

## INTERVIEW: MARGE PETTY (Revised)

Q: You're Marge Petty. I'm Sara Tucker. This is January 10, 1991, and this is an oral history as part of the Washburn University Kansas Legislative Women project. My first question is a general one. How did you come to get involved?

A: I saw it, I think, as an opportunity to make some changes or have some influence in an area geographically where I had lived for almost fifteen years, and complained periodically about the way it operated. I remember having a conversation with my sister who lived in Oklahoma and she said, 'You know there are women in politics here.' And the men know more than the women did necessarily about the business of operating a city budget and so forth. So, that was one factor. I thought I want to make a contribution and why not, basically. Secondly, there was a change in the form of government here in Topeka and it was something that I could do and balance family commitments and other professional commitments at the same time. And I think, thirdly, it goes back really I guess to the idea of why not? I felt I had a contribution I could make and this was the opportunity.

Q: So, your first public office was the Topeka City Council?

A: That's right.

Q: And you ran in 198--?

A: I ran in 1985 and it was at a time when the change in the form of government occurred, so there were representative districts.

Q: Oh, and none of them had incumbents, so this was a great opportunity.

A: That's right and there were some former commissioners who ran. There were, as I recall, some ninety-something candidates. So, each district had a multitude of choices. Basically, I think there were nine in my primary. It was the first time I believe that women had been elected to the city offices and there were two women elected at that particular time.

Q: So then, in 1988, you ran for and were elected to the Kansas Senate, 18<sup>th</sup> District?

A: That's right.

Q: How did you come to get nominated and win that election?

A: Well, again I think there was a window of opportunity and I ran against an incumbent who was also a woman. My sense was in terms of the opportunity for my district it might not come along again because she was first-term. I think there were enough contrasts in the way we operated and our public experience that I felt at least the voters had a choice. I had been previously elected deputy mayor the second year when I served on the city council and really loved the politics. My mother used to say about me that I never liked to sleep because I was afraid I would miss something.

Q: So, did you have any trouble getting nominated?

A: No, basically, they were waiting, I think the Democratic Party was waiting for whoever was going to take on the challenge. And with this particular race, I think the incumbent was viewed as rather formidable. And I think it was open to whoever was willing to take the risk of running against her.

Q: Good definition of politics. So, how and why did you run?

A: That's a good question. First of all, I thought very long and hard before I went in. I didn't want to win and lose. I wanted to make certain that I was clear on the profile I had publicly, that I had some assessment of what my opponent's profile was, and where our weaknesses and strengths were. And how those complemented one another. I actually went about this the same way I go about a lot of things, which is a pretty definitive planning process. I had a poll taken which was very specific to outline profiles of each of ours and identified what our strengths and weaknesses were. That was one key thing. The other aspect was I worked real hard. And think when you run against an incumbent, and in my earlier experience at the city level, I ran against a semi-incumbent who had held public office before as well, you just never stop. You always assume that you could lose by 20 votes and they were the last 20 votes you could have knocked the doors of the night before the election and I was out knockin' on doors the night before the election. So, I worked very hard. I think also I was underestimated. There were many people including—I would say I had a handful, perhaps five friends who thought I could win--and many people who said why in the world are you doing this? Some of it I think, my willingness to take the risk, stems from my upbringing. I grew up in an area where the ethic was risk-taking. Not necessarily for money, but that there was a risk-taking ethic and when I decided my plan, I felt I could win. But it was interesting because it was a little bit like pulling teeth, you could actually feel the wave of resistance and pulling people along to support you, and then I could feel it turn. But there was a long period there when I was basically doing it on my own. I think anybody that gets into politics has to be willing to do it on their own. What you get is a gift, but you cannot go in expecting anyone to support you. I'll have to say, that would be the fourth factor, that I did not do it alone. At one point, there were some very critical people who were there when I needed them and the numbers began to increase in terms of people supporting me.

Q: So who are these people?

A: I would say basically some people that believed in me, a couple of good friends. A person that I served with in public office. I think there was some hesitancy on the part of family. I'm not sure, I think my husband felt that I could do it and actually--if you'd like I could talk more about that, but...

Q: Sooner or later, I'd love it.

A: But you know those key people were probably more colleagues, professional colleagues, in terms of being out there saying, go for it.

Q: Can you tell me who they were? I mean...

A: Oh, you want specific names?

Q: At least, male or female, experienced or not?

A: I would say it was balanced in terms of male and female.

Q: Did they help you with strategy? Did they help you say this is how to take the polls, this is what your strong points were, or did you really do that and they said, go for it.

A: I think it was a balance also. I had a sign on my mirror that said, '35% of the incumbents win' to remind me every morning when I got up that if I was serious about it, I needed to focus. I needed to be out there. Also, that commitment, once I decided to do that, I realized that the commitment was more than just for me. It was a commitment on behalf of the party and that I needed to do a good job.

Q: Did you get much help from the party organization?

A: In many ways, yes. There was a key person who was part of my previous campaign who is very good at assessing the impact people can have on the public. I would say, in a sense, he was a really wonderful marketing consultant. I had a couple of friends who knew me well enough, who asked me whether or not I could be--I hate to use the word 'tough' enough--but that what beating an incumbent requires is first of all giving the voter a reason to replace the incumbent. They weren't sure whether I'd be willing to do that or not. So, part of it was a growing process for me in many ways, and I worked very hard to stick to the facts in terms of voting record and not get personal. Primarily--well, for several reasons, one personally I liked the person I was running against. You know, our profiles, in many ways, and our friends, are very similar. Our styles are somewhat similar. So, I wasn't in any way interested in damaging her personally, but I felt like, in terms of a representative of the people, I could do a better job and that's what I had to convince the people of.

Q: Well, that sounds fair. This kind of leads into talk about issues. What were the issues you brought up and what issues do you think may have made a difference?

A: I think there are a couple of key issues. One is a procedural issue in a sense, and one is a fact issue. I think when you are selling yourself to the public that message has to be consistent with who you are as a person. For example, somebody gave me the example once that when John Glenn and for President, and there were firecrackers and skyrocketing going off behind him, it was not consistent with his persona. That basically he'd come from the farm; he was low-key, folksy type of person, and had the campaign been consistent with the way he was personally, it would have rung more true with the public. I've always been very careful that my message is consistent with the way I am personally. I'm a fiscal conservative. The social issues, I mean I would much prefer to spend money on people rather than buildings. So, in terms of the issues, think that one of the primary issues was government efficiency, operating government more like a business, having the government be efficient with the tax dollars.

Q: And you felt that your opponent wouldn't say this, or you were able to convince people you'd do it better or...?

A: I can't answer that. I don't know. I think just in terms of the issue itself, the focus and being willing to fight for the changes that I saw were necessary. I had some specific legislation that I'm going to be introducing in the next two or three weeks, dealing specifically with fiscal issues, fiscal management. The kinds of choices that government makes, and I think government needs to be smarter in this day and age.

Q: Do you feel the issue of pensions was important in your campaign?

A: I do. I absolutely do. Primarily because again think it's evidence of the responsibility that a public official has to the public, and the fact that there was a dichotomy made setting the legislature apart from the rest of the public as deserving more, I personally think was wrong. As I said earlier, it's consistent with what I really believe, I believe it's wrong and I happen to believe that when somebody is elected to the legislature, if they end up evolving to the point where they're elitist and figure that they've all the answers, I think that's wrong too. You end up being out of touch with the public you're representing and I think the pension plan was a symbol of that.

Q: Another question I'd like to ask is in some of the interviews we've been doing, again and again we hear about women's organizations having been helpful in the campaign. Various women have told us that the League of Women Voters or the Federated Women's Clubs or the Junior League, or whatever network of women they were part of, was very helpful in their ability to have a campaign mechanism. Is this anything in your experience? Did you have a network like that; were you able to use that?

A: I had various networks of which I'd been a part. But quite frankly, many of the networks were things like the church where I go. I had previously been involved with women's political caucus some years ago and there were people with whom I'd made a connection that I stayed in touch with, but as far as it being under the-- you know, having that cadre of people who were members of a particular organization, I mean I had nurses help me because of my association with the health profession and I had church people, and I had state employees, so you know, there were...

Q: It was a mixture of different people.

A: Yes, but you certainly can't do it alone. You've got to rely on those networks you've already established.

Q: Once you got in the legislature, did you find a mentor or a group of people who were particularly helpful to you? How did you get going?

A: Well, quite frankly, I felt extremely grateful for the local experience because the system and the dynamics and the informal kinds of transactions that go on are very similar. The difference is you've got more people and there were new faces, but I would say as a freshman I didn't feel green. I felt relatively comfortable in the setting. In terms of people who were available, I would

say the minority leader, some of the leadership of the party, were helpful. And I think the group that I came in with was particularly good. They were very bright. Many of them were women, the majority of them were women. Each of us had probably served in some elected or appointed capacity in serving the public, so there was some familiarity with those kinds of systems. I think we supported one another. It wasn't as much a mentorship, perhaps, as being available for each other, and I'm also a great observer. There wasn't an official mentor that come to my mind specifically, but I selected certain people to watch because in my observation or advocacy with the legislature in years past I had identified them as effective. So I kept an eye on how they operated and have learned from them.

Q: So, if I'm understanding it, first of all, you weren't green when you came in. You'd already had political experience. And then you feel as though you learned by watching, knowing who to watch to begin with, and also you had a lot of colleagues you came in with who you could work with.

A: Now I would certainly, in reference to not being green, I don't want to leave the impression that I knew everything. That's a real mistake. You never know, in this business you never know everything, but I was not intimidated by the process.

Q: What committees did you serve on when you first came into the legislature?

A: Well, I was very lucky. I actually got every committee that I asked for, with the exception of one. I serve on the Tax Committee; I serve on Judiciary; I serve on Local Government; I serve as minority leader for Labor, Industry, and Small Business. Then I also served on Joint Rules and Regulations, which is a fascinating joint committee. They get all the regulations from the various departments, so you get to know a lot of the workings and the nuances of how your legislation is being implemented. However, I will not be on that as of this coming session. I've been appointed to the Economic Development Committee. So, I have five stellar committees I'm really thrilled with.

Q: That's a lot of committees, isn't it?

A: In the Senate you end up with more. Because there are fewer people.

Q: Why is it you wanted those committees? What is it you're trying to do? Why did you think those would be good committees?

A: It's my belief that the economic viability of the families and the state are centered around fiscal issues, primarily tax, those economic development kinds of issues, job-related, small business, those kinds of things. And I think as a woman I bring another perspective in than the men who may have a business orientation and understand all those nuances, which I, having just completed a law degree and having taken a lot of those corporation courses I appreciate that, but there's NP additional perspective. Particularly with the projection that the major work force is going to be minorities and women in the coming years. I think we need to help fashion a business community that's more responsible to that for the viability of everybody concerned.

Now, in terms of judiciary, I was particularly interested in that because of my legal background. But the other committees really impact and impinge on family economics.

Q: Can you describe and how would you describe the statehouse power structure that you met two years ago and are still dealing with?

A: That's a rather open-ended question. It's different in the House than in the Senate. My observation in the Senate is that with the influx of newly-elected women, and we're talking almost 25%, there's been a major shift in a relatively short time. Eleven years ago, there was one female member. Ten years later, we now have almost one quarter of the body. It has much more of an effect I think when you've got a smaller body because you don't have as much anonymity as you do when you've got 125 members. Your voice generally is listened to, there is more sharing of a voice, when you have a smaller body. And I think it can work both ways. I think it can work with 25% of the body being female. I think it can work as a threat to an earlier power structure, and what I see is really a transition right now in terms of power. You've got people who've been there almost twenty years, from whom we can all learn. And they're not certain how to relate to some of the new people. Many of us who are new want to respect that power system and yet, you'll want to be heard as well. I think each of us has gone about it in our separate ways that are sensitive to just our own personal styles. So, I think the former power structure is evolving, but it's not going to happen overnight, and my interest is that it not be such a threat that it is counter-productive.

Q: Do you think the election of the governor is going to change this any? Do you have any expectations about that? Speed up changes or doesn't that seem really to have much impact?

A: I'm not sure. I think at one level it does. At the level I see it having an impact is that I have a personal belief that a female elected official brings a different quality than a male does. And that quality is that they are more likely to negotiate; they are more likely to take into consideration more than what is just being said on the surface, but to listen for other things that are being intended but not verbalized. So I think there's a difference that women generally bring in. Now, that's not always true. You've got exception. But I think some of the observations at least in the Oregon the new majority leader in Oregon, those kinds of examples I think hold true. So, I think there are people skills that come with a female governor. The strength that I see is that she really believes in people, and that she is very sensitive, she reads people very well, and I think has just marvelous people skills. My interest--I would certainly hope that we could all help her succeed in being the first female governor. I think all women have an investment in seeing her do a good job. I don't know how that's going to turn out. I mean we have majority of the males are in both houses, and my hope is that they will treat her as a colleague, just as I expect to be treated. But maybe we're going to go through the same kind of evolution that I see in the Senate. It's an abrupt change and one would assume that some of the younger people, ideally, would be more inclined to treat her as a colleague, and some of the older people, maybe resent it a little bit, but I don't have any evidence to prove that's the case right now.

Q: You mentioned that you had some bills that you are planning to introduce and sponsor. Would you go into that a little more? What bills are you planning to bring in this year?

A: I am particularly interested in the property tax problem since about 98% of the property taxes are spent at local level, that the opportunities for local government be expanded other than property tax. I'm talking specifically user fees, in lieu of payments for property that's tax-exempt and yet the services are available to them. That particular issue is a matter of equity, I think. I have a particular bill I'm introducing that has to do with the--more technical probably than you want to get--but it's a recapturing of the fees charged by the court system and attorney's fees in the district court. Shawnee County's had a great experience in terms of an increase and a recapturing of those costs. And that increases revenue for local government and the opportunity to decrease the dependency on property tax. The other issue is related to those local costs. Certainly, the issues of the numbers of tax increments we have. Across the state we've got about 7,000 separate taxing units. Kansas runs eighth in the numbers of elected officials statewide and in the past it's been a source of pride. Well, there has been great resistance to any kind of consolidation of some of those functions. If you've got a water problem, you may have six different entities that have some investment in how that problem is solved. Yet, not one of those entities has the power to make the decision over the other entities. That's just one example of the problems that are evolving because of these numbers of tax increments. The impact also that it has on the taxpayer is obvious. If you've got several townships that could operate in a larger township and share one road grader, you know, it's more efficient government. There's been real resistance to consolidation because people have, and it's part of the Kansas heritage, I think, that we own our own stuff. I mean, that independence that I think many of us value. But it has a cost. And as long as people know that that cost is there and are willing to pay for it, that that's part of the impact on property taxes, then fine. But I think there has been a gap in terms of educating people, so one of my bills has to do with educating people on the numbers of taxing units and how that affects their property tax. So, those are local issues that I've got. A couple of other bills I'm looking at in terms of state efficiency. Specifically, something as mundane as the amount of storage space. My daughter came to me the other night and said to me, 'Mother, we really need a bigger house.' And I said, 'You know, what we need to do is operate with what we have and use it better.' And I think the same holds true. We spend almost four million dollars on storage space for the state. About \$400,000 of it is not our property. We lease it from someone else. I can't help but believe that if there was a better system of examining what's being stored, how we could do that better and more efficiently, that ultimately it would free up dollars to spend on people who are in need. My whole legislative package this year really will focus on the idea that we're at a time when we need to be clear about our priorities, local government does, as well as state government. And we need to go through a process where we're defining those priorities, and my emphasis would be to invest in the people and spend money that way, as opposed to storing lots of forms in somebody's basement.

Q: Put that way, it sounds real convincing. What kind of coalition do you see yourself belonging to? Or if I'm putting coalition wrong, it sounds like you see yourself in the middle of the spectrum. Who do you see yourself working with in the legislature? This is going back to how you operate and how you expect to accomplish this? You're a Democrat. You obviously expect to work with your party, but do you have any plans for how you're going to accomplish these wonderful things? Who do you expect to do it with?

A: Having served at the local level which is non-partisan, that was my primary experience to look at the issue rather than the party first. And I think I would be considered a moderate

Democrat, generally. It's real important to me to relate to people as people first, and not party. So a lot of the issues that I look at, I am willing--in fact, some of the bills I have already sponsored have had bi-partisan sponsorship. And that particularly has to occur in the Senate because we're in the minority. And I have been very pleased at, well, first of all, I like the people I work with. On both sides of the aisle. I have great respect for the amount of commitment that they make. I have great respect for the fact that many of them don't think in the short term. They are very policy-oriented. That's a luxury the Senate has, maybe that the House does not, because our terms are for four years. But, I mean, I can tell you people who have been there a long time--one I am thinking of in particular, a Republican who helped co-sponsor a bill with me last year. It did end up passing and I wrote him a thank-you note and he said, 'You know, this is the first time I have ever gotten a thank-you note from a colleague.' Well, you know, I like him personally. I respect his opinion and it's not fabricated. It's real. And that, I think, my expectation is those measures which I think are important are good government measures that everyone can support. I know the rest of my party sees me as a team player within, as well. I don't build exclusive alliances.

Q: Just as a clean-up, because I kind of went past it, what would you say you had accomplished in your first two years? What bills have you sponsored and participated in, what issues have you fought for, or won?

A: One of them in particular has to do with space planning. Not very flashy, but the bottom line is that we've got... I'll give you an example. When the highway bill was passed, we had 150 new people who came aboard. As part of that bill, it was never said we're gonna have 150 new people that we've got to find space for. As a result, we had a building that was purchased outside of the downtown area--which in my mind is very important to keep viable--and it was stated we've gotta put these 150 transportation people someplace. The Kansas Corporation Commission said, well, we don't have enough space. We're gonna move. There were a lot of nuances that were part of the planning that was done for that move. I contend had there been a long-term, long-range plan on how much space do people need to operate in, what is our projection going to be, how can you use the space that you have better, do we want to store some of these files in the basement and free up office space, that we could have saved the state a lot of money by not purchasing an additional building. So, that particular bill was passed. Put in place a requirement that the departments project their space needs and I think ultimately it can help the system run more efficiently. That's one thing. The other thing, of course, I participated quite a bit in the discussions and negotiations on the tax issues. Incredibly frustrating because everybody wants it solved, but everybody has a different idea of how it should be done. The other issues related to health care. I was in charge of a subcommittee that looked at the living will the very first year I was there, and certainly health care is going to be one of our primary concerns. That will help, I think, alleviate some of the rising cost in health care. So, some of those issues related to child in need of care kinds of things, health care, social issues, as well as fiscal issues in helping government run more efficiently. I think there's a relationship there.

Q: What--without wishing to pin you down--what ambitions or hopes or wild guesses do you have for your future in the legislature? Do you plan to stay a long time, do you hope to stay a long time? Would you like to be part of the leadership? Where do you think you're going?

A: I plan to be in the legislature. I plan to have a leadership position at some point in time. That's one of my targets that's down the road. Right now my primary interest is making certain that I do a good job where I am right now and not taking on more than is necessary in order to do that job best.

Q: Turning to your private life, and please do feel free to say, 'Hey, I don't want to talk about that', I'm very interested in what it means for a person, especially a woman, to become a legislator. The first thing I'd like to do is go back to your being able to leap into politics. You talked about it a little bit. You talked about your Texas background, about the fact you grew up in an age that at least let men take risks. Do you have anything more you want to say about what you think it is in your background that made you so clearly enjoy doing this and feel as though you're comfortable in it? What makes you good at politics?

A: Well, I think the first thing would be that I enjoy it, and I would say in terms of background, I had a father who was a real risk-taker, and a mother who was incredibly, who is incredibly sensitive to people and operates kind of with a mission. So I had those two people as models. My mother, at the age of 60, went back to school, trained and worked until she was 75. And had never worked out of the home.

Q: Good heavens. So, she had been a traditional housewife?

A: She had been a traditional housewife and she and my dad had a very traditional relationship. I recall bantering with her about... Actually, I think growing up I was probably the contentious one in the family, but generally spent a lot of time out and about doing things and stirring things up. Enjoyed being independent and involved in activities. But, I think growing up in an area that's the West, I mean some of the ethic. My family was an oil family, but what I find is close similarities between the ethic of people who are in the oil business and commerce. They are gamblers, they are risk-takers. They have a tremendous amount of faith in themselves. And that was a big influence on me, I think.

Q: What did your mother go back to school to study?

A: Nursing.

Q: And was your father well and alive at that time or...?

A: Uh huh. But it was a real risk for her and she was at the point, I mean she is now 77, she was at the point where it was something she had always wanted to do and thought 'well, why not'? Now whether or not she made those decisions after seeing her daughters balance things differently than she did, so that it challenged her, or I can't say what made her decide this necessarily. Anyway, it's made it a lot of fun, I mean in a sense, she's been an encouragement to me that you can continue to contribute for years.

Q: Now you were one of how many children?

A: Four. I'm the second.

Q: You have brothers?

A: I have a younger brother.

Q: Older sister and a younger sister?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of impact has it had on your family that you are doing all of this? Is there a cost? I don't necessarily mean financial, although certainly I understand it can be expensive, especially your first campaign. What has changed for your family when you took on this very large commitment?

A: Oh, a couple of things come to mind. When I first ran, my daughter was three and I had a son who was nine. She was thrilled to be seeing all these yard signs and she would say, 'Oh, there's a Marge Petty sign. There's a Marge Petty sign.' At the time she was really playing with Barbie's regularly which concerned me. You know, what does Barbie do for a living? And she said, 'Well, Barbie runs.' I said, 'What does Ken do for a living?' and she said, 'Well, he used to work, but he quit his job and now he runs with Barbie.' So, at three, her perception was that that's what women do--they run. Either literally, which I was doing, or figuratively. But when she was seven, she said to me, 'You know, mom, I think I'm gonna be a pediatrician' and described in great detail what she was going to be doing and she said 'I'm gonna have a husband with a moustache.' And I thought, well, I certainly haven't taught her to be very flexible and I said, 'Well, what is he going to do for a living?' And she said, 'You know, I don't know. I don't care.' So, in answer to your question about one of the impacts, I think it has provided a model for my daughter that women have a lot of options and when I was seven I don't know that I would have thought that, growing up in a semi-Southern culture with a mother who was home full-time. So that's one positive thing. I think it's also had some positive impact on my son seeing women take leadership roles that have some power. That's part of it. When I first to minimize--I could not have done it without a lot of support from my husband in terms of he's a wonderful parent, he was willing to pick up a lot of the logistics when I wasn't home. When I first ran for city council, I gave him one of the tasks and it wasn't one he was really well suited for. So, when I ran for the Senate, I said 'Ty, you don't have to be part of this at all. You don't have to do a thing and I would love it if you would go door-to-door with me when you've got time, but this is my thing. You've got your thing. I will welcome you if you want to be part of it but you need not feel under any obligation.' And it was wonderful. I mean on the days he had a little bit of extra time free and I was going door-to-door, he'd join me and he was wonderful. I mean, he's great with people and it was fun. And when he wasn't there, that was fine too. And it was just the two of us that went door-to-door. I didn't take any friends or any big names because I wanted it to be very personal. So there has been participation by the family. On the negative side, I think it does put a strain on the family. There's an incredible amount of time commitment and my children are still relatively young, and were even younger when I first went into politics. So I worked very hard to try to keep that balanced there and to respect their need for privacy as well as their need to have me around. But it's been sort of a daily reassessment, continually resetting priorities and so forth.

Q: Now, your husband's a minister? So that gives him a fairly flexible work schedule which doesn't mean he doesn't do a lot of work, but...

A: He works for Stormont-Vail, so he has a full-time--he's not particularly flexible other than he's a department head, so the flexibility that comes with being of a managerial status. So it's required a lot of communication just on logistics, you know, who's doing the laundry and what time can you be home, and 'I've got to go to a meeting at 6:30.' The first year, during the legislature, I tried to do everything. The second year, I told my secretary don't schedule me anything after 6:30. I will do everything between 5:00 and 6:30. I'll go to three different receptions and spend twenty minutes each there. Don't schedule me for anything other than that. And there are exceptions, but generally I made it a point last year to be home by 6:30 and it worked relatively well. This year, for the first time, we're going to have somebody come in regularly which I think will be wonderful. Somebody who will cook.

Q: Could you do this if you didn't live in Topeka?

A: There are women who do, and they do a wonderful job. I don't know that I could personally do that, or that I would personally make those sacrifices because the model that I had growing up was a woman who was home full-time and the jobs that I have fashioned have been those that allowed me the kind of flexibility where I can keep one foot in a professional life and one foot at home and always be able to juggle those, depending on what priority existed at the time. And that's been real valuable to me. And knowing myself well enough to know that I need that, I've fashioned a job that I can do that. I've got my own consulting business that I can say yes or no to any time and I was, when my daughter was an infant, and I was still nursing her, she would go with me and I'd line up a sitter and nurse her at noontime and play with her in the evening and do a workshop during the day. It's important to me to be able to balance those things. The people from--the women from western Kansas--one has grown children, the other has a husband who farms and so he's free during the winter and they move the children here. So, it's interesting to see how all the women have ended up juggling all their commitments. I don't know. Maybe I represent a 21st-century woman who really wants it all. Knowing that I can't do it all 100% of the time.

Q: Tell me some more about your jobs. That's one of the things that's very interesting, what kind of job anyone, male or female, can have that eventually lets them be a legislator. Because certainly there are certain occupations that don't go away, or let you do it. Could you trace through your occupational progression that got you where you're at--which is a lawyer-consultant. What kind of jobs have you had?

A: When I first moved to Topeka, I went back to KU for my master's degree. I worked in state government for four years with the Department of Health and Environment as a consultant for the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health which was consistent with what I had done when we lived in Chicago.

Q: Now, what was your master's degree in?

A: Counseling. So I worked--what I did through that particular job and my son was three at the time--I realized just for my personal balance in my life that I wanted to go back to work when he was three. And so I balanced those kinds of things...

Q: It wasn't always easy, I take it.

A: It was not easy, no. It was not easy. What I learned from that was that what I really needed was the flexibility that so many women today do not have. Particularly the single mothers who have to be at work at 8:00 and their child doesn't go to school until 8:30. The incredible logistics. It was important to me to have the flexibility that I could be at home until 8:30 until my child went off to school. Those kinds of things. So, what I did after I had my second child, I developed a consulting firm that was dependent in part from a network of people I had developed over those four years and, basically, they would call for one-day workshops on program planning, personnel management, some financial investment, in terms of just the way their organization operated. I could say yes or no. And I did consulting all throughout the Midwest. At one point, I was a sub-contractor with a federal project and provided the--and my office was in Kansas City--and I provided the management for a ten-state area, what was then HEW, out of Kansas City office and out of the Chicago office and basically managed a consulting contract for them. I would provide some of the consultation on request or I would match people up, you know, with problems. Then, that evolved into--I was particularly interested in the corporate and financial kinds of things, so I guess what I say is I'm more of an expert in process and it was very important to me to keep my ears open for things that I was interested in. I did, as part of that consulting, I did some parent-education classes at Stormont and did neo-natal assessment on one-day old infants, and I worked with teenage pregnancy project at Menninger's. I did some parental assessment on videotapes which was just fascinating. But all these kinds of things, including the business consultation which I've done with a lot of corporations, they were the kinds of things where I could say I will be there at such and such a time, and that they were very task-specific as opposed to time specific. So that I knew what they needed and they knew what my commitment was, but that I could work it around the other commitments that I'd made with family and with the legislature. Now, I will have to say that has slowed down considerably the last two years because I want to make certain there are no conflicts, plus I was in law school, completing a law degree, too, so there was only so much I could do.

Q: With this consulting business, why did you go to law school?

A: Law school really came out of my experience on the city council, and I served with a mayor who was a lawyer and three other lawyers. What I felt I brought to that forum was some skills they didn't have. That they had skills I didn't have. And I felt if I was going to get my legislation through and be effective, that I needed to at least understand their skills and be able to understand how they thought. So that was really the motivation of law school. I think it's held me in good stead in the legislature as well, because not only do you understand the language, which can get pretty technical at times, but it develops a process of thinking where you anticipate better what arguments are going to be and you don't ask a question unless you know the answer already.

Q: Do you ever plan to practice as a lawyer?

A: I have to do that and I'm particularly interested in working in the cities. So, in a way, all this pulls together.

Q: Since you've been in the legislature, of course that isn't a very long time at all, so since you've been in politics, have you changed anything about how you feel about yourself or where you want to go?

A: I have to think on this one. Yes, I think I have.

Q: How has it changed you?

A: I don't think that you can campaign door-to-door in twenty-five different precincts, talk to two-thirds of a district which is very different, I mean my district goes all the way from downtown to it includes a rural area. You can't go from door-to-door with people and have them let you into their lives just for a few moments and not be changed in some way. If I were to put my finger on the single most important influence, I think it was that that experience has broadened my perspective of life. It's been wonderful and, in addition to that, that willingness to--that the forum itself forced me to put myself out to those people and be with them literally on the doorstep or with their particular situation, it pushes you out of your box.

Q: If you had to say what was your greatest strength or your greatest weakness in politics, or even what strengths and weaknesses you have as a politician, what would you say?

A: I would say first of all that I think I've got the ability to see lots of different points of view. The first year in city council, I think I was aware there must be 5,000 different points of view and they all were right. At least, from the point of view of the people who were saying them. But, I think my strength is that I do listen to people and I do understand their perspective and as a result I think much of what I tried to do has been an accumulation of those thoughts rather than being elitist enough to think that I always know all the answers. I think that's one of my strengths.

Q: Got any weaknesses at all, or areas you want to work on?

A: Sure. I think that the weak side of that is that sometimes you listen too much and don't act fast enough. You know, I don't know that speed is the issue, but I am much more inclined to want to make certain I've figured out all the possible implications and, actually, in terms of weakness as a politician, I'm much more interested in things I think will have a long-term impact, but a weakness is that most politicians really love the media and relish that. That was the hardest thing for me to get used to. So, the way I go about doing things is not as quick in terms of being flashy and that kind of thing.

Q: I have a question that I really meant to ask earlier. Why are you a Democrat?

A: Why am I a Democrat? Well, that's a good question considering that I grew up in a community where George Bush raised his children and, as a matter of fact, went to--which is extremely Republican--went to school with George Bush, Jr., with whom I kept in touch quite a

bit. My choice in being a Democrat was that--it was a choice as opposed to doing what seemed to be the thing to do.

Q: Is your family Republican?

A: Dad was definitely Republican. Mother never said. And Mother grew up in Chicago and, interestingly enough, you know, they represented two extremes. Now, Dad's family had plantations and Mom's family were part of the Underground Railroad in Boston and had politics in her family. So, I saw both sides of that, I think, and when I was old enough to register to vote, there was never any question but that I felt like a Democrat. And I think part of it was the people orientation and people versus bricks and mortar. I mean this is an oversimplification.

Q: Now, I think we're the same age. You graduated from high school in '64 and college in '68? Do you think it was your college years that did it? The whole youth revolution made you a Democrat?

A: No, I think the major difference was moving to Chicago because I went to school in the South. One of the big issues in college was whether or not you could stay out past 10:00 or wear slacks to class. So, I mean, but I think for me the major--I felt like I woke up when I moved north. And I commuted downtown, you know, through model cities areas, the juxtaposition of the Hancock building and urban renewal area. And worked in downtown Chicago, traveled through that entire city including the South Side. Spoke at high schools on the South Side. Worked with the model cities program. Worked with the AMA. I was really involved with Chicago. But it was so different than anything I had grown up in and I used to stand--I was like a kid--I would stand in front of the corner at lunchtime of Carson, Pirie, Scott, and just watch the people going by the area. What I'd grown up in was very homogeneous and I absolutely thrived on the heterogeneity and the fact that you could walk down the street and hear Victor Frankel talk. I'd read his book in high school, but I never believed he was a real person who I could just walk around the corner and listen to. Heard Jesse Jackson speak. Went down to Breadbasket. Cannonball Adderly was there. I mean, some wonderful experiences when I was twenty-two through about twenty-five. And it really woke me up.

Q: And somehow the way you woke up was facing Democrat rather than Republican?

A: Uh huh. That's great. I woke up facing Democrat. That's the truth.

Q: What else should I have been asking you? What maybe haven't I talked about that you think is important to get down as a woman legislator person?

A: I don't know. Maybe it is perhaps that my belief that women can help change the system in a way that's never happened before. And that is bringing an additional perspective and sensitivity and willingness to negotiate and not be dogmatic. But challenging the previous system to look at some new things. And I'm very hopeful that we can have that input.

Q: Me, too.

