was elected to our local school board. At the same time Governor Carlin appointed me to an advisory board to the Governor at the state level and over the next few years, by '84 or '85, I was involved in five advisory councils or commissions at the state level. I just realized that the action was in the legislature. So, I decided I wanted to be part of that.

Q: Now, how did you come to decide to run for the Senate and did you have a primary ballot or what?

A: I ran for the House in '84 against Keith Roe and I lost that race. It was three counties. I lost that race. I did not have a primary; neither did he. I determined that I wanted to be in the legislature and I felt, looking at my options, that I had more of an opportunity to beat the incumbent Senator than I had to beat the incumbent House member. I had no primary opposition. In fact, I was encouraged by many of the people in my area to change parties and become a Republican because they felt they wanted me as a Senator and they felt as a Democrat I had no chance. But I felt that...first of all, it's very difficult when you're known in one party to change. I had no philosophical reason to change parties. I would have been running against an incumbent Republican among his people. As we all know, the people who vote in primaries are the hardcore--Republicans or Democrats and it's very difficult to beat you on your own turf against those sorts of odds. And, in fact, I think I was proven correct because my opponent only gained 150 votes from the primary to the general election.



Q: That's fascinating. So, you decided to do it head-on, to run as a Democrat, and you won.

A: Yes.

Q: How did you do this?

A: Well, I started a year before organizing. I have eight counties, which is a large geographic area. And I went to...in the three counties that I had run for the House, I had a good basis. I had gone door-to-door, knocked on every door, urban and rural, every farm house, every urban house in the three counties. So, I had a good base there, pretty good name recognition. In the other counties I simply sucked in my stomach and put up my courage and I would find the name of some people in the county who were respected, obviously Democrat names, but who were respected by a lot of people in that county. And I went to them and said, 'Would you work on my campaign?' I had some connections in some of the counties. Some of the people I'd never met before in my life, and I had only one person that I asked turn me down and that was because she was the mother of six young children and she thought she did not have the time to devote that was necessary. From that we spread out so that by May 2, when I announced, May 2 of 1988, when I announced my candidacy, I had at least one individual in every town that I could go to and say, 'I'm going to be in your town on this date. I need this.' And I started May 2 with my announcement and started every day after that, weekdays to begin with. I would go to some town and go up and down Main Street and meet the business-people. I'd just make myself known in the businesses. I did that first of all in my ten major towns and then I have twenty-some smaller towns. A total of over thirty-six towns. So that [way] my name was known. Then, July 11, and I remember that vividly because it was my birthday, I started going door-to-door. I started [in] the small towns first because the people in small towns are not as used to having you go door-to-door and they remember you longer. And I found...in fact we were told by national experts that you don't need to go door-to-door until the last month or two because people don't remember. Well, it's totally impossible to cover 50,000 voters in one or two months. It takes six months [and that] is what I spent. Secondly, I found the people remembered me from four years, the people whose door I'd knocked on four years before remembered me. So, it's not true in the rural areas. But I started my small towns first and then I'd work a small town and go back as I went through the county to the major town and go into a few businesses and say, 'Hi, how are you doing?' Then, I started later on in my larger towns. I did the small towns all by myself, but my ten major towns I would usually have somebody in the town go with me. They'd go on the opposite side of the street. I attended any sort of a function you can imagine. All my towns have summer celebrations of one sort or another. I was at all of those activities. My opponent would go to a parade and leave. I would go to a parade and stay for the day-long celebration. And just by [way of] making myself known, we also sent out six fliers to every voting household in the district. We did that over the last six weeks. We did some newspaper advertising. Some radio, a little bit of television, but in my area, to advertise on TV, you have to advertise out of Nebraska. But mainly I campaigned by letting everybody meet me face-to-face if I possibly could, asking whatever questions they wanted to have answered. And I won the election by 68% of the vote.

Q: Were there issues?



A: Yes. There was the issue of the pension plan. My opponent had voted for the pension plan. There were a number of people that were very concerned about that. But I think the major issue was some of his behavior and the fact that he had not been...when he went to a town, he'd go to the bank and that was it. He was not one to go out and meet the people, thought he didn't need to. Never went door-to-door. The last few weeks of the campaign when polls on both sides showed that he was way behind, although I was never told that, but both Democrat and Republican polls showed he was thirty points behind, he began to do some in the business district. But by that point it was too late. I mean, many people told me they'd seen me more in the six months I was campaigning than they had seen him in sixteen years. He was rather arrogant and felt that because he was Republican and because he was male, he didn't have to worry. In fact, he made that statement a couple of times. In fact, he told one elected Republican woman who held an elected county office, whose husband had died ten years previous, who had raised the children by herself, that he wasn't worried because I was just a woman.

Q: My goodness. For the record, who was your opponent?

A: Neil Arrowsmith. That attitude, that arrogant attitude, I think, was part of the reason I was able to win that election.

Q: That seems terribly frank to say in public in 1988, which was when you were running. How did you know how to do all this right? Did you have mentors? Did you just kind of study the political process? You seem to have been very in-charge of what you were doing, had a game plan from the very beginning.

A: Oh, yes. I definitely did. Part of it came from...well, actually, I think it came from myself because I had some rural Senators I had visited with, but they didn't carry on campaigns like mine. I'm a very organized, thorough person, and I determined that in my area the way you win votes is by meeting people personally. I was advised by national advisors that there was no use running the campaign because you couldn't win. The amount of cross-over votes had been previously.... There was none. There were only four precincts out of my eight counties that had ever even shown any tendency to cross over. So, it was an impossible race. And the advice that you get, even from the state level, but especially from the national level, in a Senatorial campaign, applies to urban areas and does not apply to rural areas. So I simply, I guess you'd say, came up with my own game plan and that was to shake as many hands personally as I could. Meet as many people face-to-face [as I could], saying, 'What are your concerns? I'm here, I care about you. Can I help you?' I knew from my previous campaign about how long, how many hours it took to cover how many streets in what size town because it takes more time to campaign in a small town, which is towns of 100 or 200 or 300, than it does in a town of 1000, or my largest town is about 4,000. So, I determined I wanted to go door-to-door. I wanted to get my name out first and that was to go to the businesses and then, obviously, to go to activities that were in those areas. And then, to supplement that with written material, because they tell you you have to have your name in front of the people seven times before it goes into effect. I have to tell you, my husband was on the farm at the time. He no longer is on our farm. Because of allergies, he's had to leave. He now works for a computer consulting firm. We're very fortunate. He very much enjoys that job and it's only twenty miles from where our house is, so we're



very lucky in that manner. But he did not spend much time campaigning with me. I knew he would not. He was very supportive, but didn't have the time on a day-to-day basis to go. Occasionally, he would go to an activity, but he didn't do any door-to-door with me. The last two days of the campaign, the Saturday and Monday before the election, we took a caravan of people and went the one day to four western counties and the one day [to] the four eastern counties, and he went with us on that. And we went just mainly in the business districts and handed out fliers and said, 'Remember to get out and vote,' and this sort of thing. And as we were getting up Saturday morning and getting dressed, he said to me, 'You know, I'm happy to go with you and I'm very supportive, but I'd feel a lot better if I knew what I was doing.' And the thought struck me. I've spent six months, every morning wondering when I got up in the morning just exactly what am I doing today? Because it was my plan and, you know, is this the right plan? But I had determined that if I was going to run, that.... First of all, John Carlin had told me that you can lose once, but the second time you lose, [the] second time you run, you'd better be pretty sure you're going to win because you begin to get labelled as a loser and it makes it much more difficult. So I determined I was going to put everything in that race, so when I finished, win or lose, I could say, 'But I did what I should have done. I did what I wanted to do. I put in the effort, all the effort that was possible.'

Q: And you won. So, why do you think that many people crossed over? Why did you win?

A: Because they felt comfortable with me. They knew that party is not important to me. I just fought very hard on the floor today for a man that worked very hard against me. And I will do that because he's my constituent. It makes no difference to me how the people voted. The fact is they are my constituents. I'm here to represent them and I'm here to do whatever I can to help them. The people believed that. They met me. They knew I cared and that party isn't that important.

Q: So, to put it in different words, they thought you'd do a real good job for them. Tell me...you started to tell me already, but define your job and I realize it may have several parts. What is this job of being Senator that you're doing?

A: First and foremost, I represent the people of my district. I listen to them. I have a tremendous amount of coffees. We'll talk about that in a little bit, but I'm out among my constituents. I'm very accessible to them. I listen to them. I also help them to understand state government. Too often, politicians, I believe, don't understand it themselves, so they can't explain the issues that we're confronted with and the ramifications of those issues to their constituents. It's easier to blame it on somebody else or to say that's just government. My degree is in teaching, although I never have taught full-time. But part of my job is also to educate the public to what we're faced with up here, what our options are. Now what do you want us to do? Here's what we're faced with; what do you think is the best? When I'm up here, I'm [here] to represent them and do as much as possible to put their viewpoint very vocally...make their viewpoint known to the rest of the legislature, primarily the rest of the Senate, so they understand, so the other members of the Senate understand how the issues affect the people of North Central Kansas. So they'll take them into consideration. Then, another



part of it is to help my people if they run up against a roadblock. An example is, although he's not my constituent, he is my doctor. I go to Herster [?] Clinic at Halstead once a year for a very thorough physical. And my doctor there...he originally was from Nebraska close to where I live, that's why I went to him. He moved to Halstead. His wife is in the hospital and he'd been told by the administrator down there that if he was her doctor or attending physician it was against the state law. He couldn't be paid anything through Blue Cross and Blue Shield where they have their insurance. So he called me. Well, it's no state law. There was nothing to it. It was all because of some administrator at that hospital. Well, he called me and I looked into it. There was nothing with the Board of Healing Arts, nothing with the Department of Health and Environment. There was nothing with the State Insurance Department. We got the situation taken care of. That's part of what I am. I'm a problem-solver for my constituents. If they run up against a roadblock, then I try to help them work their way through. Not to bend any laws for them, but to work their way through the maze. Too often, when the average citizen of Kansas calls a department down here, they're too busy to take care of them. They don't have the time and if I, as Senator Lee, call, right or wrong, many times we can get that problem solved. That's part of my job. So there's many sides to my job.

Q: What you didn't mention is what I suppose, before I started doing all of this, I would have thought of as a major part of your job: getting things done, getting bills passed, getting on the right committee. What about that side of things?

A: You get things done and get on the right committee by demonstrating to the other Senators that you are capable and competent, know your business, don't make rash statements and if you say something it, indeed, is factual, by showing that you're competent. And that is part of it, obviously. I guess I just take that for granted.

Q: It's just interesting. We started out always asking what committees did you ask for, what committees are you on, and I've gotten very interesting different approaches to this. How important do you think committees are in your experience here so far?

A: In the work in the legislature, committees are very important. I asked for the Assessment and Taxation Committee. I got on that committee, which is very important. I love taxing issues. I enjoy the complexity and the ramifications of those issues, so that was a real plus for me. I got on Ag[riculture]. I probably shouldn't say this on the record, but I'm not thrilled about the committee. But for my area, it's a good committee to be on. I'm on Energy and Natural Resources. I love that area. That covers many of the issues that are important at the state level for farming, for agriculture, and for my area, plus the water issues and that's important for all of Kansas. The one committee that I asked for that I didn't get on was Education. I am on the Interim Legislative Educational Planning Commission and have found that to be even more fascinating than being on the regular Education Committee because we deal with oversight for all post-secondary education. I'm very interested in vocational education because of the council I sit on, although I come from a university background myself. So I'm very pleased with the LEPC assignment. One of the committees I got on that I thought was a 'pud' committee that has turned out to be very interesting was



the Elections Committee because we're dealing with all the ethical conflict of interest campaign finance issues, and the particular members of that committee are very interesting. I happen to be the only female on that committee, which makes no difference to me other than [that] we've had one gentleman that comes before us every year who still has never acknowledged that there is a female Senator on that committee, which I find fascinating.

Q: Indeed. How do you see the process of getting legislative work done here? Do you have mentors that have helped you and how you're going to accomplish your part in it? Who do you learn from? How do you set about to accomplish this?

A: I observed the legislature very closely for the four years from '84 to '88. Whenever I came down for one of the commissions or committees that I serve on, I always took time to come to the legislature and observe. I sat through the committee process and learned. And, yes, I have a couple of Senators, one in particular that I have known for some time. I guess you might say, somewhat of a mentor. I learned from him how activities took place, something about the players. Although I also, by serving on these committees and councils, was well acquainted with many of the Senators, both sides of the aisle, before I was elected. I found that to be a real plus because those who had served with me on other committees were aware of my competence or lack thereof. And I found that helpful.

Q: Would you mind telling me the name of this one Senator who...?

A: Senator Hayden from southwest Kansas is the one that I have known for a number of years. And he was helpful. Senator Carr was helpful in my campaign. He was the one that was assigned to me by the Democrat Senators to be my help, but as far as how things happen in the legislature, probably more from Senator Hayden.

Q: Are there any bills or issues that you've been concerned with in the last two to three years that you are particularly proud of winning, or even proud of fighting for if you lost?

A: Yeah, I'm very proud of.... Yes, my father would tell me to say. Not 'yeah.' It's interesting how our parents stay with us. My mother was an English teacher and every week when I write my newsletter, she's standing over my shoulder. The first session I worked very hard on the funding of the water plan, state water plan, and we lost that in the last hour of the last day of the session by one vote, by some inappropriate power used by the Governor. But I felt very proud of the reputation I gained on that piece of legislation. Probably the piece...the amendment that sticks most in my mind was an amendment I offered to a claim against the state bill the first year I was up here and it was, perhaps, an affirmation to me of how the other Senators felt about me as a Senator as opposed to how they felt.... It was a \$12,000 appropriations, which is miniscule in amount, but it was important to a county of mine. It was a claim that a county had had against the state and the Claims Committee had denied it, denied the claim, and the Ways and Means Committee had denied the claim. And I offered it as an amendment on the floor of the Senate and got it put on and it was taken out in the House and the Senate kept it in in Conference Committee. To me, it was an affirmation of the respect the other Senators had for me as opposed to.... Well, the claim



had validity, but it would have been quite easy had I not worked, had I not been able to work well with the other Senators, for it to have been denied. So that's one that I'm proud of. I'd have to think. I'd have to go back over and look, I guess, to find another, because I.... I have three bills right now that are coming up on the floor of the Senate. But none of them are major bills. They're bills that I've introduced for my area. One I've introduced for county commissioners; one I've introduced for the Highway Patrol that was suggested to me by one of my Highway Patrolmen. I have one I introduced because of one particular individual in my district that I felt had a just idea and have introduced. They're not major pieces of legislation, but they're...in their own right I think they're important. The major pieces of legislation I've probably dealt with have been the tax issues and those are committee that you work on. And some of those have been to get issues defeated, as well as to have them passed. It's being a part of the whole process and my effect that I feel I've had on the whole process is probably as important to me. One of the reasons I wanted to be in the legislature, and it deals with this issue of pieces of legislation, is that those four years I sat out in the audience, I felt too often that the appropriate question was not being asked. The only people that can ask questions are legislators who sit on the committees. And too often it felt to me that from the testimony we were hearing, they weren't asking the key question or the key series of questions to get the information that was needed to get before the committee to have the right decision made. And one of the things I enjoy most about being on the committees that I serve on is that I can ask those questions now. I've had staff tell me that they enjoy serving on the committees that I serve on because I ask the questions that they feel many times need to be asked and are not asked. Now, the other thing I'll tell you is that before I ask a question I normally know the answer. So that I know which direction we're going. But I think that quite often you have a great deal of effect on what happens to a bill, how it's amended in committee, whether it gets out of committee or not, by asking the appropriate and necessary questions.

Q: I'm assuming that you continued to be re-elected, of course, and you stay in the Senate for quite awhile, so someday you're looking back on a career, what would you want to be able to say about yourself or to have someone say about you? If you could achieve a great deal, if you could make a difference, what changes or what style would you most dream about accomplishing? What is it you're really trying to do here?

A: To make government good for the people. I don't know...what do you want people to say about me?

Q: Or, I suppose what I'm really trying to get at is the jungle of government seems so large sometimes, the result isn't very clear. And I'm trying to get a real picture of what result it is you want to be here to achieve and I think I'm hearing you say all kinds of really exciting things and I'm trying to get more of them.

A: I want government to be responsive to the needs of the people. I want government to be more understandable to the people. Too often, as I said earlier, politicians try to...either because it makes them feel more important or because they don't understand themselves, they try to make government issues sound so difficult that you can't understand them. 'Leave it up to me because you don't understand.' And what I want government to be is I want you



to be able to understand what we're faced with, what our decisions are. Not necessarily what our decisions are, but what the issues are that we have to make our decisions about. Then, I want you to tell me how you feel about it and why and then I'll tell you how I feel about it and why and we'll come to some sort of compromise. I want government to be good for the people and that probably sounds simplistic, but I want it to be responsive to the needs without being overwhelming. We have taxes for a reason. Because they provide services for our people, needed services for our people. I want those services to indeed serve the people and their needs.

Q: You want government to do a good job.

A: Yes, for the people. Because that's what we're here for. Some of my constituents say to me that they want government to be run as a business. They run a business. I run a business with my brother because my brother and I now farm together and it's a fairly good-sized farming operation. So I know how a business is run, why it's run, but state government is not business.

Q: I think, moving on then from your general goals of government, you have mentioned your family in various ways and I would like to go back to that. Starting out with your birth family. You are from, then, the general area of Kansas and you're a born and raised Kansan?

A: Yes, in fact, we live a mile and a quarter from where I was born. We live in the same yard where I was raised, although my husband and I lived in Iowa for six years after we graduated from college, but we moved back to the farming operation. I had three brothers; one brother died when he was 21 months old and I was a fourth-grader. But I have two living brothers, one who is 14 months older than I am. He's a nuclear engineer. He currently is in charge of the rebuilding or whatever is going on at Rocky Flats in Colorado. He and his wife live in Chicago, but he, of course, spends a lot of time now in Denver. I have a younger brother who has his master's in nuclear engineering, who is now back on the farm with us.

Q: You have a very nuclear family here.

A: My younger brother probably got his degree because of the older brother. In fact, it was interesting in our family [that] up until the time that I became elected to the Senate, Donald was always the one, my older brother was always the one that was used as the example in the family, the one to achieve to be. That's been one of the...I guess, one of the strokes I've had being elected to the Senate is [that] now my father probably brags about me more than he does my older brother. It's a very high-achieving family. We've always been encouraged to strive and nobody ever told me when I was growing up that girls went in different directions than boys did, which was probably helpful to me. I always did a lot of debating with my older brother, not in any sort of school activity but just one-on-one and I think that's been helpful to me because he intimidates most people and does not intimidate me. I find that very helpful when I'm debating on the floor of the Senate that I've had that experience. My husband and I were married quite young. I was 18 and he was 20 when we married. We went...I had gone through one semester of college and he had also gone through one semester, although he'd flunked out, had worked for two years and we got married and both started back to school. He graduated in '68 from K-State the first year they gave a degree in



Computer Science. He graduated with honors. It took me seven years to get through college because I had three children while I was doing it. But I graduated in '70, did some substitute teaching, but did not start to teach because I wanted to be home with our kids. In '73, we decided to move back to the farm. My younger brother who was at MIT at the time, finishing his bachelor's and starting on his doctorate, had decided that, in fact, rather than being an engineer, he wanted to be a farmer, but he did not want to go back by himself. As I said, it's a large operation and so we decided that...my husband had come from a farm background and, although he liked working with computers, he also wanted to get back to where he thought he would be his own boss, and so we both made the decision in '73. My husband worked for Lennox at the time in Marshalltown, Iowa, and made the decision to go back to the farm. We moved back in September of '73. John came back and Linda came back about that time. It may have been a month later. And we have been on the farm ever since. Family is very important to me. We're very close. We live, in fact, in the same yard as my parents. Built our home in '74 in the same yard as my parents' house. My brother lives a mile and a quarter away. My husband developed allergies, terrific allergies. In fact, it got to the point where it was turning into asthma and he had gone to specialists--Denver, all over Nebraska--and finally came to the point about two years ago...he was with my brother one day and had one of his asthma attacks, and you really think they're dying when that happens, and my brother convinced him that he needed to find a job off the farm. We still have the same amount of ownership. If I'm here, I do the book work for this farming operation, which is very interesting, very challenging to turn in the FICA, FUTA, SUTA and do all that stuff. But I am actively involved in the decision-making. My brother called me at 6:15 this morning to discuss things that we are going to be doing. I love that part of my life. The connection with the farm is very, very important to me. It's where my roots are and, if I had to give everything else up, I'd probably go back to the farm. But, at this point, I have the absolute ideal because I love my involvement down here. I love the ability, the reason, I guess you'd say, to be out among my people in my area, to help them when I can. If we have time I'll tell you a little story. It's not family, so it's a little bit off the subject. There has been a couple of times I've been able to help constituents that very few people know about and it's not...they don't need to know about it. It's just rewarding for myself. A young man, he's about 9 years old now, when he was born, he was perfectly normal. He had his DPT shot and became terribly mentally and physically dis-abled. His parents live in Rooks County. He was at home the first four years and then they could no longer handle him and put him in Winfield. We're in the process of trying to get funds to build a home...to pay for a home in Hays, Kansas, a home for severely disabled children, and they wanted Brandon to be able to be in Hays because he would be within distance of the home. On a weekly basis they could visit Brandon. Now, it's twice a year. It's a six-hour drive and both parents work. But they couldn't, even though we still don't have the funds for the home, we were working on the funds at the time about two years ago, and Brandon wasn't going to be able to be moved to the home because he had a gastrointestinal tube and that takes an RN on duty for 24 hours a day. The home wasn't going to be able to have that and I had been working for several months with Winston Barton, who was secretary of SRS and with Velva Chung, who was nurses' association, trying to see if there wasn't some way we could circumvent that regulation so we could get Brandon to Hays. Because Brandon's mother could take him out and keep him in her own home and nobody [would] do anything about it, but in order



to get SRS help, he had to have an RN on duty. And I called Brandon's mother, Linda, on Wednesday afternoon just to tell her...it was in August...not to give up. I was still trying to find if there wasn't some way that when the funding came about we could get Brandon moved. And in our conversation, she said, 'You know, Brandon's only had that that gastrointestinal tube for a year.' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'Well, the nurses told me it was too messy to feed Brandon, took too long to feed him, and they didn't have the time. So the doctor put the tube in.' I said, 'Let me get back to you, Linda.' And I called Winston Barton about 3:00 on Wednesday afternoon. I said, 'Winston, do you want to hear something interesting about this case?' I told him; he said let me get back to you. Friday, I got a phone call, Friday afternoon about 5:00. I remember vividly because my refrigerator had quit Friday morning and the repairman was there delivering the new refrigerator. I'd been gone all day and I'd called him before I left in the morning and said 'I'm going to be back at 4:30. Can you deliver it?' You know. Well, actually, he'd come out and checked it in the morning between stops. I'd come back and he said it's going to cost this much to fix it, and I'd said, okay, bring a new one out at this time in the evening. And he just asked me...I'd had a bad phone call...and he just asked me, 'Do you ever hear any good news?' And the phone rang, and it was Winston Barton and he said, 'I thought you might be interested in this report that's on my desk.' He said, 'The doctors at Winfield have done a re-evaluation of Brandon and they've determined that it's time to begin mouth feeding again.' As I recall, that was around August, and by the next February, he was able to...February 14, he was able to eat food by mouth, [it] took that long to get back there. So Brandon now is being mouth-fed and whenever we get the funds for the group home at Hays, he'll be able to be moved there and we're hoping that with this year's budget, we're going to get the funds for a group home for four children and he'll be able to be moved there. But it's those kinds of things that make it...and I guess that relates back to family, because that's family, and the only people that know that is Brandon's family. They know what happened. And a few others. But it's not important that anybody else knows. It's because those are some of the differences you can make. Little things, but it's very important about family, that at some point Brandon, hopefully, will be that much closer that they can go on a weekly basis to see him and have him as part of their family. Well, we have...my husband and I have three sons. I would have loved to have had a daughter, but I don't have any, although the middle son's girlfriend, if I could, I would adopt her.

Q: Well, maybe you'll get her.

A: They've gone together six years, so I assume that it's going to be a lasting relationship. The oldest son, David....They're all very bright young men. The oldest son is 26. He is an aeronautical engineer, works for NASA, and that was his goal from the time he was real young to be a part of NASA and the space program and he succeeded. He went to Wichita State. The middle son that you just met is a senior at K-State. My sons are very individual, as you can see. Two younger sons have long hair, which is not typical of rural Kansas. They're very fine young men. He is a senior, a double major--physics and psychology, carrying a 3.8 something average. He's just now applying for graduate school to go on and get his...has actually six more hours to get in physics after he graduates in psychology and then he wants to get his doctorate in physics and go into research. The youngest son is the brightest son or, according to tests, he's the brightest son. His other two brothers



also tell us he's the brightest son, but he flunked out of college. At this point he has [not] found that which interests him enough. If he knows something, there's no reason to tell you as a professor that he knows it. We haven't gotten over that hurdle. When he does work, it has to be absolutely perfect before he'll hand it in and it often ends up too late because we never get it perfect. So, he at this point is working and someday I think he'll go back to school. Probably very good for me, though. If you have only perfect children, it's hard to understand those who have children they have problems with.

Q: That's fascinating. So, your youngest son is 18, 19?

A: Twenty-one.

Q: Therefore, I clearly do not have to ask you how you arranged childcare once you went into the Senate.

A: I was fortunate...in fact, he had graduated from high school the year that ...that May, when I was elected in November.

Q: So, your children were all out of high school or older when you were elected. Although they would not have been if you had won your House of Representatives race in '84.

A: My children were used to taking care of themselves. I had been gone...first of all, we live in the same yard with my parents, like across the street. But I started being gone for two or three days at a time when the younger children were...well, it would have been in '79, and the one was born in '68 and one was born in '70. So, when they were like nine and ten, eleven years old, they were used to Mom being gone. And at that time, Grandma fixed meals for them, but the son that you met, the middle son, Brian, is an excellent cook. In fact, during the '84 campaign, he was 16 years old, and part of what I do on the farm is I cook for hired men. There's a number of us, so ordinarily I only cook once or twice a week, but that particular time I had to get meals three days a week for two weeks because everybody else was gone on vacation. And Brian cooked those meals for me. I helped him before I would leave in the morning, and then I went campaigning and Brian got dinner for eight or ten men. I put instructions above the washing machine: this is how you wash your clothes, jeans, shirts, underclothes, and they just were always taped up there above the washing machine. They could cook their own meals, I mean, they didn't need me there. They were fourteen, fifteen years old. In fact, I was interested...I was on the school board for ten years and, even though you think people are accepting what you're doing.... My youngest son told me...he thought it was kind of a funny question. The school principal had asked him, he was about a sophomore in high school, 'What do you do for breakfast when your Mom's gone?' And Danny said, 'I told him the same thing I do when she's home. I get my own breakfast.' So, I feel that's part of young people growing up. What if I died? I mean, young men should know how to wash their clothes and cook their meals and the two younger boys are very good chefs. In fact, when they come home for vacation, they do a lot of the cooking, which is nice for me.

Q: I'm happy to say I don't think you have a tremendously unusual independence approach here, but surely it is not completely usual. Why do you



think you come out of this family that has so much achievement? Why do you think you have these attitudes? Because they were not dominant and normal for women thirty or forty years ago. Where do you come to be so up-to-date?

A: In what manner?

Q: You apparently never felt as though you played a different role in life from your brothers. You seem to have brought your sons up to be very independent. Not every woman I talk to has had these attitudes as clearly defined as early. Do you think it was your parents that gave it to you? Is it you?

A: It's been a matter of growth. When I first got married, and let me say I have to give a tremendous amount of praise to my husband, because I'm probably not the same woman he married and he's been able to accept the changes and stay with me and I'm certain not all those changes are easy. It's not easy to be a female politician's husband. Normally, we expect in the marriage, traditional marriage, the man is the one that's getting all the acclamation. My first few years of married life, my goal was to be the perfect mother and the perfect wife, but you soon realize that--or at least I realized--that that was only short-term. The children are soon gone. I mean, you know, they're gone and then what do you do with the rest of your life? And I had always had instilled in me the importance of service to community. I'm fortunate in what I've been given as far as family and financial issues. And I felt that I owed something to people in general for being so fortunate. So, I wanted to go into service in some way. Well, you start out in service as schoolboard, local issues. I was township treasurer, those sorts of things. Fair Board treasurer for many, many years. But your scope widens. I was always taught to be independent and I guess, I was just always taught there's not that much difference between male and female. I think that's part of the farm background. Although I never worked on the farm that much as a young girl, teenage girl, because we had a lot of hired men around and it would have been inappropriate for me to be out with hired men some of the time. But I was still a very important part of the farming operation and had the things that I did to help. I don't know. I just always thought that women were equal and wanted to make a difference in this world and you do that by going out and being independent and sometimes you're scared to death and you suck in your breath and on you go. And I was very determined that my sons would treat men and women as equals and I think that the compliment that I cherish most came from Amy, Brian's girlfriend, and she said to me one time that Brian and Danny treat women more as equals than any other young men she'd been around. That's the biggest compliment anybody could give me.

Q: I agree. Were your mother and father partners on the farm when you were growing up? Is that the role you saw?

A: Yes. Now, it's a family farming operation. My father's father died when my father was thirteen. My father was not the oldest brother. There was one brother older. Two younger brothers and a younger sister, but my dad took over the operation, and my dad, in fact, became the father to two of the brothers. They all farmed together for awhile. The one brother went off on his own then later on, but when I grew up, we had one checking account for three families, plus my grandmother. One checking account. Everybody wrote out of the same checking account. You never questioned what anybody else



spent because it was obvious if they spent it, they needed it. Very, very strong family orientation. Later on, after my brother and I came back to the farm, my one uncle who had three children, took his part of the corporation, the farming operation, and they now farm separately from my other uncle who has no children and my father. But, yes, it's all done as...my mother did not go out and work on the farm per se. She did not do the book work that I do, but I always knew she was a very important part of the farming operation. Dad could not be there, it would not be successful if she was not a part of that. She's a very strong, dominant person. And I guess I grew up in probably a communal society.

Q: That's fascinating.

A: And I have total trust of my brother. I mean, he makes decisions. You know, it's just that sort of a family relationship, that we discuss the decisions that are made, but I never question his motive.

Q: I always ask a question, in this case you've told me the answer in bits and pieces, and the question is what does it cost you to be in the legislature? And that can mean many different things--money, time. I suppose it can be your marriage if your husband didn't like what you were doing. Are there costs doing this, being here?

A: There are financial costs, but the rewards so much outweigh the costs that I don't really think of it in terms of costs. My children are grown. They're delighted that I have something I'm doing that I enjoy so much, and frankly I get to see the two younger sons probably more being here. For instance, the weekends I go home, nearly always I stop by Manhattan Sunday evening and we go out to dinner together and they come over and visit me every once in awhile. The major cost is probably to the farming operation and I'm not able to spend as much time there as I would otherwise. But that's something that I can, when I go home weekends, I can do book work 'til midnight if I want to and those things I can arrange in a manner that, so far, I've been able to take care of both responsibilities. The major cost would be for my husband and myself, the time that we're apart. And that is a cost, but on the other hand, he understands that this fulfills a need for me that probably there's no other way to fulfill, and he's pleased with that. And his job is a very demanding job. Now, he doesn't get home most evenings 'til nine or ten, so we both have less guilt about the hours we put into our jobs because we both are so busy.

Q: Now you stay here in Topeka during the session and you drive home many weekends and sometimes, I take it, he can come up here? So you are very definitely not able to drive back every night. That would take you forever.

A: Four-and-a-half hours drive. The first two years I went home virtually every weekend. As I have become busier, I'm now Democrat Caucus chair, there's more burden, there's more things to do. There's less time to get my letters written, and I answer all my letters myself. So, a few weekends I've stayed up here and I found that to be quite helpful. Gives me a little bit... I don't have to have that 4 1/2 hour drive on Friday and 4 1/2 hour drive on Sunday, and so far, Lyn's been able to come up every weekend. I don't know about this weekend. In fact, I'm waiting for a call to find out. But we've been able to spend the weekends together. And I can't remember what the question was.



Q: What costs there are and I think you've told me. Basically, not that many. Certainly none you're not willing to pay.

A: That's right. And it has to be a decision between both my husband and I that we're willing to pay. But it's...people have told me several times, people this year have told me that I look like I'm enjoying it. And indeed, I am. I really find it rewarding and exciting and interesting and challenging.

Q: That sounds good. I've got two questions which just are left over. The first one is, why are you a Democrat? You told me you absolutely are. This is clearly out of a family in a Republican area.

A: A very conservative Democrat. Democrat because my father would probably turn over in his--although he's not in his grave, but he probably simply could not understand me becoming a Republican. It's part of my independence. The fact that I can get elected as a Democrat in a Republican area. I feel that around here I have more influence, certainly more independence being a Democrat. Nobody on the Democrat side twists my arm to vote any way because they know that I have to represent, first of all, my constituents if I want to be re-elected. And I find that my Republican counterparts often have their arms twisted, especially when there's a Republican Governor, to toe the line. On childcare issues, issues dealing with SRS, I probably am much more Democrat. Tax issues, I probably am much more Republican, many times. I'm very conservative fiscally, but human issues are important to me.

Q: Finally, or almost finally at least, you've been here 2 1/2 years. This is your third year of a four-year term and you've certainly been very much aware of the legislature for awhile before that. Do you have any perspective or impressions on what difference it seems to be making that there are so many more women in the legislature than there used to be? There are forty-four of you altogether, nine on your side, and thirty-five in the House. Why do you think that is? Do you see any differences of any sort?

A: I think the reason there are more women...there's a couple of reasons. People trust women more and I had that said to me often in my campaign. They feel we're less likely to be bribed or whatever it is. We're more likely to be concerned about the people. There's no amount of money anybody could offer to bribe me that would make me vote a way I don't believe I should vote. The job is too important to me. You can't buy it from me. Secondly, the job is very demanding and it's difficult to have to be the breadwinner of the family and also be in the legislature. I'm fortunate in the situation that I'm in. My brother is very supportive. He's very active in KLA, which is a livestock organization, understands the importance, so that I have a great deal of support from my family to be here. But it can be--if you're the breadwinner in the family--it can certainly be financially draining. And we have a couple of senators who have financial problems and I think it's because they've spent so much time being a senator. In my case, in a rural area, it's virtually a full-time job. In fact, I spend many more than forty hours a week, even when not in session, just because of the distances I have to travel. So I think that's two of the reasons. Because of the cost of service and because of the fact that people feel that women are competent and trust women and are beginning to like us being here, quite frankly. Do we make a difference? Yes, I think we make a difference. In some ways, it's very subtle. We look at many issues in a slightly different manner than men do. It's just our makeup.



Secondly, I think we're more organized than many of the men are. We look more at the details than the men do. Again, I think it's our upbringing. It's part of being a mother, I think, to be organized. Maybe I'm prejudiced because I am a mother, was a mother, whatever.

Q: I think you're always a mother, once you're a mother.

A: Yes, I tell my sons that. I'll always be their mother. But I think we look more at detail. We look more at organization. And then just from the feminine perspective, we bring a different light to many issues. We ask different questions, so it may be very subtle, but I do think...I think it's good. I think it's positive that we have both viewpoints brought to the center to look at, to examine the issues.

Q: Okay. Is there something you thought I'd ask that I haven't? Is there something else you'd like to get on the record?

A: I had no idea what to expect. Just that I find this to be a very fascinating and enjoyable.... I spend a great deal of time out with my constituents and sometimes when I get up in the morning and I'm going to go to a meeting or something, I find myself not certain that there's the energy left. It's very draining. But then once I'm out among them, it's as if they just give me energy. I absorb the energy from them, from their interest and their excitement, and their upbeatness, that I find it to be extremely rewarding.

Q: You sound like you have found the perfect job.

A: Yes. I really believe it is and each year I'm down here, I find that you have more effect on the system. You have to become a part of the system and you have to be accepted by the other legislators that you are serious and you can do your job and you're to be taken seriously, then I find they don't treat you any different--male or female. And they allow you to have influence. And many times that influence is very subtle. But I find each year there is more influence and that's been very rewarding.

Q: Might I assume that all things going well, you will run again?

A: Oh, absolutely. That's right.

Q: Well, I'll look forward to that. Thank you very much.