

Triple Date, a conversation with Senators Alicia Salisbury and Nancy Parrish by Joan Wagnon,  
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Kansas Oral History Project, Inc.

Joan Wagnon: So, would you talk a little bit about what the Senate culture was like when you came in. There weren't very many women, but I'm interested to know how you were treated.

Alicia Salisbury: I thought we were treated well.

Nancy Parrish: I think for the most part. There were certainly some good old boys that were in the Senate at that time. Some of them were wonderful. I know a group of them. We were all from Shawnee County, you and I and Jeannie Hofer were all from Shawnee County. Of course, the folks from out of town, they saw each other in the evenings. We didn't. I sat by Frank Gaines. I always got the little short version of what was going to happen that day because they'd talked about it the night before. So I wasn't aware of a lot of it, but, boy, was he right about a lot of what was going to happen because he talked with the other guys when they were out having dinner and whatever at night.

AS: I know. Didn't Frank call us "girls"?

NP: Oh, yes.

AS: He was a kick. He made me laugh even when he was doing that.

NP: We probably were not smart enough to really have a Women's Caucus at that time to really gather some strength in numbers. I don't know that we did.

AS: I don't think any one of us really came in strictly for feminine issues. Education is not a feminine issue. Children isn't a feminine issue.

NP: Right. I remember a reporter asking me if I was going to be supportive of women's issues. I said, "I think women's issues are really people issues."

AS: I said the same thing.

NP: I didn't see the difference. We were talking just a little bit earlier, but, Alicia, do you remember, the three of us were elected from Shawnee County, and Martin Hawver, who at that time was a reporter for the Topeka Capital Journal, he calls us "The Triple Date." That probably got a little bit of play because it was unusual for three women to be elected from Shawnee County.

AS: It kind of felt special.

NP: Absolutely. It certainly was an honor. I think it was a little bit hard in some ways to get along, but then again, there were probably some times that—I don't know if they went easier

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on us because we were women when we were arguing. I don't know that I recall that. Perhaps, maybe, at times.

AS: Don't you think though, even though there were initially good old boys, don't you think it was easier then than it would be today?

NP: That's an interesting question. In what way do you think?

AS: I think there was more civility.

NP: That's a good point. I don't think that we were treated in any hostile way or anything like that.

AS: Maybe in some bumbling way.

NP: Yes, maybe at times. I'm trying to remember if they told us jokes like they would tell their colleagues. I'm not so sure. But I don't think during that time that people were as concerned about that, that might be sexual harassment or reason to report someone.

AS: I don't think anyone gave that any thought.

NP: It was a little different time as far as that.

JW: One real quick question. You were from different political parties. Did that get in the way of your working together?

AS: It didn't from my perspective. I have said before, and I would continue to say, we're not going to agree with everyone all the time, but you certainly respect, and being respectful is so important.

NP: Right. I don't think that it did get in the way. You knew certain things. There was certain issues where you did get persuasion by your political party to vote in a certain way.

AS: That's right.

NP: And we understand that, I think. But I don't think it caused problems among us, those of us from Shawnee County.

AS: And you and I shared an interest in Shawnee County Schools.

NP: Absolutely.

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AS: And I would talk to you about it because at that time, being Vice Chairman of the Education Committee, I was also kind of automatically a member of the Conference Committee. I sort of fell out of line because when I found out what effect it would have on the schools that I represented, I would have to vote with my constituents, and suddenly I was no longer on the Conference Committee for the rest of my life.

NP: I had forgotten that you were on it. I was on the Conference Committee as the ranking minority member on Education. I'd forgotten that.

AS: That's why we talked about it. You said, "Well, you've got to do what's best for the schools you represented." I heard that, and I did it. And suddenly—

NP: You're pulled off. Wow.

AS: I didn't know I was going to be.

JW: Okay. Thank you all very much. This is just a short clip to tease some people about how much fun it is to be a state legislator.

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