Linda Uthoff: Hello, I'm Linda Uthoff, and I'm here in the home of Phyllis Garibay-Coon of Manhattan, Kansas, and she's a wonderful statehouse muralist who has just recently unveiled "Rebel Women." This is part of the Kansas Oral History Project and their "Notable Kansans" collection. We're so excited to have you. Thanks for doing this, Phyllis.

Phyllis Garibay-Coon: Thank you. It's an honor.

LU: Absolutely. Well, we're excited to know a little bit more about you and how you came to create the very large mural. It's 19 x what?

PGC: 8 feet.

LU: 19 x 8 feet on the first floor east of the Kansas statehouse, right across from the cage elevator, if you know where that's at. So, tell us first, Phyllis, how did this artist journey begin for you? I know you're a lifelong Kansan. So, tell us a little bit about what led you to art in the first place.

PGC: It really started with 4-H, which is interesting because I grew up in a small town, two small towns in Kingman County. I'm the youngest of ten, seven girls and three boys. We were all involved in 4-H. I also had a sister that was an illustrator. So, we learned to sew. I loved the crafting program, and I would do arts and crafts for it.

I think part of it, too, my mother was very creative at getting busy hands busy. She would give me flowers to plant. There were always crayons and paints and different things to keep me busy, and I enjoyed that. I probably liked doing that more than I liked my homework when I was in school. I was so excited to go to kindergarten and have more creative things to do, but initially it was with 4-H, we were in such a small community, we didn't have an art teacher. We did have art in our classes, but it really started with my family and 4-H.

LU: Awesome. Then you went to college then?

PGC: Yes, and actually, too, part of it, I think, some of my creative that I think goes on past the college degree was I did edit, I was editor of a small newspaper when I went to Norwich High School and the yearbook, and I loved that too because it was kind of the beginning of a different part of my art career.

After Norwich High School, I went to Kansas State University, and I majored in graphic design. I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

LU: Awesome. What was it that K-State gave you in terms of your—I mean, a lot of things, but what direction in the art field were you starting to go in college?

PGC: That's a really good question because a lot of—at the time, since I was going to college in the late eighties, graphic design was really starting to be more popular in colleges. I knew that I could make a living in graphic design. But K-State, a lot of our hours were fine arts classes. I think it made us more flexible and resourceful and look at different things.

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I only took one painting class, which is interesting, lots of drawing classes. I loved ceramics and I did weaving and photography and print making, and that was just to get your credits that you needed besides marketing and typography, you took for graphic design. I think definitely that—it was kind of like going to kindergarten again because it was like, "Ooh, playtime."

Especially since I didn't have art in high school, I didn't experience—and a lot of the kids that were coming to K-State were from Kansas City and bigger communities and it was a little intimidating, but they had already taken some of these classes. But K-State really—their program at the time had a lot of focus on fine arts. I think it made me a better designer, too.

LU: And in retrospect, you've used all of those skills in some way.

PGC: Absolutely.

LU: Because your art's been so varied over the years, too. After college, as we all do, you moved around to different places, raised three kids, and fit art in as best you could. Is there anything that stood out for you as far as growing as an artist during those busy years?

PGC: Yes. I worked for a design firm, Willoughby Design in Kansas City, and it was an all-women design firm. They were started by Ann Willoughby. She was a wonderful illustrator. She always encouraged all of the designers to also make fine arts a part of your life. That was empowering in many ways because it was an all-women design firm, and we were working for really big firms from Farmland to Sprint to Hallmark, all kinds of corporate entities, but we were doing the fun stuff.

And so that was very influential, but then starting to raise kids and taking care of them and then I did freelance design and then kind of by a fluke started painting. At the time, when I started painting, I started painting in acrylics. The one painting class I had in college—I wanted to take watercolor, but that class was always full.

So, I took oil painting, and I hated it. It was in the old stadium. You know how the old stadium was. It was always wet in there, and it took forever for the paintings to dry. As a student, you're rushing all the time. It's like, "I'll never finish this painting because it's always wet."

Anyway, I started painting in acrylics. A friend had asked me to paint in a restaurant that they had, but I would still freelance, and I had time to be at home with the kids. I had a small studio, and I would paint when I could. It just grew kind of organically from there.

LU: Yes. Well, that leads me to the next area that I was going to ask you about, and that's you've got artwork all over Manhattan. How did that start to happen once you were here?

PGC: Well, I was so happy moving back and after being away from Kansas for six years and Manhattan specifically for ten. Coming back to Manhattan, the Beach Museum is here. We have art galleries. We have the art center. It was really great to be able to get involved in the community. And then once starting to meet people in Manhattan, and some of my old professors

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were still here. I met a couple of classmates. As time allowed, I would still freelance design and then I decided that "I'm going to go talk to the gallery and say, 'Hey, I have this work. Do you have room for me in a show? Is it good enough to be in a show?'" I had not been part of a real gallery show.

And so it started with that. I was in a show at Strecker Nelson Gallery. Then I started to meet people that had small businesses, mostly restaurants. So, that kind of was a combination of my designer hat and my fine arts hat because I could really—I really do like working and designing spaces and art to go in public spaces, too. And you're working for a client. It's a challenge of making—the art is not for you. You paint art for a show. It's more of a client-based art.

So, it just kind of grew from there. Manhattan is a small enough community and word of mouth. I was pleasantly surprised that I was able to—and now over time do so many things, so many variety of things, too.

LU: You really have. You've done soft sculpture. You've done hard sculptures, outdoor, indoor.

PGC: Metal.

LU: You've done large murals. When did the large art begin for you?

PGC: I think, all leading up to it, all the public art that I have around town, and just being here in one community so long, I first got the opportunity of a large outdoor—I had some smaller outdoor things at restaurants. It was Sunset Zoo, and they were renovating their leopard area, their Asia area, and one of my neighbors who's a big fan of my art, asked me if I would be interested. It was awesome. Usually when there's public art like that, there's a net put out for artists. It's more of a competition. This was wonderful. She is a big donor and has loved the Sunset Zoo forever, and so she said, "I'm paying for this piece. So, I want to choose who's going to paint it."

I love history. I'm a huge history buff. The Sunset Zoo is part of a WPA [Works Progress Administration] project, and a lot of people that grew up here in Manhattan don't even know that. So, they wanted to tell people about the history of the zoo and the fact that Sunset Zoo was a part of that and benefited from that project.

I had done one smaller outdoor project at Taco Lucha and some Luchador's, but the Zoo is three-and-a-half panels of 10 feet x 11 feet. I started at the end of March, and I finished at the end of June. So, I went through weather. I was like rained on and hailed on.

LU: You had it all.

PGC: It was really cool because I really got to know the animals actually. In the morning, I would walk through the zoo. The otters would come up and say hello of course because they thought I was going to feed them. It was cool because I included the personalities of the animals. So the subject matter is the WPA workers building the zoo, but the zoo animals are helping them.

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LU: I think it's great. It's a wonderful asset to our zoo.

PGC: So, that's the first big one. And then I have a painting at Kansas State University, and that's really wonderful because it's my alma mater, and it is at the multicultural center. I was commissioned. It's in the Gabe Hernandez Commons Area. It's another space for students to gather, and he was interested—I have a good friend that works there. So, this donor that's very proud of his K-State roots said, "I would like to commission a painting in this space, but I would like this person to be of Hispanic descent and also be an alumnae of K-State." And she was like, "I know exactly"—

It was great. I showed them some ideas, and they were, "Yes, do this." I think that led up to the biggest commission I've had so far.

LU: Which is this one?

PGC: Yes. "Rebel Women."

LU: That might be a good place for us to talk a little bit about "How did this begin?" We just unveiled it this past Kansas Day, January 29, 2025.

PGC: Yes.

LU: How did you first hear about it? What prompted you to apply?

PGC: That's also a little bit nuts, that question, because my daughter and I have two businesses now, Little Batch Company and Parkside Station. It's a bakery started actually in my kitchen, and we sold at the Farmers Market. We're starting renovation on the restaurant, which is down by the park.

LU: Very close to Johnny Kaw.

PGC: Just right across from Johnny Kaw.

LU: It was an old gas station.

PGC: Yes.

LU: What you've done with it is absolutely stunning.

PGC: Yes. I got to put my designer hat on that. We have had great support from the community. One of our customers came in. I was not there that day. Renovation was still going—construction was still going on at the gas station to turn it into a restaurant. She said, "There's this call for artists for this Kansas Suffragist Memorial, and your mom should apply for this."

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They had started the whole process. The League of Women Voters had started the whole process. They wanted to try to commemorate the 100 years of women getting to vote in 2020, but it had taken a long time, and I did not hear about it until 2023. But they didn't have enough artists apply. So, they extended the deadline.

So, this lovely customer came in. She said, "Your mom should do this, apply for this." I looked it up, and they had Kansas Suffragist Memorial project. You sent the resume and paintings you were doing, and they narrowed it down to five artists. Again, they would prefer it to be a Kansas artist, and they were hoping for a woman artist. They narrowed it down to five, and then we had to make our own presentation.
They gave us kind of parameters of Kansas women that they wanted to feature, and then each artist made their own presentation, and I was chosen.

It was really just—I still have to go and sit in front of it. I'm right below "John Brown."

LU: One floor down from "John Brown."

PGC: But the painting's on that [first] floor, it's one of the busiest hallways in the whole Capitol, and it's been blank forever. It's an amazing honor for my family growing up on Kansas farms, tried-and-true Kansans. We all were like, "This is pretty amazing."

LU: I was there that day you unveiled it. I'm with the League of Women Voters here in Manhattan and Riley County. We partnered with the American Association of University Women as well. But I can't tell you how proud we are of you and how beautiful we think it is and so grateful for all the hard work it took to do that.

PGC: Thank you. It was really amazing.

LU: When you went in to make your presentation that first time, was it something very similar here?

PGC: I did another rendition. The League of Women Voters, like I said, there were about twenty women that were involved, and we kind of sorted—I did my own, and the rendering was the same size, but I had a couple of different women in it. This was the second rendition. We actually sold the first rendition to help pay—the entire payment that came to me was privately funded. So, Kansans funded this project. So, they sold the first one to help raise money for the project.

But we had a discussion on which women—the League of Women Voters Committee and the Preservation Committee of which women we would like to feature.

LU: The Capitol Preservation Committee.

PGC: Yes, the Capitol Preservation Committee.

LU: Did they have their own parameters for what they wanted to see?

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PGC: Some of the women that I included were not in their suggestions. I had done research and looked about some past and then some actually present women that were active in politics. They wanted to focus more on the historic story.

LU: It was done as a commemoration to the 19th Amendment, the centennial of the 19th Amendment.

PGC: Yes.

LU: Which gave women the right to vote.

PGC: Yes. Like I said, they started this process in 2020. They had actually a descendant of Lizzie Sheldon kind of gave a big chunk of money to the League of Women Voters, and they had used some of it for other projects, but then they had this idea, "Let's commemorate Kansas women suffrage," and then that kind of started the ball rolling for the entire project.

The Preservation Committee, it used to be called the Arts Committee, but now it's the Preservation Committee. So, any art that goes into the Capitol, a bill has to be passed. They have to approve the art, and then after that approval goes, the money is raised, and they pick a spot. Together they chose that spot. It is a permanent installation. It is an 8 foot x 19 oil on canvas, and it has a black walnut frame that I designed. It's the only painting that's not like either painted on the wall or applied to the wall, but it's as big as the other ones. That was what they decided this was going to be, the Preservation Committee, and it was kind of great.

It would have been fun to paint it there, but painting it at home, I could paint when I needed to. They do add a little more leeway. Fortunately, I was at a space where I could do that.

LU: In your beautiful dining room here.

PGC: Yes. There's still paint spots on the ceiling and the floor from little mistakes.

LU: 19 feet x 8 feet. Not everybody has a dining room like that.

PGC: That is true.

LU: That is awesome. Did you know where the place would be when you started the process?

PGC: Yes.

LU: You knew it was going to on the first floor east opposite the cage elevator there.

PGC: And I actually superimposed my sketch in the presentation. That was one of the slideshow pieces.

LU: Yes, I think I saw that.

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PGC: Then people can visualize what it's going to be like there.

LU: You're in heady company. You've got John Steuart Curry, David Overmyer, a variety of other artists, but you were the first woman.

PGC: Yes.

LU: That has art in the Capitol. I may ask you later, "What do you think should happen next? What are some of the other subjects that should go in the statehouse, too?"

PGC: What's interesting about that is because being the first woman, it was something—I was kind of in the middle of painting this last summer, and the League of Women Voters committee, we would email each other quite often. I was able to speak at different League of Women Voters meetings and AAUW meetings to talk about the history. The question just came up, and I asked Cille King, "Cille, are there any other women artists in the Capitol now?" Probably I'm guessing some artists that had assistants, and there might have been assistants women that helped work on those paintings. But as far as having their own art or getting credit for the art, and so—I think it was a couple of days later, it's like, "No, there is no other women." That was another thing that we added on the promotion.

LU: And the first in how many years? Do we know?

PGC: "Brown v. Board of Education" is the last, most recent painting after mine.

LU: It's been a while then.

PGC: It's been a while. It was pretty exciting, all of those things.

LU: Talk a little bit about your research process for deciding who was going to go in this mural, and what helped you the most.

PGC: Well, it was great—you can still look up Kansas Suffragist Memorial. Their website will pop up, and you click on "History," and they have a list of women. They had about a paragraph about each woman. It's across the state. There's Salina, there's Wichita, Topeka, Lawrence, Leavenworth. So, there's women across the state. That was helpful. That was a good start.

On the League of Women Voters committee, there's amazing women. Jeanne Cline is one of the people on the committee, and she's just a walking encyclopedia. If ever I had a question, she would find it out. If she didn't know, she would find out.

Then once I started posting on social media, it was really cool. I was on Facebook and Instagram and TikTok, and people would message me and say, "Hey, that's my great-great grandmother." Mary Ann Brown from Leavenworth, she's involved with the historical society there. They have an amazing community, and she said, "I noticed the Anthony House that you're painting"—

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because Anna O. Anthony and Daniel Anthony were very involved in the suffrage movement and prominent people in the Leavenworth community—"that's the wrong house."

Then she sent me the right house. She sent me a photograph of the right house. Then I could call the Kansas State Historical Society. I could email people. They were amazing. They'd send me images from the movement and everything. So, that was an amazing resource to have, people giving me feedback and then the Kansas Historical Society—

Some women had a lot of information online, and some of them did not. It was kind of a combination of kind of digging. When I do projects like that—I did three months of research before I even started painting the initial painting.

What was great, too, was that even though we changed some of the people in the painting, the Preservation Committee did not have a problem with my design or layout or the content. Everything else was exactly the same. It's kind of a timeline from left to right as far as the story of—it took really from the beginning of our Constitution—they discussed having voting rights for everyone when Kansas started, and from that time and the territorial capital of Lawrence, and how many decades it took for women getting the right to vote in Kansas, it was a little quicker than the United States. The Kansans had the right to vote in 1912 for women, white women. It's getting a little specific.

LU: There were some caveats.

PGC: Some hoops to go through.

LU: We can talk about this and look at it, too. What were some of the characteristics of the women you chose for the painting that they had in common? Did you find some commonalities in some of these women?

PGC: Some of them were born here in Kansas, and some of them—there was that big push to make Kansas a free state. So, there were the programs on the East Coast to encourage people to move to Kansas. I think that the common thread—every single one of them worked. Many of them had small businesses that they started from having published a newspaper, magazines to—they were schoolteachers, they were four lawyers—and women lawyers at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, that's pretty spectacular.

Every single one of them not only had this passion to work for themselves, but they had children. They moved to Kansas because they knew that they could have some freedoms. So, most of them were Republicans. They were the progressive party at the time. That was kind of the common theme and incredibly fearless. They used the power of the pen very wisely because a lot of them were journalists and activists. They used the papers wisely.

It was just interesting to—they were determined, all of them determined in their own way to have the right to vote because they saw that that was the way they could protect themselves. That's the way they saw that they could take care of their children and their families.

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It was dangerous times. People didn't live that long, and a lot of times, the women were left to take care of themselves and their children.

LU: With no other safety net.

PGC: Right. That was one of the things that at the beginning of—the beginning of the big movement in Kansas was the Wyandotte [Constitional] Convention. In that, Clarina who's the superstar here in the center, Clarina I.H. Nichols, she pushed hard for property rights because that was like the first safety net to being able to take care of yourself.

LU: Instead of your property going to some other male heir, it could go to the woman.

PGC: Right.

LU: It could go to the wife. It could go to the existing descendant.

PGC: Right.

LU: Let's take a look at some of these other women a little closer.

PGC: Okay.

[00:29:47.02]

[talk about how to proceed]

[00:31:24.18]

LU: Now we're going to look at the painting in more detail. This was Phyllis's presentation to the committee when she was one of the five finalists for this, right?

PGC: Yes.

LU: And what they were very impressed with and chose her for. Let's talk a little bit overall. You said you go chronologically a little bit from left to right, right?

PGC: Yes.

LU: The time when women were finding that voice to get the vote in Kansas. Is this the house that you were talking about earlier?

PGC: Yes. I actually think that's the Anthony Home in the East. When you look up stuff and you type in the Anthony name, of course, Susan B. Anthony comes up. But overall, I guess what I would say first is in my head when I—sometimes when you're working on commissions and stuff, the idea is like immediate. When I heard about this and I started to look at some of the

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history, I had this vision of superheroes and a V formation of these women with this army of women behind them because it took so long and all the protests over the years that they had.

One of the things that's always striking about looking at the suffragist movement is that in their protests and their parades, they would all wear white. Part of their colors were purple, white, and yellow, and it's purity, and the purple is for hope, and the yellow was adopted because—nationally because of the sunflower. So it's interesting that it went to the whole nationwide community, sunflowers and yellow roses. So that was part of the banner. And they wanted to also differentiate themselves from the suffragettes in Europe because that was a more violent campaign, and they didn't want to have the purple, white, and green. So, they adopted the purple, white, and yellow.

LU: I see.

PGC: What's great about that is the prairie colors of the flowers, the asters and the Queen Anne's Lace and the sunflowers are all part of the colors.

LU: All fit into that.

PGC: I kind of had this vision from the burning of the territorial Capitol in Lawrence.

LU: Which is up there.

PGC: Which is up in the lefthand corner and some of Clarina's sons fought in those battles. That's kind of the left, and the Capitol now is on the right. Then the protests that happened at the parades of women getting to vote, there was even a movement of women that were against getting suffrage, but they were arrested. They were force fed. So, kind of the angry mob over to the celebration.

LU: On this side.

PGC: On this side.

LU: With the Capitol, the statehouse over here.

PGC: Right.

LU: And the banner reads, "The rights of the citizens of the state of Kansas to vote and hold offices shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex." That was Lizzie Sheldon.

PGC: Yes.

LU: 1911. Talk a little bit about some of the women in the settings that you put in this.

PGC: It's not in chronological order with the women exactly.

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LU: Right.

PGC: But these are definitely the women that started it, and over here, the women that were able to vote, and it passed. The right to vote passed.

On the very left-hand side, when you look at the Capitol, this has changed, and there's a couple of things that have changed from this. Just as you're painting, it's like, "Okay, this is going to look better this way." The colors change a little bit.

But Anna O. Anthony who is the sister-in-law of Susan B. Anthony had suffragist movement meetings at their house and their home in Leavenworth. She is right here. She has on a white dress in the painting at the Capitol, and she's welcoming women in. It's kind of that era. They would have garden parties. In my imagination, you look up suffragist thing, and it was a very lovely setting to have a rebel movement.

Then I have right here is Lutie Lytle. Her family moved from Tennessee. She did go to school, an unsegregated school in Topeka because schools were not segregated and they were segregated. But she decided she wanted to be a lawyer. The KU Law and Washburn were not here yet. So she had to go back to Tennessee. She got her law degree. This was at the end of the 1800s, like 1880s that she got her law degree.

She was the first Black woman to practice law in the United States, in the entire United States. She wasn't the first Black woman to have a law degree. The first one was in Chicago, but she got a law degree because they said she couldn't be a stenographer without a law degree.

So, Lutie was going to move to the East Coast, but she realized that she was going to get push back, and they probably wouldn't let a woman practice. She wanted to go to New York. She said, "I'll go back to Kansas because I want to help my people. I want to help women navigate." She loved constitutional law, but she wanted to help them navigate divorce and property rights. So, that's pretty impressive that she did that.

Then down here is Anna Wait. She's from Lincoln, Kansas, Lincoln County. She co-founded the Equal Suffragettes Association [(KESA)] with Bertha Ellsworth, and she was an incredible educator, and she was the owner and editor of *The Lincoln Beacon*. So, she is pictured down here with a young lady.

Then next is—oh, my gosh, I should know all of the names by now, but—it's Lilla D. Monroe. She was also an editor, and she started—she's from Wakeeney and then Topeka, and she became the first woman admitted to practice before the Kansas Supreme Court. She wrote "The Kansas Women's Journal", and she collected all of these stories from women in Kansas, and then her granddaughter, Joanna Stratton, completed and compiled all of those stories in Pioneer Women and published it in 1981.

LU: That's right.

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PGC: That's amazing. Annie Diggs is the librarian. It's funny. In the Capitol, there's a beautiful library in the Capitol, and it's because of—

LU: Her.

PGC: Yes, of Annie. They kept telling her that "We don't have enough money to do a library, but she kept fighting for it because she wanted steel and glass shelving. She didn't want anybody to have any excuse to ever take down the library. They kept saying, "No, we don't have enough money." She waited. They would use the room for like balls and state dinners and stuff.

LU: It's a very impressive room.

PGC: Yes, it's a beautiful room. So, finally she got the library in. She would go across the country. I believe she was the one that did actually go overseas to speak about women's suffrage. She was always there at the Capitol advocating for women's rights.

Next to her is Laura M. Johns, and she was the president of—that's why she has the banner—Kansas Equal Suffragettes Association, and from 1887-1895, and they would have conventions across the state to speak about women's rights to vote. She was president of Kansas Republican Women's Association. She was just advocating for women's rights always, and she was from Salina. The Salina has a very wonderful historical society, too. We got a lot of information about her from there.

In the center, when I started reading about all of these women, and the committee had put Clarina I.H. Nichols on the top, and there's a reason. She to me was the spark and the force that started everything. Unfortunately, she didn't get to vote in Kansas. She didn't see women being able to vote. But she was born on the East Coast, but moved to Kansas with her second husband. Her first husband— a lot of women left their husbands. There was a lot of, actually interestingly enough alcoholism. They had no protections. Her parents were able to extract her from her first marriage. She married someone that owned the paper, but then she started—he didn't have great health. She started publishing.

LU: Doing the work.

PGC: Yes, doing the work, and she would write under—

LU: A pseudonym.

PGC: Yes, like C.I.H. Nichols. But they wanted Kansas to be a free state. She moved here. She was at the Wyandotte Constitution. She's the reason that property rights were pushed forward, and the right to vote in local elections. So, women were able to vote in school board elections.

She was also part of the Underground Railroad, amazing woman. The reason she's holding this escaped slave's hands is because she would help—she opened a home for women and children. She was part of the Underground Railroad. She lived in Quindaro, a town that does not exist anymore. It was the first stop across the river from Missouri. There's a book called

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Revolutionary Heart [Revolutionary Heart: The Life of Clarina Nichols and the Pioneering Crusade for Women's Rights], and it's a wonderful book about her life. She talks about hiding escaped slaves in her cistern at her house.

She has a bag, a knitting bag on her. It's in the book. She had busy hands, but she also—you would sit in meetings and have to wait and wait and wait to talk. She was always knitting. Her fellow suffragists were always talking about after she left because she moved away from Kansas with her daughter to California. They said, "We miss the clicking of her needles."

Next to her is Lizzie Sheldon. Lizzie, and that's when we were talking about the one that—her descendant was the one that started the funding for this whole project. She was just a firecracker, just like many of them, but she wrote the bill that passed in 1912, and she graduated from KU Law in 1900. She started lobbying—she was one of the few Democrats that were in this group. She was kind of done waiting. Without consulting any of the organizations, she wrote the bill.

LU: Wow.

PGC: And she presented it to George H. Hodges. When he became Kansas governor, he took credit for the bill. But she was not going to have any of that. She wrote a huge article in the paper and said, "Hey, I wrote that bill," and she is credited with this now. That's why we put the banner at the top because it really is—the bill that passed nationally is very much like the one that she wrote.

LU: Really?

PGC: Yes.

LU: So, did some of the national legislators take that?

PGC: Kansas was—they descended on Kansas because they thought the whole suffrage movement—they saw the opportunity to push forward in the Western states. The movement really came from the West, and we were kind of in the center. They realized that we could have a big impact on getting it passed nationally.

So, next to her, this is a wonderful little vignette. It is Carrie Langston Hughes, and then Mamie Dillard is the teacher here. Both of these were activists, educators. She was a journalist. Carrie's husband [father] was a big civil rights advocate. Her son was Langston Hughes - writer, poet and Mamie was his teacher when he was young and saw his potential. So, these people knew each other, and Mamie had a big impact on him becoming the writer that he was.

LU: Absolutely.

PGC: And next to Mamie is Laura—I want to make sure I get the right name. No, that is Jane Brooks, sorry. Jane Brooks was in Wichita. She has a statue on the campus of Wichita State University, and she was the KESA president when the vote was passed nationally. She was very

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active in getting the right to vote nationally. I believe she started like the first League of Women Voters.

LU: I think you're right.

PGC: So, that's pretty great.

LU: She's putting that ballot in the ballot box.

PGC: Yes, she's putting that ballot in the ballot box. Then Lucy B. Johnston is right here in front of the bookmobile, and the reason she is because she expanded the traveling libraries. She started the traveling libraries and expanded the traveling libraries across Kansas. She worked in the Library Extension Committee and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. She was the president of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association, and she led the push in 1912 when it passed in Kansas.

LU: When it finally passed, yes.

PGC: And then Minnie Grinstead's down here, she got a teaching certificate from Emporia State University, and she married a judge in Larned. They lived in Liberal. But she was the first woman to be elected to the Kansas House of Representatives.

This photograph is taken from the Kansas Historical Society. They gave me permission to use them directly. It was really cool to see some of those images. This car, they would drive across the state campaigning, and they would sell balloons, and they would have bake sales and all kinds of things to make money for the whole movement.

I would have to say, there's so many impressive people, but to me like Lutie Lytle being a lawyer before the turn of the century and then Clarina, all that she did is amazing. It truly is amazing. She was I think the reason that we did get voting rights here so soon.

LU: It took a multitude of women who had that drive and didn't take no for an answer.

PGC: Yes.

LU: So, many of them were teachers or educators, journalists, lawyers.

PGC: Yes.

LU: Just activists within their community.

PGC: And most of them, they did have higher education, were able to get a higher education, and I think that was because they came West.

LU: I was reminded of that with "Equal education equals freedom." I'm glad you incorporated that. I know there's some changes from this first model to the final product in Topeka, in the

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statehouse. What an achievement. Anything else you'd like us to know about the challenges it took to lay this out?

PGC: One of the things I did, like these protesters on the right are modern protesters. So, I kind of went—after the women got the right to vote, what were the hurdles that they had to jump through after that? It was equal pay. They fought for no children working in gyp mines.

LU: Better working hours, better working conditions.

PGC: Better working hours and conditions for their spouses and for themselves, no child labor, and then equal pay—

LU: Which we still struggle with.

PGC: We haven't quite got there yet. And civil rights and discrimination. So, in the painting at the Capitol you can see like there's quite a lot of diversity here. That's what was really great. I also in the painting, I—my mother is painted in front of here, and there are seven women. There are seven sisters. There's the Seven Sisters Constellation up here besides the north star. We are the seventh state to get the right to vote. We were eighth to ratify, but we were the seventh state. So, there's that symbolism.

And then just honoring my mother because she instilled in all of us because she was an immigrant from Michoacán, Mexico, and she just said, "You have to get an education, and you can't complain if you don't vote. You have to register and vote." She made sure that especially all of us girls—I came from a place where my rights, our family's right were all taken away. Our right to worship how we wanted to, to be a farmer and not have all of our livestock taken away.

So, to honor her and my father, I have the wheat field. There's a wheat field here.

LU: Yes.

PGC: They loved farming in Kansas. That's what's amazing about doing this and honoring them and these women that worked so hard.

LU: Especially in a time where people were being told you're not a real woman if you're doing this kind of work, or you should be at home with your children and that kind of thing. So, they defied that and found a new way to think about our many abilities.

PGC: Yes, to me, like I said, I'm a student of history and just reading things over time. It's ridiculous to think that one can build a nation or a society and ignore half of your population. That's what we were doing. We need all the tools in the toolbox to make an equitable world, and women definitely should always be at the table because we bring all voters into the world. That's what one of the women—they would use that on the campaign trail and say, "Hey, you know, here we are."

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And the reason it's called "Rebel Women" is a quote by one of the suffragists on the East Coast. She basically was saying it's kind of crazy that we're saying that these women are rebels when they're just trying to survive and have the rights like every other citizen in the United States. These women were paying taxes. They had businesses. It was taxation without representation. So, they were going to fight for that.

LU: I was there the day that you got up on the scaffolding and took down the blanket. That was special, too, wasn't it? The cloth covering this so we couldn't see it.

PGC: Right. The banner was the flag, the suffragist flag. It was purple, white, and yellow with the stars on it. We installed it several days before, and they, of course, wanted to keep it covered. What was amazing, too, is the governor, Governor Kelly signed the back. I actually had my sisters sign the back of the painting, my neighbor kids. So there's a lot of like names of family and friends on the back side of that painting. It was awesome that the governor was able to sign it and date it.

LU: I thought that was great.

PGC: Was able to sign it and date it. She put like her time as being governor on there. It was special.

LU: You had a tremendous amount of family and friends there that were supporting you. A lot of people were very emotional about it. Maybe you could tell us a little bit, what's the value of public art? Why should we be spending money on public art like this? Is it a call to action still for us?

PGC: Sure. I think it's innate in humans to want to create. It's as inspirational as books are or music. It tells stories. We've had public art from the caveman time, from the beginning of time.

LU: To tell our stories.

PGC: Yes, tell our stories, communicate our stories and celebrate our culture and our families. It's just as important as any other kind of social experience.

LU: That's right, and it's a lasting piece that will be there for many hundreds of years, we hope.

PGC: I hope so. I hope so. I told the staff at the Capitol—they're amazing, and they love that building. They're very proud of it. I said, "This painting, you can take off the wall. If anything happens, get a knife, cut that down, roll it up, and you can save it."

LU: That's right. I hope that never happens.

PGC: It never happens, but it's still kind of unreal that it's there. I can go back and look at it. Okay, it's here.

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LU: I remember running into you as you were coming into the Capitol that day. It was an emotional day for many reasons, wasn't it?

PGC: Yes.

LU: My heart was with you when you were doing that.

PGC: It was. My father, he was 100, and he was soon to be—March 15th is his birthday, and he was going to be 101. My mother passed away about fifteen years ago. He was in a care home. He had his wits about him, but he couldn't see very well. But I'm close to all my siblings. One of my siblings was there. Pretty much someone was there every day. He knew it was happening, and he was very, very proud. He wouldn't have been able to make the trip for the unveiling. We were hoping to livestream it, but he passed away the morning before.

It made it a very poignant moment. I was very happy that he knew about it. And my sisters were saying that he was trying to hang on. But a friend of mine said, "Maybe that's why he passed away because he couldn't see very well. Maybe he wanted to see it."

LU: With new eyes.

PGC: So, it was great that he knew about it. Some of my siblings were there. Since then, I have like friends and family from my little town, and they'll send me photos in front of it. And to see the joy of like kids—I worked on it a little bit there. I was touching up the days before the unveiling, and I would have these groups of kids, thousands and thousands of kids come through there every day. They were so excited to see a new piece of art.

LU: That's right.

PGC: And a piece of art that featured women, and people of color were in the painting, and they're real women. They're real people that existed. John Brown was a real person, and those events were real that are portrayed on every floor. But it's the general story. This is about actual Kansans.

So, below the painting at the statehouse, the women are numbered, and there are keys down there.

LU: Right down here.

PGC: Yes. So, a child comes from Lincoln, Kansas, and they can see that that person came from their small town and what they did. That gives them something. The League of Women Voters is hopefully having a study guide that will go on with that. So, it's kind of a catalyst to tell Kansas history that we haven't heard.

LU: That's right and to learn more about what it took to get the vote for women and also what we could still do to move the dial forward.

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PGC: Absolutely.

LU: On making sure we're all involved in voting and registered and all that.

PGC: Yes.

LU: Thank you so much for taking this time to tell us more about this beautiful painting that everybody should go see at the statehouse. It is gorgeous and very worth reading all of the history of these wonderful women as well as all of the anonymous women that helped make this—and men.

PGC: That's right. It took an army to get us here. It does show people that together we can make a difference.

LU: We have a voice, and we need to keep following that path. Thanks to you, Phyllis, for this.

PGC: Thank you.

LU: Thanks on behalf of the Kansas Oral History Project.

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