Carol Toussaint

Interviewed by Ruth Doyle on May 6, 1991.

Oral history tape number: 47

Today is the sixth of May. I am going to interview this afternoon Carol Toussaint, a prominent Madison community activist. Now we will hear from Mrs. Toussaint. She will start by telling us something of her own background, where she came from.

Like a *lot* of individuals in this city I came in the first place for the university, as an 18-year-old from the northwestern part of the state, from rural Rusk County.

It must have been exciting.

Well, it was pretty different, very different. My only times in Madison prior to coming here as a university student had been when I had come to participate in the high school forensics contests and music contests. Madison was the mecca for high school students who had achieved that level in competitions. It was a very different place and I was the only person from my high school coming that particular year. I did know people who lived here a year or two.

Did your parents go to school here?

No, my parents had no association with the university at all. In fact, my mother, who had grown up in Iowa, kept mentioning every small, liberal arts college in Iowa to me as the topic of college came up. I systematically rejected them one by one. I did not see my future as being connected in any way with a Grinnell or a Simpson or a Buena Vista college. These were places not of my choice.

College of chiropractic?

That never entered my mind either. I have thought about this recently: if there had been the reciprocity between Minnesota and Wisconsin at the time that I graduated from high school I would have been *far* more apt to have gone to the University of Minnesota. That whole northwestern quadrant of Wisconsin is oriented to that which was Minnesota.

The Twin Cities.

That's right. I think we were one of a handful of families in our little village who took the *Milwaukee Journal*. Everyone else, as did we also, took the *Minneapolis Star*.

I grew up in a place where they read the Milwaukee Journal; my parents had the Chicago Tribune and that created a big embarrassment.

It was a long time before I found out that the *Milwaukee Journal* was an afternoon paper because, of course, if you live in upstate Wisconsin you get the *Milwaukee Journal* the next morning. I've thought about that: wanting a university education I probably would have chosen to go to Minnesota, except that as a Wisconsin resident I chose to go to Madison. So that's how I started out.

I think I was really lucky because, even as a university student, I came to know this community. Many university students don't. Why? Because I became an active participant at First Congregational Church. It is, as you know, possible to come here for four years and leave without ever getting to know anything about the community. Through my association with other university students through the church I came to know a good many Madisonians, mostly Madison West [High School], people. I actually believe that makes quite a difference when you are a student of the university, if you have any interaction with the community.

The other unusual thing about my experience as a university student that tied me so to the community was that the people I met through the journalism school seemed also to be people

who were well connected to the university. I had the great good fortune of getting to know *many* of the professors on a personal level, which, of course, we can claim was because of the size of the university at that time.

What year are we talking about?

I was here from 1947 to 1951. I graduated in 1951 from the university. It was just such second nature to come to know something about the community. I appreciated that. I did leave here: I took a job with the Meredith Publishing Company in Des Moines.

You got to Iowa.

I got to Iowa. My mother was happy, you're right. But I was not particularly happy. Des Moines as a city after Madison did not appeal to me, although I had a wonderful job working both for *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Successful Farming* magazines. It was one of those rare situations where the editor, particularly of *Successful Farming* magazine, was a man who had good instincts and trusted his instincts. He didn't care if you were twenty-two; if he thought you were a good writer or could handle something he gave you the freedom to do things. So I really had an outstanding opportunity to work. I traveled a good bit for them.

But I continued to have this interest in the things I had done through the church and I ended up coming back to Madison to take a job at the Presbyterian Student Center on campus and getting back to work with the Wisconsin Council of Churches, doing public relations work for them. Very good opportunities. Again, I think that was people taking someone young and not that experienced and trusting that they could handle the job.

I never found anybody like that. They didn't trust me.

Oh. That surprises me. I may have just been lucky in that. When the word "mentor" became so popular years later I realized I had some wonderful mentors, even if I hadn't know what to call them. And the mentors were all people who were giving of themselves to the community. That's really the role model – another word we didn't use when I was that young. But that was the role model that I had.

And you came at a good time, too.

That's true, Ruth. That's exactly right.

There were jobs available.

There were jobs and there were opportunities to prove one's self, not only in your job but, as I continue to think, many opportunities to show your competencies through things you did as a volunteer. That's been critical in my own personal development.

You have a broad background of volunteerism.

I've always looked at volunteerism as a real two-way street, because I always got a lot out of what I was doing. One of the things that I received was an opportunity to continue to practice my own skills. For me this meant staying abreast of what was happening in some of the communications and keeping the personal contact with people at the newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and having really a professional contact even though I was a volunteer.

Where did the doctor come in?

Well, I met my husband when he was in his neurology residency. He had come back to Madison

after... medical school was here, then he did his internship away, and then came back here for his residency. He was in his residency when I met him, when I came back here to do the work at the Presbyterian Student Center. We left Madison within about two years of when we were married and were away for three years and then got a wonderful opportunity to come back here.

So you've had many, many years uninterrupted.

Really have. Uninterrupted. I have now lived here since 1958.

I remember looking back on my own experience, how many people came to Madison about the time we did at the end of the war, and stayed. I find myself with many old, old friends here. People have not moved away. They're here, and many of them are congenial and we're friends.

I do think it's important, though, to have the experience of living somewhere else. It helps you look at what we have here and, for me, it has helped me value that which we have. I mentioned living and working in Des Moines. The political climate in Iowa just didn't appeal to me at all. I was familiar with the kind of rich exchange of political ideas and discourse that marks this state. So, coming back to Madison and seeing that again, I think, helped me value it.

I think that's what the war did for a lot of us that are slightly older. We went away for a few years and thought all the time we were gone about coming back.

Madison is a community that has just about every opportunity you might be looking for. In my own field you can do almost anything that you want, either by way of service through volunteer organizations or, as I truly believe, also doing things that allow you to be seen as a volunteer. I spend a lot of my time now talking with young women who are kind of looking for how to make their way in the community. Most of them know what to do professionally. They are looking for some ideas of things to do on a personal level. I like to recommend the volunteer activities, not only because you often find your own kind of friends through some of the things you do in that way, but because of the *extraordinary* opportunity to test yourself, to try something new.

And to make contributions.

That's right. But not necessarily just contribute, if you're an accountant, for example, to always be the treasurer. If you really want to get into more research or public speaking, volunteer organizations will give you the freedom to try some things that you'd never get to try in your paid professional career.

I think that we're going to need more people, too. There's kind of a change going on in Madison that requires that good volunteers and smart, thoughtful people have to really make some contributions now, because we can see the handwriting on the wall.

There's a need for a lot of leadership, particularly on human service issues. Our resources have shrunk a great deal.

And we have these controversies about Santa Claus and Christmas and so on that assume such major proportions!

That's true.

We have to be available to help out.

There must have been a time when the leadership in this community believed that we did have a set of values which were shared by most of us, and that probably was true. But as the community

became more diverse, I'm not sure that the leadership within certain of our institutions kept up with that change and diversity. Some of the values came in conflict at that point. I think it requires some thoughtful discussions to be sure that we are always moving toward the future in a way that is good for all of our citizens, not just for a small few that might be in an advantaged position.

People move in and out and things are going on. It's quite disturbing.

We see a lot in our schools, which I know has been one of your major interests. I'm *very* proud of some of what has been accomplished in our schools. My two sons are both graduates of East High School. It's been very good to see that East High has gotten some recognition. They've had some exceptional leadership with Mr. [Milt] McPike, who is just very good for that school.

It's just very fortunate.

Yes. Good person at the right time. Good timing. But there was a time when the resources of the community were not as evenly spread around the community – probably during the time maybe even when you were on the school board and decisions were made to set up the areas and to try to be more certain that the resources went equitably into each of the areas.

Had to be very, very conscious of that in local politics.

Yes, you do!

If you do something for the east side you'd better do something for the west side, and vice versa.

That's right.

So that we have an even progression. We don't have a whole section of the city that many larger cities have that's been neglected and creating such havoc now.

I spoke last week with Dan Bernstine, the new dean of the law school. He said that when he came and was looking over the job people drove him around the city. They took him through some of the areas which are assisted housing areas. He said "I looked at them and I said, 'Do you mean, these are the projects?'" He was told "Well, yes. You could use that terminology." But he kept waiting to see what parts of the city were really slums, and they weren't here. That gave him great hope that this community still has an ability to manage the issues.

He's a very alert and interested person.

He certainly is.

He spent a lot of time in Madison before he ever was considered for the job he had.

I see.

He was a graduate student in the law school and he taught a number of semesters. He would come for one semester at a time, so he was well acquainted with the staff. He was a lucky, lucky choice.

He said that he's well acquainted with a lot of the large cities across the country and that when he looked at Madison he thought "This is a city that can be governed and that can address in a constructive way the issues it will confront." You will be interested to know that he is now a member of the board of governors of the Community Foundation. He has been appointed by Chancellor [Donna] Shalala, who did serve herself on the board of governors for the first three years she was here and saw how important it was to have that connection to the community.

Let's talk about the Community Foundation.

All right. Let's do that.

It's one of the most remarkable stories.

Well, you are a part of that story because you were the person who interested me in coming to do some work. That was 1980. I don't exactly know how long you've been on the board.

I had been on for many years. We were sort of stumbling along without much direction.

I couldn't be more proud of the association with the Community Foundation. I do believe that it is an institution that is properly positioned to serve this entire community. And, of course, the exciting things that have been happening now are just wonderful.

When I was on it, it had gone through this twenty-five years or so. There was a real question about whether it was even legal, because they had just taken the money that was left over from the fund drives and set up this foundation and had about four or five men that were involved in it and that was all. They were beginning to expand a little bit when they asked me to be on the board. I stayed quite a long time.

You did. You were in that transition when, in 1977, they got approved to be a community foundation in the full sense of the description given by the IRS, so that it is a charitable operation with no questions about its ability to receive tax deductible contributions. But, as you learned, and at the point at which I came in in 1980, the issue was: are we working hard enough and showing support from our community so that we merit that.

We never really raised any money.

That's right.

We spent our income, I remember, and that was about $50,000 a year at the most.

That's right. There was a $500,000 fund in 1980 when I first began doing some of the consulting work. In the next four years we didn't do much about raising money. We raised small amounts of money – enough that we met our public support test so that the IRS couldn't raise questions about our status.

The thing we really worked at was clarifying our relationship to the United Way. Many people thought we were just an arm of the United Way, sort of like a United Way foundation and, of course, we were not. We were chartered, a trust form, chartered to serve the entire community, whether it was organizations that we would grant monies to would have anything to do or nothing to do with the United Way. The turning point came in the fall of 1983 when the United Way board and the Community Foundation board reached a memorandum of agreement.

That was a major accomplishment.

A major accomplishment!

We distrusted each other.

That's right. There was a high degree of distrust. It was hard to understand, because most of the people on the board of governors of the foundation had at one time or another been active leaders in the United Way. But we signed that memorandum of agreement and the United Way put $500,000 into a designated fund within the Community Foundation. That did two important things. One was that it doubled the assets of the Community Foundation. But more importantly,

it was a signal that the United Way is not going to set up its own foundation; it is going to use the Community Foundation for its endowment fund. A *very* important step. And it is a decision that needs to be worked at.

Were you on the staff when that happened?

Yes. I represented the Community Foundation.

You succeeded a man that I helped to hire that was the biggest flop that has ever come along. It was so nice that you were available.

You remember that the man whom you had hired came into this community. I think he had the requisite skills as a community foundation executive but he didn't know this community. When he left after only fourteen months – he was here only fourteen months – he left, I think, because he saw that that was a *big* stumbling block for him. And he also had the opportunity to go to a very good job back in his education field.

But if you'll recall, the Milwaukee Foundation accepted advice from David Huntington, an experienced foundation director working with the highly successful foundation. He came over and consulted with you and he said "You should find someone who knows the community and is known in the community. That person can learn what they need to know about the foundation business." That's how they came to ask me to work with you, and I think it was a good choice. The proof of that is probably not in what I did but in what has been done in the last five years.

In enlarging the whole thing.

Yes. With Jane Coleman as the executive director this foundation just took off. It was a million dollars in assets in 1986.

Which is twice as much as it had been.

Right. That doubling happened while I was still working with the foundation. Jane has taken it from one million to five million to seven million. Then suddenly we received this word that a resident who hadn't been in our area for twenty years, Marie Graber – she had retired to Florida twenty years ago when the Graber Company was sold. Because we had a vehicle for her to use to give back to her community she was giving, we learned at first, at least ten million dollars. That was going to mean we went from seven million to seventeen million overnight. But when the actual word came from the estate it isn't ten million, it is closer to seventeen million. Our assets in five years have gone from one million to close to twenty.

Are you still on that board?

Now I'm on the board. I did this half-time work for four years, from 1980 to 1984, and then I stepped back from it. When Jane Coleman came in as executive director she said "You know, I really want you back on this board. You represent a lot of knowledge – the tribal memory, so to speak." I told Jane I'd always be available to her but I really wondered if she wanted me on the board. Sometimes you need board memberships to get someone who has not committed, to expand. So Jane and others – Bob Koch and some of the other people on the board – really asked me to become a voluntary participant, to be a board member, so I've done that. I'm the mayor's appointment to the board. Interesting arrangement that we have of reaching out into the community and getting appointing authority to help bring the diversity that's needed.

Who are the appointing authorities besides the mayor?

The mayor and the county executive, and then the chancellor and the director of MATC. The four. Each appoints one. Then the United Way appoints three, the Chamber of Commerce appoints two, the Labor Council appoints two, and the League of Women Voters appoints one. I've always felt that when they wrote this trust document back in the mid 1970s that they must have put the League of Women Voters in there so that there'd be at least one woman. I think they thought that's how they would get one woman on the board.

One objective woman who would spend some time at it.

Right. And one who would know how to do it.

One of the greatest services that the league has performed is, I think, is providing personnel for all kinds of community activities.

Right. So those twelve appoint three at large then. Can we talk about the League of Women Voters for a minute? That organization gave me most of the opportunities that I've had.

I think that's true for many people.

Helped many, many people. I can't say enough about the league as a training ground for whatever it is that you may want to do.

I never joined or was active in the league because I was active in politics by the time they started out.

They have to make that choice.

But I could benefit from the things they were doing.

Yes. And I'm sure that you saw from time to time persons such as yourself involved in the partisan end of politics who still relied on the league a lot for some of the local community issues that had no partisan interests.

Yes. And you could trust them. The things that they did were available and useful.

They tended to be on practical topics – things that we really needed to know about. They were actions that we could or should be taking, and also that the information was always readily available. The league has never had enough money to do the things that they really needed or wanted to do. But one of the things is that it always put its financial resources behind getting materials duplicated and distributed. Even though a study might be done for those of us who were members and were trying to make some decisions, such as, say, about a school issue, we still put whatever limited resources we had behind making sure that people who never planned to have anything to do with the organization still had access to the information.

I think that's especially true in Madison; probably everywhere the league operates it's not quite the same.

It's fun to compare and, of course, as I became active... I did the radio program, the state radio program for the league, for two years and went on the state radio network once a week as the moderator of a program, a 15-minute program. We used interviews, various kinds of formats, forums, we'd have debates – whatever it took to get the information out. My job was to first plan the programs – who would be on, what the topics would be – and then to moderate it.

When I did that I kind of got connected to the statewide constituency that's out there. Then I did the legislative board, and then I became the Wisconsin league president. In that position I

traveled all over the state and got to know the communities really well. There were about forty communities in Wisconsin at that time that had local league organizations. Then I went on the national board as the national vice-president. Again, timing was *wonderful*. I was there during the time that the league decided to do the first presidential debates. I served on the steering committee, organizing the presidential forums that came up.

You didn't make Mr. Nixon shave before.

That was not the series that I was involved with. The year that I was working on it we had Jimmie Who and Milton Shapp, who was then the governor of Pennsylvania, who was aspiring to the Democratic nomination.

I was just mentioning Milton Shapp, who no one remembers. But we laughingly said at the League of Women Voters that should Milton Shapp be elected – first nominated by the Democrats and then elected president – we thought probably the League of Women Voters could have almost anything it asked for he'd be so grateful to us.

One of the reasons for his gratitude is that he is a man who is short, of small stature, quite well developed. When you see him sitting down he looks like an imposing figure, really. But because he was so short and because at this first forum the candidates were going to be seated, Governor Shapp was most upset because he looked so short. He requested, and we agreed, that he could sit on a telephone book. We thought perhaps if he went very far in presidential politics that we ought to keep that telephone book for the Smithsonian or something.

You could use it to raise money with.

That, too, Ruth. But the league has really given opportunities to many, many of us to expand, to really expand our interests and our horizons. I'm very, very grateful to the organization for the opportunity it has given.

It continues to thrive, too.

It does. It's gone through some transitions. For one thing, prior to, say, the mid-1970s, most of the women who were married with children and wanted something to keep their minds active while they were doing all that baby stuff sought out the league as a place of contact with others.

I did that, and I think a lot of people did that as they moved to town.

That's right. It was a good place to get acquainted.

I was on a radio committee and many, many of my very good friends were on that same group. That's where I met them, on the league radio committee.

That I can understand. And as more women chose to go into the workforce they seemed to have less time to do something such as the league. But I think there was a brief time also where the league was a little slow to adjust to the changing lifestyle of women.

I remember that they called women by their husbands' names.

Oh, yes.

Very religiously. "Mrs. Paul Rauschenbush," let's say, instead of "Elizabeth Brandeis."

Yes, yes. And they wore hats and gloves everywhere too, as if this was something of a social nature.

It had a good effect, though, in a way, I think. It sort of made the women look respectable.

Well, they *were* respectable, so that's true. What I remember about this debate about using your husband's name is something I remember of a personal nature. I was up in Beaver Dam giving a speech. My husband is not a political person. The reporter from the Beaver Dam paper wanted to be sure she had this quote from me and then she said to me "Now, that's Mrs. John Toussaint. Is that right?" You know, I hadn't thought about all of what it meant to sort of declare yourself in this way. But I looked at her and I said "Well, no. I would prefer you refer to me as 'Carol Toussaint.'" She said "Well, aren't you Mrs. John Toussaint?" I said "I am. But I don't think my husband should be held responsible for anything I have said here tonight."

This reporter looked at me and she said "I never thought about it that way before. I always thought you women – that phrase! – that you women were just trying to declare something about yourselves." I said "Well, maybe that was a part of it, too. But for me to be known by my own name was also a way of me not saying 'Here, my husband is responsible for everything that I do.'" Well, she didn't know whether the Beaver Dam publisher would let her do this or not. Of course, their style sheet says that married women have to be referred to by their husbands' names. She thought I made a good argument and she would go back to the newspaper and try. Bless her heart, she persuaded them and it appeared in print.

I've been kind of persnickety about that: whereas I also don't want to trade on my husband's good reputation, I really don't want him to have to always and ever be identified with my own opinions and statements. It seems to me we've done quite different things in the community. I shouldn't get any great credit for the good work that he's done and he's not looking to ride along with me.

He's an intellectual in a very demanding profession, so that you could be terribly embarrassed if it embarrassed him.

Yes. I wouldn't want to do that. You're right. And I think that many times I might not have thought that out as clearly. I'm grateful to that reporter from the Beaver Dam whatever, because it was something about either what I had done that night or the way she put the question to me.

I had one other funny opportunity, a similar experience. In about 1974 or 1975 I was invited to give a speech to the Downtown Rotary. Now, you know that august body of men...

Which now has women.

Yes, it not only has a number of us as women members, but I have been on the board for two years along with Angela Bartell, who was the first woman admitted to membership, and several other women. A year from July I will be the first woman to be the president of Downtown Rotary. They have come a very long way. And it's open as to membership.

Is that nationally true of Rotary?

Rotary has some areas where women have been less well received in some parts of the world, where Rotary International is still without any women representatives. But in this country for the most part women have been invited into membership, and not just in token numbers.

I remember that the year of this first speech that I ever gave to Downtown Rotary – which, as I say, was probably 1974, maybe 1975 – that the executive secretary of the Rotary Club called me about a week or two before my scheduled talk. He introduced himself to me on the telephone and he said "It's one of my responsibilities to have a gift ready for our speakers. We have a gift which is a notepad for your desk and we engrave it with the speaker's name. He said "I suppose you'll want to be 'Carol Toussaint.'" You could just *hear* the underlining in his voice. And I hope I said very politely "Yes, that would be nice. Thank you, and thank you for inquiring."

I got there that day and I did this talk on a title I had been given, which was *A Woman in a Man's World*. I talked pretty much about the changes that were coming about in certain areas of public life where women had been excluded. This same gentleman who had called me up and inquired – he supposed I wanted to be known by my first name – did the most thoughtful and sensitive reporting on my speech. I thought, "Well, whatever he thought the day he called to ask me, he and I have come to understand one another."

That's wonderful. That's a major accomplishment!

I thought so.

We've gone to another stage though, I think, now. My three daughters are all professional people. They all use their maiden name; none of them uses a married name. As I recall, there never was any discussion on it. They just assumed they were all Doyle girls.

And always would be. I have three little granddaughters. My husband was the only male Toussaint and his father was the only son in a large family of daughters. He's the youngest in the family, so they felt somewhat saved to think that the name would continue. My mother-in-law – my father-in-law had died before we were married – my mother-in-law was very pleased when we had a son because she felt the same way. Someone said something recently about not having any grandsons and I said "Well, I fully expect that my granddaughters will not change their names."

And that their children will have an opportunity to be Toussaints.

If they want to. Isn't that a nice thing about what has happened: that there are so many more choices?

Yes. Opportunities. I get a little angry because none of these things were available to me that are now available to my daughters, who are well established professionally.

I think you did all right for not having all of those things available. You made opportunities, Ruth. What I think it was also about was that women... maybe the young women today take some of this for granted and don't know that it wasn't always that way.

My daughters never considered anything except the fact that they would be professional people, and they are. They lead hectic lives as a result. I was in and out of activity. When I had a baby I usually could take a year off and stay home.

I actually did not do any paid professional work during the time that my children were young. I had opportunities for jobs which I would weigh against the demands on my time and whether or not it would intrude on some of the volunteer things that I was doing.

At the point at which I had been elected a national vice-president for the League of Women Voters, I also had an excellent invitation to join in government at a position that I think would have been a good position for me. We talked about it as a family and basically said that the job opportunity sounded very nice but that it also sounded like doing one thing in one location and that what the league was going to give me was the chance to grow and develop in many different ways. So I didn't take that. I went ahead and did the job with the league.

Then, of course, I was glad that I had done that. In 1977, right after we finished all the work on restructuring the trial courts and creating the appeals court – which I had been involved in as a representative through the League of Women Voters – and my ability to deal with issues of that sort and constituents and all really got me to the attention of the lieutenant governor. When

Martin Schreiber became the acting governor, he of course gave me the opportunity I *never* would have expected to have: to be a member of his cabinet.

A major responsibility.

Yes, a major responsibility. What a risk he took: that I would be competent to do that! He knew a lot about me and he knew, of course, that anyone that comes in to that job has wonderful support within the state agency. But it was a small agency – they still have two hundred employees – Local Affairs and Development, which no longer exists.

What did they do: distribute those responsibilities around in other agencies?

In the [Lee Sherman] Dreyfus administration they reorganized and took Local Affairs and Development and Business Development and merged them. In my judgment, it was a way of getting resources to Business Development without having to ask for new positions and so forth. Certain of the responsibilities merged nicely. What was lost was the strong relationship back to the local units of government. Local Affairs had been created in the late 1960s, when the major reorganization of state government agencies that took place had created this new department in an act in which the legislature was doing away with boards and commissions and merging agencies and cutting down. They created one new agency and it was Local Affairs and Development, and they created it because the state had no contact point to relate to all of the local units of government.

Local Affairs' primary mission was to be that liaison between state government and towns, villages and cities, counties, also Indian tribes. We administered all of the Office of Economic Opportunity programs that were going through, all the federal dollars that were going through in that way. Very important responsibilities. It's been dispersed.

There's been some talk lately, though, about taking a new look at that.

Isn't that true. Things that go around come around. Some took the position that the local government organization such as the towns association, the league of municipalities, and the county board associations, could fulfill that liaison function. I never believed it for a moment.

I had some satisfaction a few years after this merger took place. I had appeared at the hearing on this at the invitation of the assembly chairman of the committee. I said I didn't come reluctantly, but I wouldn't have stepped out as the former secretary to criticize that which the next administration was doing. The committee chairperson asked me to come and appear for information and to help the committee members. I had said then that I doubt that these local government organizations could wield the same kind of clout. After all, when you're secretary of an agency you get to sit in the cabinet meetings, your peers are the other agencies. Sometimes it was very important to take a message to the Department of Transportation and have it come not just through one municipality or some organization but in a peer relationship from the secretary of another agency. So I had said I doubted that it was a good move. But one by one the representatives of the local government association had stepped up to the microphone and said that they supported this merger.

Well, my satisfaction came about two years later when two of them sought me out to say "You were right. We have lost something and we're having to work very hard at maintaining the kind of relationships that we had taken for granted before."

This was during the Dreyfus administration?

Yes, it was. I actually was in that position only a year and a half because Martin Schreiber,

though he won the nomination, the Democratic nomination, and there was a contest for that, was unsuccessful in the campaign against Lee Dreyfus, so Lee Dreyfus took over.

When he took over in January of 1979 he appointed a young man who had been the mayor of Ashland – kind of an attractive thing to take someone young from the top of the state, someone who had been an elected official. Lee Dreyfus was big on that: He thought if you had run for office and gotten elected that somehow put you in a little different category, I guess. That young man was secretary up until the time that they merged; he was there about a year and a half. Lots of changes.

But the fact that you didn't continue with that job was a political thing.

Yes. Yes, it was.

It wouldn't have altered the way that things were going particularly.

It probably wouldn't have. And, you know, I didn't know for a while whether or not I might be considered for an appointment. I was told by a number of people that Lee Dreyfus was not interested in coming in and turning everybody out. And, in fact, he did keep Don Percy at the Department of Health and Human Services, which was a good, good decision, I believe. But I don't know. I think I would not have been comfortable in that administration. Not on partisan things so much as philosophically I did not agree with a number of things that they did. I never could quite adjust to that idea which Dreyfus seemed to be so enamored of, which was "Well, if you've got an idea," as he used to say, "you just run it up the flagpole and see if it flies." Well, lots of those ideas came down from the flagpole, but a lot of damaging things happened internally within government.

People wondering what's going to happen to them.

That's right. And I believe that in Wisconsin we had had at that point a strong, committed, really well-functioning bureaucracy. I've never thought "bureaucrat" was a derogatory term, because we depend on government at all levels to accomplish some very specific things. And we had a rather extraordinary state employee group. My own personal opinion is that this has been eroded in the last ten years. Some of this is perhaps not going to be repaired.

I think that the changes which came about by legislative action which increased the number of appointments that a governor can make is good from a management standpoint. If you're a secretary of a department and you come in and everyone is in place you know you're the transitory one. They're going to be there and you're not, later on. There can be some difficult relationships. But the move that was made unclassified administrators of divisions. In a department such as Local Affairs we only had four divisions, so that would have meant at most four appointments that could be made outside of the civil service system. The practical impact of that during the Dreyfus administration and the [Tony] Earl administration is that many people with civil service standing were actually given those appointments. What we have now in the [Tommy G.] Thompson administration is that there is no one at an administrator level at the division level who is there except by outside political identification and connection.

Contributions.

Contributions seem to be right up there as one of the means to... Quite a change, Ruth. It's a *big* change from state government as I experienced it.

I have this vague... I don't know a whole lot about what's gone on in the attorney general's office, but there are many, many people on that staff who stayed on. There was no question but

that they would stay on. And out of a hundred lawyers I think most of them have been there for many years.

Yes. In certain agencies...

And they seem to be glad with the turnover.

Yes. Well, government has been an important part of my functioning here in this city and it's one of those things that again I'm just so grateful to have had the opportunity to participate.

Can we talk a little bit about your other volunteer activities? Just sort of list them so we get some idea of the scope.

Okay.

Just a moment. We might mention that now you're a consultant and have an office.

Yes. Yes, I do. I decided that I needed to be well-organized even in my volunteer activities and that for me I could do that better if I functioned out of an office.

And had a secretary.

Well, I'm sort of my own secretary. But I go through a telephone system where I have the receptionist so that someone takes my messages and I have access to purchasing any of the secretarial services I need. But, you know, with computers we all look like we're top-flight secretaries now. The first big step for me came in about 1974, when I decided that I wouldn't look professional enough in my volunteer things if I didn't have a correcting Selectric typewriter. That was what I asked for for Christmas that year, and, oh, my, I looked ever so much better in the letters I typed myself. But then the big step was in the early 1980s when we got a computer and I started being able to do word processing. Not only does it help you turn things out faster, it helps you look better.

And it helps you file things.

And file things. I can leave it on the computer and not have a piece of paper for everything. I like that part about it. I am doing fund development consulting with non-profit organizations. I'm not really in it as much of a business, although a couple of other consultants have asked me from time to time if I'd like to form a partnership with them. I think I'm still enjoying kind of this luxury of working with one and not another and not having to worry about how many billable hours I have or anything of that sort.

I recently did a feasibility study for Hospice Care, which is an organization I really respect and value. I liked doing that and I did some board training this last week with the Ronald McDonald House board. I like talking to people about what it is to ask for money to support the causes that they believe in. There are so many people who think they can't do it or who insist they don't know how to do it. I rather enjoy trying to encourage people to that step. That's at the heart of everything we do in non-profits: getting other people to believe in you enough to put some money into your hands.

Do you deal only with non-profit organizations?

Yes. If I had the opportunity to work with a for-profit enterprise I'd be just as happy to do that. But there are a lot of people out there who have credentials that are probably better than mine who are in that business, and for me to do that very much would be... I think it would be difficult, because I'd have to market myself in a way that I might not be comfortable with. I

treasure the business opportunities that I have had. As I think you know, I was the first woman to go on the board of Wisconsin Power and Light. Madison Gas & Electric had a woman before that, but at the time I went on the board, which was 1976, there were not that many women around the country serving on boards of public utilities.

Now I have again an extraordinary opportunity. Since the late 1970s, 1978-1979, I've been identified with a group that calls itself a utility women's conference. We do an annual conference. We come together as women with public utility board responsibilities because we think there are some needs to network and support one another and to learn from one another and from the programs we present. I am presently chairman of that group, which is an honor for me. I feel very proud, because they are a pretty good group of women.

Is this a statewide group?

National. In fact, we can even claim that we're international. We've had women from utility boards in New Zealand, and our upcoming conference will have one if not two women from England, and we have had one woman from Canada continue to be interested in us. But we're kind of holding to what we've said about ourselves and that is that we would be from the investor-owned utilities. So we haven't, for example, had women from the co-ops. The woman from New Zealand got interested in us because New Zealand was moving into privatization and the woman in England was interested, too.

You might have a Russian group next year.

Maybe we will.

I was mentioning about my work with the utility women's conference and how this is an opportunity for me to get to know women around the country.

Now these are women that are interested in utilities?

No. These are women who have been elected, as I have been, to the board of an investor-owned utility. We also have expanded to include women who are at the policy level as employees, like a corporate secretary or vice-president. We see as our role, really, education for ourselves so that we are more knowledgeable about the issues, so we don't look foolish. You've got to.

Our very first reasons for coming together was that financial women's association of New York had a number of women who were either... one woman was a vice-president of Standard and Poor's, another one was a vice-president at Merrill Lynch. They were encountering, around the country, public utilities adding women to their boards. This was happening in the early 1970s. They were intrigued that most of us did not come because of what we knew about finance. Most of us came on this board because of what we knew about the communities. They felt the need for a woman. That's absolutely right.

The founders came from academic backgrounds. They were in home economics, consumer science – and its relationship to public utilities is pretty obvious – women who were economists. A woman from Montana Power was the chairwoman of economics at the University of Montana, for example.

The national women's association in New York said "You know, I bet if we organized a seminar on utility finance that maybe these women would come." In 1978 they organized such a seminar. They identified eighty-five women around the country and invited us to the seminar. I think that about fifty-five of us showed up, which says something about the need. They sponsored us for several years.

In 1980 I was the program co-chair and got the Wisconsin utilities to put some dollars into

this meeting. We had a session in Zion, Illinois, still with the financial women's association of New York sponsoring it. Those of us from the Midwest said "Wait a minute. Let's get out here in the middle of the country and then maybe women from the West Coast wouldn't have to fly so far." That they all had to go to New York is what we were saying. They agreed. That was quite an interesting conference.

One of my jobs as the program co-chair had been to help select the speakers. Now, this is the spring of 1980. We decided we'd like Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who was at the American Enterprise Institute, as a speaker; she was teaching at Georgetown [University] and teaching on topics of public policy for our nation. I got to make the contact with Jeanne Kirkpatrick and went to see her at her office at American Enterprise Institute. And yes, indeed, she'd be very interested in doing this. We got out her calendar.

By July of 1980, every day I'd read the paper and there was speculation that if Ronald Reagan got elected president, what would Jeanne Kirkpatrick be appointed to? I could see my program – which was scheduled for the Saturday after the November election – I could just see my program star going down the drain. So I kept trying to keep in touch with her office and with her and I was given assurances that...

Was she at the United Nations then?

No. See, this was before. Some people thought she might be appointed secretary of state if Ronald Reagan got elected. So one day I thought, you know, I've really... I just have to have some more confidence that Jeanne Kirkpatrick is going to show up five days after the election, especially if Reagan wins.

And so what did I do? I used my Wisconsin connections. I put in a call to Austin Ranney, who was her colleague at the American Enterprise Institute, who had been my political science professor here at the UW-Madison. When I got Austin on the phone, I explained all of this to him and I said "Can you tell me, is Jeanne Kirkpatrick the kind of person that's going to honor that commitment? Or is she going to pull out on me at the last minute?" Austin, of course, said "Well, first of all, I'll go and talk to her and tell her she can't do that to a friend of mine." But he said "I think I can also get a kind of inside inkling for you." He went to bat for me and called me back and he said "No, I have to tell you, I think the chances are very good Jeanne Kirkpatrick will get a Reagan appointment." But she said "You tell her not to worry. I will be there." And she was. I truly enjoy this group.

They just have an occasional meeting?

Once a year.

Do you have a newsletter?

Nothing. We aren't even a membership organization. We have no bylaws, no nothing. We get a different company to sponsor the conference each year. The six of us who are on the board determine the topic and plan the agenda. I am the chairman of the board, but another woman is the program chairman. At the upcoming conference in September, which is in Atlantic City, we have just an outstanding program and I have had very little responsibility for that. Last fall we were in Honolulu and Hawaii Electric was our host. We had an excellent program, really focusing in on all the economic issues involved in the Pacific Rim. And then we did a field trip to look at the alternative energy sources, the ocean and thermal conversions, and the geothermal.

You have to go to Kuwait and turn the lights on everywhere.

Maybe that has to do that.

I guess they're still out.

But you wanted me to talk more about the community.

I just want to know everything that you've been in, that you've been an officer or a responsible party.

I have had that opportunity. I would say that I've focused a good bit on economic opportunity issues and, of course, the judicial issues. I worked to help organize the citizens' conference and then worked on all the judicial reorganization, the trial courts and creating the appellate courts.

Then when Tony Earl was elected governor, a couple of us went to him and said "You know, we wish you would give a serious, serious look at how judicial appointments are made." He was very open to this and we presented to him a plan by which he would name an advisory committee. I remember very well sitting there with him and asking him to consider this. He looked at me and said "Well, if I agree to do this, will you do something for me?" I said that I would try. He said "Well, if you really think this will work then you'd better be the one to chair it." So he gave me the opportunity for the four years that he was governor to chair the advisory council.

In that period of time there were thirty-two judicial vacancies – none at the Supreme Court – but there were a few – two or three appeals courts vacancies, and the rest were at the trial level. That was an outstanding opportunity again to work with people all over the state. Tony Earl put together a good, good committee. There were five of us who served for that full four years and then if we had a vacancy, in each district, we would draw a lawyer and a non-lawyer from that district to serve on the advisory committee.

Is that still functioning?

No. It is not. It was created by executive order and the executive order died with the change of administration. Governor Thompson does have an advisory group. He uses attorneys. The thing that was an unusual characteristic of the group that Governor Earl put together was that he agreed that the non-lawyers should out-number the lawyers on the committee. Of the five of us, three of us were not lawyers. Then from each local district we had a lawyer and a non-lawyer.

How many vacancies did you say?

Thirty-two.

In the four-year period?

In the four years, yes. Most of them came right at the beginning because there is always a bit of that as judges maybe wait for the next governor: if they favor the politics of the next governor they don't need a replacement. But also at the time we started there was a seventy-year mandatory retirement age for state judges and the legislature lifted that during the time that we were doing the appointments, so we had only two or three that were vacancies created by the incumbent judge reaching that mandatory age. Judicial selection has been an interest of mine.

The arts. I came to serve with some arts groups. I had done also with Governor Earl... I worked full-time as the assistant director of the Strategic Development Commission, which Governor Earl had put together in 1984-1985. One of the recommendations that never got acted on in that year and a half was researching what was the economic impact of the arts on the state of Wisconsin. In 1986-1987 I did a project sponsored by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences,

Arts and Letters. We put together a research project and surveyed... did a lot of things to gather data and do the report to document that the non-profit arts are an important part of the economy of the state of Wisconsin. So I've done things in the arts.

I notice you're also on the board of the [Wisconsin] Historical Society.

I'm not on the Historical Society, but I'm on the Wisconsin Historical Foundation. I've done some things for the Historical Society and that is an interest of mine. I was on the board of visitors of the School of Business, which is sort of surprising, except that they were interested in me because they wanted people who were not graduates of the business school but who related to the business community in Wisconsin. I enjoyed doing that. I think I was there for five or six years. Five, anyway.

You've been very active in your church.

I have been very active at First Congregational Church. Again, they gave me the opportunity to be the first woman to serve as the lay moderator of the church, which was in 1972, and I served on the foundation for the church. I chaired the fund-raising committee when we did our big capital drive in 1979-1980. Usually you could find me where there is money to be raised; I'm very comfortable doing that. The other place, and that's the reason I came to the Historical Society participation, is that I really care about governance. If there's a committee that's going to build a structure of an organization of anything I'm ready to do that.

That's wonderful. The wonderful part about that is that that needs to go on in every organization and it's hard to find somebody with the background and experience and the interest.

No one likes to do it, do they?

No. It's a short-term responsibility, relatively short-term.

That's right. I think that's a pretty good cross-section.

Now, your husband is retiring?

My husband has retired, or is in the process of retiring, having been the only medical director that Central Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled has ever, ever had. He started that operation, working with the superintendent, in 1958. That's what brought us back to Madison. They were building that facility for the mentally retarded. He is putting all of that behind him and has a lot more flexibility in his life. He is doing some neurological consultation work.

Does this alter your plans? Are you intending to slough off a little bit?

No. I don't think so at all. He, of course, isn't either. In addition to his consulting work that he has just taken on, he has been, since 1980, 1979 or 1980, the commander of the medical unit of the Wisconsin Air National Guard. So when people say "I hear your husband is retiring" I say "Yes, from one of his three jobs."

John is still very active with his profession as a neurologist and his community interests are music. He sings in various... he sings in the church choir and in the civic choir or the symphony chorus they call it now. Once in a while he sneaks over to Middleton. The Middleton Civic Chorus has a wonderful reputation and he particularly likes their conductor. If they're doing the Brahms *Requiem* or something that he really enjoys singing then he leaves the Madison Civic Chorus and goes over there. Actually, after all his years of singing in the First Congregational

Church choir, in June he's about to leave with the Bethel Lutheran Chamber Choir to go to Germany for two weeks to sing. That's not because he's changing denominations, but because they needed a tenor, one who had his passport in order and was ready to go.

That points out another of the great advantages of Madison: if you're interested in music you have infinite numbers of opportunities.

Oh, yes. Yes, you do.

You can keep yourself as busy or as free as you like.

And you can be a participant or a spectator.

We can get 15,000 people to listen on the Capitol Square on a summer evening.

Yes. We, I more than John, but both of us have been involved in helping the Chamber Orchestra get started with those concerts on the Square. And our younger son, Todd, was the coordinator one summer between his university studies. Or maybe that was the first year after he finished graduate school and was looking for a job. I guess that's the year that it was. I think just the whole idea that all of these people are coming in to the heart of the city and really like that.

I am on the board of Downtown Madison. I've worked in the last several years trying to get us a convention center because I really do believe in that. I chaired the group we called the "Coalition for Madison's Future." We were primarily the fundraising political action group and tried to get the voters to agree with us. I'm quite hopeful that Mayor [Paul] Soglin has a good group going now. If the city should decide to try to build the Frank Lloyd Wright I'm sure I'll be involved. I worked also in getting the funds raised for the Civic Center and have served on that foundation, which is a small grant-giving foundation. I like associations with money and I'm not really sure about why this is. There are no bankers in my background whatsoever.

Anybody that's interested in money, they can find any opportunity to volunteer your services.

You certainly can.

I've spent my life sort of dancing out of the way, being busy with something else so that I can't go raise the money.

Well, I think that's the richest part about living in Madison: it's not just the opportunities that are here but the people that come with the opportunities. I'm really, really grateful for all of the chances that I've had to make a difference.

That's very nice.