

NANCY BROWN: INTERVIEW  
(REVISED)

Q: This is Representative Nancy Brown's interview, February 19, 1991. First, I'm going to ask you some questions about your service in the House. When were you first elected?

A: Nineteen-eighty-four, so this is going on my fourth term.

Q: And you've been in the House the whole time?

A: Yes.

Q: And you're a registered Republican, I assume. How long have you been registered as a Republican?

A: Forever.

Q: Why did you register as a Republican?

A: I think it's probably mostly because my family was Republican.

Q: It seems like a lot of people have that same reason. Can you describe your first election?

A: My first election was very difficult, although I didn't realize how difficult it was until I went beyond it. I was called and asked...I was in Chicago at the time and some friends of mine called me and asked me if I'd consider running. It was Thursday and the filing deadline, I believe, was that Monday. I said, 'Well, I don't know. I never thought about it before.' And they said, 'We really want you to do this and really think about it.' So, I talked to my husband about it, and he said, 'Well, why are you asking me? You're going to do what you want anyway.' So I talked to the kids who were all there and I drove back and filed and then had to leave for a meeting in Washington, D.C. on Saturday. So I drove back Friday, got the paperwork filed, went to Washington, D.C., and was gone the whole next week. So when I came home, then I had to stop and think about what I did, and as it turned out, there were three other people that filed as Republicans besides me. So I was in a four-way primary. But interestingly enough, I really never thought I'd lose. I really was not worried about that election in the sense that I felt good about people. I really didn't...I really never thought about losing and there were times later into the election when you kind of get a panicky feeling like what if I lose, but I just felt good about what I was doing and I guess I didn't have a vested interest in winning or losing.

Q: Now what made you decide to run? Had you been thinking about this?

A: No, in fact, there's a newspaper article I have...there was a profile on me done by the Star quite some time ago and the very last question was, 'Have you ever given any thought to running for higher office?' and I said, 'Absolutely not.' So, no, I had never thought about running for higher office and I had been actively involved in local politics when I moved to Kansas in 1980. And when I moved there, I didn't want to come. I was very happy in my life before, and my husband's business transferred there. So we moved, and I got actively involved very quickly in a sewer issue in Kansas, and I went and

talked to the county commissioners. I had been involved in politics back in Illinois, so I went and talked to the county commissioners because I was very disturbed about the direction I saw them going and it was also a drought year. 1980 was a very bad drought year and I was the sewer/water chairman back in the community we moved from. I was going to run for mayor which was another reason I didn't want to move. Anyway, I talked to the county commissioners and said I really didn't like the direction they were going and why were they doing this. Why weren't they conserving water, etc.? And Bob Bacon, the county commissioner at the time, said, 'Well, Nancy, you know, you sound like somebody who would really like to get involved in the community here.' And I said, 'No, I really wouldn't.' So he called me up and said, 'Do you want to serve on the mental health board?' And I said, 'No, I don't want to serve on the mental health board.' I said I'm really interested in government land-use planning and things like that. He said okay and he called me later and asked me if I wanted to fill a vacancy as a township trustee, which I filled in the fall of that year, the fall of '80. So that's how I got involved in Kansas politics very quickly. I hadn't lived there very long.

Q: Well, that's unusual.

A: So I was already actively involved with the people in the community when I was asked to run. The reason I did it was I really felt that I could benefit the people in my community further as a state legislator than I had been able to do as a township trustee.

Q: That's quite a jump. From township trustee to....

A: It really was and I really had not thought about it. I had been in Topeka and I testified on bills and I had helped write a sewer ordinance.

Q: As township trustee?

A: As township trustee, so I was somewhat comfortable with the place, anyway. I knew what the committees were like and I knew the local government chairman and I knew some of the legislators. So it wasn't real foreign to me as far as coming here. But Kansas was foreign to me, so.... I'd only lived here for four years when I ran, so I really didn't know a lot about the state.

Q: That's kind of unusual, isn't it?

A: I think it is unusual for somebody to do that.

Q: You're one of the few who's done that that I've talked to.

A: Interestingly enough, though, I think because I was new to the state, I took a real different interest in the state than a native takes. I started a historical society in my community, for instance, before I came and I'd be talking about all this Kansas history and all these unique things, and they'd look at me and say, 'That's not history; that's Sam's place.' I'd say yeah, but there's history in Sam's place. It was kind of fun to watch them, and we put up some Santa Fe historical markers and we now have a church. I'm still chairman of the historical society. Actually, we broke our community organization into two groups, but I share the main group, so I became acclimated to Kansas real fast. I took probably a greater interest in Kansas than I took in my own state of Illinois.



Q: That's your home state?

A: That's my home state, right.

Q: You said some people called you up. Did they help you run your campaign?

A: Yes, they did. As much as they could. But I had also worked for Dave Owen when he ran for governor. I was his office manager, so I had some idea about Kansas politics and a little bit of an idea about how to put a campaign to-gether. Although I had never run for partisan politics before. I was going to run for mayor in the community I came from, but that wasn't partisan. And I really underestimated, I think, partisan politics.

Q: Underestimated in what way?

A: Well, maybe that's why I was afraid. Because I really didn't...it never dawned on me. I thought people elected people because they were people and I really never knew that I might be the greatest person in the world, but if they were a Democrat and I was a Republican, they weren't going to support me. However, I did have a great deal of bi-partisan support because of my involvement with the Stanley sewer. There were about 500 people who were already a real cadre for me who were affected by the sewer and I was not in the sewer district. I just went to bat for them as township trustee. They never knew I was Republican and I never knew they were Democrats. They just felt I was up there in Topeka fighting for them on sewer issues, and they didn't seem to care. So I still to this day, some of my biggest campaign workers were Democrats.

Q: That's good.

A: For me, it's been very positive, but partisan politics was real different.

Q: Well, who were the other candidates in your primary and general election that first year?

A: I'll have to stop and think, it seems so long ago. There was an attorney who had worked in Johnson County court system and he was the one who came the closest to me. There was a girl who--a young lady--whose husband was the Public Works Director of the city of Olathe. She was one of them. Who's the third one? Isn't that terrible? I don't remember.

Q: Did you have a general election race, too, then?

A: Yes. And then I had a general after that and I had George Collins, who has run against me since that time, and is very actively involved in the Democrat party. An old-time Olathe person all his life. And my district at the time was about 60-40 rural, so now it's flipped the other way, since we've redistricted it. But the rural area was predominant when I first ran and there were some shifts over the years, but my biggest race was with the people from the city of Olathe.

Q: How did you campaign? What type of strategy did you use?

A: I campaigned strictly on who I was. I did not know the other people. I did not know Olathe city politics at all. I just basically said this is who I

am and this is what I've done, and I made some mistakes looking back. According to people I put in things about my previous life as sewer/water chairman and came from Illinois and people said to me later, 'You never should have done that. You shouldn't have talked about coming from another state.' I don't know. I just....

Q: Did you go door-to-door a lot?

A: I've never gone door-to-door a lot. I hate going door-to-door. I did do some door-to-door the first time and my family did some door-to-door for me. My kids were younger and they helped, too. And other people went door-to-door for me. I'm not good at that. That's not a strength of mine and I don't like it. I think it shows when you do that. But I did have some friends in a newspaper, a local newspaper, and they ran a lot of stories, and in fact I had written a weekly article for the newspaper that was a free paper to a lot of the people in my rural district. So I was already pretty well known in the rural district.

Q: What newspaper was that?

A: The Blue Valley Gazette at the time. It's no longer in existence. But that was a real source of help for me.

Q: Did you do a lot of mailouts?

A: No, I didn't have very much money and I didn't know how to get it. I never really was good at asking for money and I'm still not. But I did have fundraisers that were put on by people for me.

Q: Just individuals?

A: Right, and I had very little PAC money. I don't think I had any in the first primary because they didn't know me and I wasn't a real Republican.

Q: Well, did the media, besides that newspaper, get involved?

A: Yes, but I had already had a reputation--which I still have--as being kind of an activist. And so, I think, the 'city' newspapers viewed me not positively. They viewed me more as a rabble-rouser. And they still sometimes view me that way. They viewed me more as somebody who was kind of an agitator to the county commission, who was fighting for the rural rights of the people, but not supportive of the urban rights. Which is interesting because I was on city council of a small community, but like 3,000 population. It was not a rural community. There's not too much rural in Lake County up in...you're right adjacent to Cook County in the Chicago area, so it was a city from my standpoint, but they really viewed me more negatively. In the general, I was endorsed, but in the primary I was not ...I don't know if they did endorse in the primary. I think it was more articles. I was not prepared I guess for the negative letters to the editor and I responded to some of those, which brought on more letters to the editor. And I had some letters to the editor, back-and-forth to the editor, and the editor was John Marshall at the time, but he wrote some very derogatory things about me and to me at the time. One time he told me he was going to hang me up by my underwear. I kept that letter. He did not like me and said I was too thin-skinned and should



not take all those kinds of comments very personally. So my first campaign I learned a lot.

Q: It sounds like it.

A: It was fun, although I've subsequently had worse campaigns in the sense of nasty. The last one was very nasty. But my first one...none of them have been fun. I mean, I don't like campaigning, so they're not fun. But some are less stressful than others.

Q: Well, did anyone precede you in the House or in Kansas government or in any government, as far as state government goes? Any relatives in your family or your husband's family?

A: No.

Q: And Stanley is your mailing address. What is your district like?

A: Until two years ago, my district was predominantly rural, for Johnson County anyway. It went over the Missouri line and then south to Miami County line and it took in the city of Olathe, but it was gerrymandered from years before to get the guy...well, the guy that ran against me twice...to get him out of Edward Moore's district and thrown into mine. So it went around the city of Olathe. It was a really bizarre district. So it had the new area of the city of Olathe and a lot of the old area of the city of Olathe. And two years ago what they basically did is cut it in half, so I didn't get any new territory, but I lost the majority of the city of Olathe and just have two precincts. So it was one of the largest districts in the state. I think it was the third largest.

Q: One of the growing areas.

A: Yes, a really growing area. It still is a very rapidly growing area.

Q: That's an interesting district. What issues are important to that district?

A: The issues that are important to this district versus the older district...[in] the older district, of course, there were more city issues, and there were some areas even in the city that were concerned with sewer and water. Of course, taxes are a problem in the district, but not maybe so much as a lot of other areas because my district now is partially farm, so that takes care of some of the farm people. Partially wealthy, too. I have a scattering of very wealthy home sites, two, three acres. And I've got a scattering of little small communities that are old and with old people that have lived there all their lives. So, part of the thing is not just the taxes and the property tax....Well, it is, I guess, in a sense. It's also got a very progressive area in the school district. Blue Valley School District is a very active school district and you have the people who really don't mind paying the school district taxes and then you have these little pockets of people who...they can't understand why we have to have computers in the rooms and so it's a real mixed bag. And you also have people who are saying, 'Gee, I want bigger and better services,' and people who say, 'I don't want any services at all.' Because we have a transient population who come and we have some people who say, 'Where are the streetlights and the gutters?' and then we



have other people who say, 'I don't want streetlights and gutters. I moved here to get away from that.'

Q: Well, did you focus on the issues? You had a lot of experience with sewer and that type of thing.

A: I guess I focused more on myself. And to this day, I still don't focus on issues. I generally feel that if the people trust me and like me, the issues will take care of themselves. So I don't go out there and say I'm going to reduce your property tax and I don't make a lot of promises. Basically I've always run my campaigns that 'I'm a good, kind, wonderful person and trust me.' I don't quite go like that but....

Q: During your years here in the House, what have been the major issues that...?

A: That I've worked on? I worked on a lot of, obviously, local government issues because that is where my area of expertise is and I also became very actively involved in township government when I moved there and started this county township association in 1981. Then it branched out to have a state township association. It was called the Kansas Association of Townships. From that, I ended up being on the Board of National Association of Townships, so I became and still am considered probably a township expert in the state of Kansas. So I got involved in a lot of the township issues. Even though my township itself, the one I live in, doesn't have a lot of the authority the other townships have, that's been there. Because of my national interest, I got involved in a lot of national issues and am now involved with the state emergency response, hazardous materials, and that's come about kind of in a different way. It doesn't necessarily impact my district, but still state-wide I'm pretty much involved locally and nationally. And I'm also actively involved in special populations. I have a cousin who lived with us who was deaf, so I have worked a lot with the deaf and hearing-impaired. I took that on as a project and I did it for a very interesting purpose. I felt that there was no way to ever become known in the city of Olathe. They viewed me as an outsider and always would. I don't live in their school district and yet half my district...it was becoming more and more a bigger part. I figured I had to get in that district some way, and the school for the deaf is in Olathe but not in my district. And I...Vince Snowbarger came in at the same time I came in and it was in his district. So I felt that there were some things that needed to be done there, but it was his district and I didn't want to step on toes. And after awhile I began to realize that he was not as comfortable with the deaf population as I was, and I speak some sign language and am comfortable around those people. So I decided the good way to get involved and serve that community unlike anybody else could serve it...I decided to take on the deaf community. I got seven bills passed for them in 1985 and '86, I think. To this day, still am actively involved in that community. And it was a service. Something I felt I could do that nobody else could do.

Q: You knew something about it....

A: Yes. So that's another area of interest. I just get involved in a lot of social issues.



Q: Do you think any of these issues are women's issues? Do people still see some issues as women's issues?

A: Oh yes, very definitely. But I don't. But, sure, a lot of people do and even sometimes as women we isolate certain issues as women's issues and non-women's issues.

Q: Do you think you've seen a change in that in the years you've been in the House? Is this more or less true now than it used to be?

A: I think it's...well, when I first came in there were fewer women. I thought at the time that...and I was not involved with women's issues when I came in. I didn't come in with the idea...in fact, I wasn't on the school board, so not education, which some people view as women's issue, I didn't have that background. The background I had was government and that's not a women's issue. And the other background I had was hazardous materials which is not conceived as a women's issue. And I've always been involved in men's boards and governments and I never even felt a real need, I guess, to look at issues as whether they were women or male issues, and that's changed. I'm becoming more of a women's activist since I came here rather than less.

Q: That sounds opposite to what most people say.

A: It is. And I'm trying to figure out why, and I think it's because I've watched...particularly Republican women...and I don't want to be critical of that, but when I first started to do some things with other women, the Republican women would say, 'We want to be one of the boys and I don't think we want to have a women's group.' And yet, I began to realize that if you're going to form networks up here, that's a valuable resource that I didn't want to exclude myself from. So I ended up forming the network with some women, Democrat women, and have since expanded that to where now I suppose in some respects I'm the chairman of the women's groups.

Q: Is this the Women's Caucus?

A: Yes.

Q: Are there any other Republican women besides yourself?

A: Well, we're all involved now. I had several group activities with women Republicans and Democrats and Joan Wagnon and I recently hosted an event, and Republican women came. They would not have come, perhaps, four years ago.

Q: Now what is this you hosted with her?

A: We hosted a reception at the Heritage House and it was just a social thing. [There] weren't any agendas that we spread around. We kind of formed a bond last year when we put in infants and children money. I think there are some issues that I suppose could be considered women's issues. The reproductive rights issue that we're talking about is certainly considered a women's issue, but also I think that the other thing that...this bill that Carrie Tappas [?] introduced is certainly a women's issue. Interestingly enough, we have not banded together on that bill.

Q: How will women react to that bill?



A: Some are supportive of the bill, Republicans. And some are not.

Q: I can see real diverse opinions.

A: Yes, there are diverse opinions on that bill. But there have been changes I think in the way women feel and maybe it's numbers. Maybe all of a sudden we've got more of us. Individual differences are not so apparent.

Q: That's interesting. Now as a freshman legislator, did you have any mentor when you came here? Do you have anyone who helped you in your campaign and supported you and helped you get on committees or anything like that?

A: No. In fact, I wasn't put on Local Government, which is one of my areas of expertise. I was deliberately not put on Government and then, when I came up here, I would say not only that I did not have any mentors, but I probably in some respects was sabotaged by the Johnson County delegation in the sense that they.... I was the first state representative woman from Johnson County. And Jean Myers had been their Senator, so I was the first state rep. And a lot of the legislators, in fact, I remember Steve Farr[?] came up to me and said, 'Nancy, you really are a lot nicer than we heard you were.' And I said, 'What did you hear?' 'Well, we heard you were going to be a real bitch and a real feisty activist.' I was almost shunned for awhile by the delegation.

Q: Well, who's your Senator?

A: My Senator's Jim Allen. Mr. Chauvinist himself. So, no, I had no one that helped me at all. In fact, I had a reputation that would make people not want to help me. I was put into an office with Dorothy Flottman, who was just a real kind, nice person, and I wouldn't say she was a mentor, but I think she provided some of the help that....Not only that, but I wasn't able to go to freshman orientation because I had to be in Washington for a meeting that week and so when I came up here, I had no idea what my telephone number was. Nobody called me and gave me information. I didn't know where my office was. I didn't know what to bring. I didn't even know there was a swearing-in ceremony. My family didn't come with me. Nobody knew there was a swearing-in ceremony, so I didn't have anybody here. I was lonely for awhile. What ended up happening is I ended up meeting some of the freshmen, other freshmen numbers, and became friends with some of the freshmen that were there. But, no, I had absolutely no mentors when I was first here. And then after awhile, some of the Johnson County Republicans would call me up and say, 'Nancy, I don't think you want to vote that way on that bill.' And I said, 'Thank you very much,' and voted the way I wanted to, anyway. Because I had no allegiances to anybody, to me, that was good. I didn't have to feel like I owed somebody something. I owed the Republican party nothing. They didn't help me. They didn't get involved in my campaign, and so I came up owing nobody anything but my people back home, who were Republicans and Democrats. So I came up here very independent and I never thought beyond two years. I never thought about voting, casting a vote because it might hurt me back home or because I didn't understand something. It never ever dawned on me. I'm very grateful it didn't. I came up pretty loose and stayed that way.

Q: Well, you said you didn't get on Local Government. What committees did they put you on?



A: I ended up getting on Government Organization, Transportation, and...no, Computers, Communication and Technology at 3:30, and I guess it was Transportation I was on.

Q: What are you on now?

A: I'm on Government Organization, which I've asked to stay on, and ranking Republican of Local Government, and on Economic Development.

Q: That sounds like you really changed all of them.

A: It changed when I became a more respectable member.

Q: Do you hold any other leadership positions besides the ranking...?

A: I serve as chairman of the State Community Block Grant program, but I was appointed to that position by John Carlin, who I became very much acquainted with during the Stanley Sewer case before I was ever state rep. He appointed me to that, and I chair the State Emergency Response Commission. I was just appointed to the Emergency....

Q: What is that?

A: That's a federal...where they are in charge of community right-to-know for hazardous materials and emergency response, hazardous material spills and things like that. And then I was just appointed last week to the Emergency Medical Services Board, which I asked to be on because I felt there's some things going on with the State Emergency Response Commission and I kind of wanted to oversee what they were.

Q: What bills have you sponsored and introduced, besides the one you mentioned? Is there anything else?

A: Oh, gender balance is coming up tomorrow. I've introduced bills, a lot of deaf and hearing-impaired bills. Task Force on Autism and then a Commission on Autism, and I served on the task force and knew nothing about that, but I met them at a conference and became interested in them. I ended up developing a real interest in people who are up here lobbying and I observed the process and realized a lot of grassroots groups don't lobby. So I offered to help them lobby and effectively kind of go through the process, and became interested in their issue. Then I started to...in fact, I serve on their board. [There's] some pickup truck legislation which I sponsor now with some other women. Just a variety. The Standards Response bill was one of my bills. We started working on that before the federal government even mandated it, so...a lot of hazardous materials kinds of bills.

Q: Do you have any particular vivid memories of victories or defeats on legislation?

A: Oh, a very vivid memory. The very first bill I sponsored was a bill on polygraphy. Now, I knew nothing about polygraphy...you know, lie detector tests. I knew nothing about polygraphy. A guy in my district was a polygraphist and they wanted to form a state board of polygraphy, and I said sure, I'll help with that. So I stupidly sponsored this legislation, and I worked hard on that bill and I got it passed. I mean, it was a real fiasco.

As I look back, I wonder how I ever did it. I mean they were fighting among themselves. Well, the next year they came back and wanted it repealed because it was too expensive.

Q: That's wonderful.

A: I love it because every time...it was one of those bills where I was so proud that I did it, and then they came back and wanted it repealed. So it was one of those bittersweet kinds of things.

Q: Well, now you mentioned when you came up here to be sworn in, you didn't even know there was one, and did you feel real left out? Was that kind of a memorable event because of that?

A: I was kind of surprised that nobody told me and I remember thinking, if I knew, would I have expected my family to come. Yeah, I kind of felt...you know, hindsight, I thought it was something my children might have enjoyed, but nobody told me.

Q: What do you think your main duty is, or job is, or responsibility is, as state representative?

A: See, I guess I would expand the responsibilities beyond the lawmaker, legislator part of it, and maybe that's what gets me in more trouble. I guess I feel my responsibility as a representative is to my people, and that, to me, goes beyond just the lawmaking part of it. That goes into all state business and state agencies, and I do a lot of probably social work kinds of things, looking back. A lot of people don't get involved. I spend a lot of time on people's problems.

Q: All the boards you've mentioned you're on, too.

A: A lot of boards, and I do that because, first of all, I'm a frustrated missionary and I feel that's kind of who I am. Secondly, I think as a state legislator, if I can cut some of the bureaucracy for them, that's what I should do. I don't feel my main job up here, I guess, is only to write laws. I think I'm here to make a better quality of life for the people back home, whether it's repealing laws, whether it's watching out for their best interests, whether it's access to the system. Nobody ever told me what a legislator's supposed to do and I've not found any qualifications or any job description that really tells you what to do. So I've just kind of made my own way, and I've no idea if the person before me or the person after me, what they'll do.

Q: I want to ask you a few questions about yourself personally. You told me you weren't born in Kansas. You lived here since 1980. Where were you born and...?

A: I was born in Chicago in 1942. I lived there for about five years, I guess. My father died and my mother remarried and we moved to Waukeegan, Illinois, which is about a county away. And I grew up in Waukeegan.

Q: Is that an urban area?



A: Yes, Waukeegan is a large city. It's a county seat, so it would be kind of like Olathe. But then we moved out in the country when I was in high school, so I lived in the country for about four years.

Q: What kind of activities did you participate in in high school?

A: None. In fact, I was not a very happy child. My stepfather was an alcoholic and I pretty much stayed away from a lot of activities and was not a good student. Looking back, I mean, I might have been brighter than my grades revealed, but I never spent any time studying. In fact, I spent very little time at home. I really could have been a juvenile delinquent. And when I went to college, which was later in life....

Q: You didn't go right out of high school?

A: No. I didn't have the money. I left home at seventeen. I graduated from high school when I was seventeen.

Q: My goodness, you were young when you graduated.

A: Yes. I started early, not because I was put ahead or anything. And as soon as I graduated from high school, I left home. I graduated one day and I was out the next. Looking back, now that I have a 19-year-old son, I look back and wonder how my mother ever stood that. But there were four of us and I suppose she was glad one of us was gone.

Q: Were you the oldest of...?

A: I was the second. Actually, my sister had left and got a job and then I went to work for the same company she went to work for. I moved in with her roommate when she moved to Chicago for a different job. I went to college, basically went to college because of some people who did become mentors in my early years of working, and they were all men. There were very few women working in those days in 1960.

Q: Where did you say you worked?

A: I worked at Abbott Laboratories, a pharmaceutical company. And I worked there, started there in 1960. And that's the year I graduated and I started within days after I graduated. I went to college later and did remarkably well in college. Graduated...I think I ended up with all As and two Bs, or something like that. I mean, it wasn't that I was stupid or anything. It was two things. I don't think when you live in an environment like that you have the inclination to study. We lived away from the high school, so I couldn't walk anywhere and it was like seven miles from the high school. It was a long bus ride and there was just no way to get involved in extracurricular activities. No way to get involved with people. I think that's one reason why I spend a lot of time now looking out and kind of mentoring other people. You know, you see some kids and you just think they maybe need a little extra push just like I needed. Somebody to believe in you and somebody to say, you can do it.

Q: Well, where did you go to college and what did you study?

A: I went to...when I was in high school, my senior year, when I got a car, I went to Moody Bible Institute. I got very involved in the church and I was going to be a missionary. Of course, that didn't work and actually I was accepted there and, if I recall, it was like \$600 a year or some ridiculous amount of money. It wasn't very much money and my father lost his job. He didn't keep a job very long and my mother needed the money, so I gave her mine and never went to college. So I went at night and then I ended up...after I started working and left, I went to Trinity College, which is an Evangelical preacher's college, close to where I lived. I went there and had some super people who encouraged me. I mean, my family never wanted me to go. They really thought it was stupid.

Q: But other people outside the family....

A: Yeah. My mother still doesn't understand what I do or why I do it. I think I'm just so foreign to her. But interestingly enough, after I went, my older sister went back and my sister got a nursing degree and then she went and got her bachelor's degree and my brother did go to college, but I helped him financially.

Q: How much younger was he then?

A: We're all three years apart.

Q: So you really hadn't been out very long when you were helping him?

A: No, not very long at all. But I had a job, which was more than anybody else in the family had. My mother ended up going to work a little bit, but never regularly. My dad never worked. I mean, sometimes he did, sometimes he didn't, but he never had any money. Then after that, I decided...after I realized I was not going to into missionary work, I ended up leaving and going into a different school, Barat College in Lake Forest. I graduated from there with a degree in sociology.

Q: Sociology? How interesting. Well, that makes sense.

A: And then here, I went back to get my Master's, but I didn't finish. In fact, it's been on my mind to call. I think I lack nine hours or something like that. So I might as well just go do it. I would have finished had I not become a legislator. Then I just didn't feel that taking the time away from my family...but I could do that now.

Q: It's better to do it when you have time to enjoy it.

A: I love going to school, though. I'd be going to school if I weren't here. I really enjoy it. I mean, not a lot of courses, but it's just the fun of going for me.

Q: Well, you said your husband was transferred here and that's why you moved here. What does he do?

A: He's right now vice-president of Technical Services and Scientific Affairs for a [unintelligible] company.

Q: At what point did you get married? After college?



A: No. Well, I can't think when I graduated. We got married in 1967 and I finished my degree in '68, so I had not....I was close. He never...he was supportive, but he never really cared. I cared. He never really cared, and his family's all very highly educated. His father has his PhD, his brother has his PhD, his sisters have Masters. And I always felt really inferior to them. And that never bothered him. It really never bothered him, but it bothered me. I mean, I didn't finish my degree because of his family, but I always thought it was kind of strange everybody else had their degree but didn't care if I did.

Q: And you have children. How many?

A: We have two children. We have a nineteen-year-old boy and a seventeen-year-old boy.

Q: And how old were they when you were first elected?

A: Ten and twelve.

Q: So they were still....

A: Still little. Grandma came. I would not have left them with other people.

Q: And you lived down here then most of the time?

A: I didn't the first year. In fact, I have some real interesting stories about my first year. I ended up...nobody ever told me anything about the legislature as far as the social events and all that stuff, so finally about three weeks before, somebody said, 'Well, you are going to move up here, aren't you?' I said, 'Well, no. No, I'm gonna commute.' And they said, 'Oh no, there's times when you're not going to be able to do that.' And I said, 'Well, okay, I'll get a room.' So I had been in a room over on Huntoon, which is not too far from here and you probably know the woman who I rented it from. I can't even remember her name, Mary Ann, I think it is, and she married a young man who worked for Menninger's, I think. She married a young man, like twenty years younger than she was, who was a Washburn law student at the time. I cannot think of her last name. Anyway, I rented a room in their house. It was just a block away from here, and it's the funniest thing I've ever done in my life because I shared a bathroom with somebody else. When I got there, there was no heat in the house, but nobody told me. They had two dogs. The very first night I slept there, they came barging in in the middle of the night, two big sheep[dogs]--kind of wolfhound dogs--and scared the heck out of me. I mean, it was a disaster. I had to take off my shoes when I walked in the door and I'm thinking, what am I doing in this place? I figured I was only going to do that periodically and as it turns out, I have spent a lot more time [there] because it's just too much trouble to drive back home.

Q: How far is it?

A: About an hour and a half. That would be a three-hour trip and then by the time I get home, my kids would say, 'Mom, can you sew a button on' or 'I didn't wash the dishes.' So, finally I realized that they got along just fine without me. I think they've done alright. I think my younger one probably suffered more than my older one who's very independent.

Q: Well, do you think there was a cost to your family, then, you being in the legislature?

A: Yes. I think there was a cost. But I think there were tradeoffs, also, and one of the tradeoffs, I think, is my husband played a much more active role emotionally in the children's lives and I think that was very important. He has always been supportive, but there are always traditional male-female roles, and my role as a mother was always to provide the support system. And there were just times he had to provide that without me. I think, to this day, he's very close to the boys and I think that was a positive tradeoff. Plus, my youngest son has always been very attached to his grandmother, and I think that was a very good relationship for them, for her to be there when I....When he was born, I had to have a hysterectomy shortly after he was born. He was twelve pounds. He took a lot of me with him. So she came and took care of them when I was in the hospital and when I came home. She bonded with him and that became her baby and I think they've always had a very special relationship, and I think that was a real positive thing for both of them, that she moved here when we moved here in 1980. She was in Florida and she became a significant part of our family. She'd move in when I was gone in those early weeks and go home on weekends. So she was kind of a surrogate mother and to this day I think she still maintains that. She's there right now. My husband's out of town this week and she's there with my son who's seventeen. But, yeah, I think they miss things and my husband misses things. He travels a lot and I used to travel with him.

Q: You can't do that now?

A: No. And he goes to a lot of exotic places. He travels worldwide and also I think there are things like basketball games you miss and not being at certain things. Myron travels too, so it's not like he can always go. Plus you miss when they come in at night and you're not there. But working mothers miss that too. So I've never really said, 'Well, my family's really suffering.'

Q: Well, that's good. I think that's interesting that you call it tradeoff. I want to back up just a minute here. When you were in school, either college or high school or even anytime in those years, were there any organizations or have there been any organizations since then, that sort of prepared you for what you do as a legislator?

A: I think the traditional League of Women Voters.

Q: You were a member of that?

A: I was a league member in Illinois.

Q: Any others? Did you debate in high school?

A: No, I didn't debate. Not in high school, no. And I was not actively involved in any extracurricular things in college either because I was a commuting student. I always felt somewhat older than everybody else. One of the things that I did when I was very young, I became very actively involved in my church youth group. We had a very, very large church, like thousands. It was a very large church, and so I became a member when I was young of the Christian Education Board and I think that was a very valuable experience,



working with diverse people and watching how boards work and watching how consensus developed. Plus, then I chaired the youth group association of the junior highs and was responsible for....

Q: That's quite a responsibility.

A: Yes, especially when I was so young. So I think that helped in organizational skills and things like that.

Q: What kind of things did you do as the chairman of that group? Did you plan meetings?

A: Oh, I planned meetings. We were a very active church group. We had Sunday evening meetings and Wednesday night prayer meetings and then every Saturday night, I had an activity for them that would be anywhere from going to Chicago to visit other churches, to planning special speakers to come in, to having seminars on drugs or music or something like that.

Q: Was there a youth director of the church?

A: There was a youth director as well. And there was the board that I was also on, so I had a support system.

Q: That's interesting. Do you think that being in the House has made you a different person or changed you in any way?

A: I never thought about that. Probably not. Probably not internally different. I've gotten older in the last seven years. I suppose in some ways I may be less confrontational than I used to be. It might have changed me in that way. I don't get quite as upset. I found it difficult when I first got here that the process was so slow. And if anything, perhaps I've learned patience a little bit more than I did on the outside. Of course, when you're involved in local government, you only have seven people to deal with rather than 165 or whatever your board is. And so, maybe that has helped me with patience. I was thinking the other day when I had a meeting that was quite confrontational--not on my part, but the people I was with. I was with some county commissioners and they got all angry and upset and I thought, normally I would probably have gotten upset back, but I was very calm and I thought, isn't that interesting. I can stand back now and observe the process without joining in and being part of the problem. I can look at it...and so, yes, I suppose I've changed in that way. I've learned patience and.... Another thing that maybe I've learned...I don't want to say individual differences, because I think I was always very tolerant of individuals. And I've always been empathetic, so I don't think it's even jumping into a person's perspective and looking at it. Sometimes I still get frustrated, but not as much as I used to, I can see something so clearly and I'm willing to put in the extra time and the extra mile to go and somebody else isn't, and I always want to know why they're not.

Q: Do you think it's changed how other people see you?

A: Oh, yes. It's changed how my family sees me, my extended family, and that's not to me a very good thing. I mean, it's a negative thing rather than a positive thing. My younger sister...my mother told me I kind of intimidate her because I'm wealthier, I'm better known. I don't think it's jealousy, but

she's not real comfortable with me because I'm so 'worldly' to her. And she's kind of living in the same home town she was raised in and her world is much more narrow than mine, so it's changed how they've seen me. It's changed how my mother has seen me, too, and I feel real bad about that because I don't think that's positive. I think it's more negative.

Q: And they weren't here to campaign with you?

A: No, they don't live here, so they've not grown with me in this sense at all. They love me, but I'd almost say they don't understand me. And my mother took it real hard that I left the children. She just thought that was something mothers don't do.

Q: My goodness, but I can identify with that.

A: So it was hard for her. I guess, I don't think it changes how people view me except every once in awhile something strange will happen, like you're in a dentist's office with your kids and all of a sudden, somebody will whisper and say, 'That's Representative Brown. She came to my school.' And then you have to stop and think, oh yeah. They view me differently than I view myself, so, yes, you get those kinds of things that you never got before.

Q: I mentioned earlier, before we started this interview, that we had done a little statistical study of the women in the Kansas...well, in the House and the Senate, but we found that in 1975, a big change occurred. We don't know what caused it, but from that year on, there've been more women every year in the House. Up to that year, there'd only been four at a time at the most, and it kind of started in 1920 with four, and every now and then, there'd be four. What happened?

A: I don't know what happened in Kansas. That was before I came to Kansas. So I can't speak specifically to Kansas, other than looking at Kansas history, it seems they've always been more tolerant of women. But I remember even in Illinois, that in many cases, I was the first woman on the city council....

Q: You were the first woman on the council there?

A: Right. In Illinois. So, there were a lot of firsts happening around that time and I'm trying to think what....

Q: When were you elected to the city council the first time?

A: 1971 or 72. Early '70s. I don't know what happened in the '70s that would have....

Q: Well, let's get a little past what happened in the '70s. Why are there an increasing number of women, do you think, being elected?

A: I think...well, for one thing, obviously, the modern conveniences of life have made it easier for women to be able to leave their families and leave their homes and go out and do other things. I've watched the young women that I've known in the youth group, for instance, when I was just a few years older than them and they still had the traditional roles that they were going in to --teachers or nurses or getting married. And now, I've watched young women who have gone through school and those traditional roles aren't there for



them. So I think just perceptions have changed historically and expectations. I don't know whether we've become more affluent as far as allowing our families to get better educated and so, therefore, when the families leave, the next generation...it's easier for them to go out and do more things. From our standpoint here, I think anytime a woman's in office, it paves the way for other women. So, it mushrooms. I personally don't think women are very good at mentoring other women, and that's something we need to do a better job at, but surely, if you do, that paves the way for other women as well. I've not felt that any woman's been willing to be a mentor of mine, but as I look back at where I've been in different places, there haven't been many women there. But I try real hard to look for that and for other people like me that are out there. A lot of women in the House are of my generation, I mean, my age generally. In the late forties thereabouts, so maybe a lot of different things have happened with them, as far as their children are grown up and they can go back and do things. Education at the time was just becoming more accepted as women fulfilling degrees and....

Q: You told me when you were born, but I forgot to ask you, how old were you when you were elected to office?

A: I was born in 1942 and I was elected in...early forties.

Q: That seems like an average age.

A: It's an age to kind of jump out and do some things. If you look at the women who are elected now, this year is the first time we've had a lot of younger women. First time we've had any pregnant women. So that's real interesting, and I think all of us before them probably paved the way in some respects to make it acceptable for women to be here. But I can't think of anything specific.

Q: Well, that might be all there is. You know, there may not be anything more definitive than that.

A: And I would say the men's attitudes have changed since I've been here, too. You don't have the snide comments as much as you used to because there are more of us, for one thing. The first time we all banded together, we were very threatening to the men. The first time...we got calls from men stating, 'Are you going to do this all the time? Is it something you're going to do?' I know Barbara Sable [?], when I first came in, she was Secretary of Health and Environment, and she said to me when I first came here...she and I became pretty good friends because I was involved with her issues, hazardous materials and such. She said, 'You know, Nancy, I don't understand why you women in the legislature don't band together. You could really be a voting bloc.' And I looked at her and I said, 'Well, why would we? I mean why would we want to be?' And now, as a woman, I'm surprised that I said that. Looking back....

Q: Then you have changed in that....

A: Yes. Looking back, I have changed in how I feel about that. But then, there are more women now. You don't have to work as hard to isolate those women and say, 'Look, we can do this.' I mean, you've got women coming together now and saying, 'Hey, we can do this.' And it's a difference. A different process now than it was then. And the men, they were more

threatened six years ago than they are now. Now there's more of us and they can't....Look at the gender balance bill. Four years ago, I don't think we would have gotten the same kind of response. And we passed it last year in the House.

Q: But not in the Senate?

A: I think it will pass in the Senate. We're trying again tomorrow.

Q: Well, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to get on the record?

A: No. It's been fun being here.