

Interview with           Susie Wilson  
Interviewed by:       Danelle Moon and Aime McPhearson  
Transcriber:           William Henderson  
[Interview #1 & 2:     April 10, 2006]  
[Begin SusieWilson.Pt1.wav]

[88:00] at beginning {start at [00:00]}

**Moon:**

My name is Danelle Moon. I'm the Director of the Special Collections Library at San Jose State University, and today I am interviewing, along with graduate student Aime McPhearson, Susie Wilson, who has participated in local politics for a number of years, and we are at Susie's house today, on April 10, 2006, and we are going to be starting our conversation with her about her contributions to San Jose State Government, and get her to talk a little bit about her experiences working in the fem [break in audio file] project to document Bay Area feminists. OK. Well Susie, the reason why I am doing this project, just to give you a little background first is -- I started -- my bigger research project actually takes place in the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. And so, as part of that project --

[doorbell rings and Moon invites Susie to answer the door, telling her that it is more than likely her student, who is running a bit late. She assures Susie that this will not be put into the transcript.]

**Moon:**

So basically the purpose -- my project started really in the post-suffrage era looking at women's political activism in Connecticut, so I've been really involved in trying to finish up that project, but it's this project because I'm not in San Jose -- I'm kind of focusing more on modern feminism, and particularly since we have so many of the collections of, you know, some of the mayors -- Hammer and Janet Gray, and we have Dianne McKenna, you know, Board of Supervisor papers, as well as some of the other papers as well. So, I thought this would be a good opportunity to try to fill in some of the gaps within our own collections, where the documentation that we have doesn't necessarily record actually the history or the personal experiences, and so this project is really an attempt to try and document more of that history as well as bring in more of the players into it that we don't necessarily have represented in the collections at San Jose State. So, with that, I was looking at this historically in trying to get a sense of the feminist capital. The feminist capital, as you know from having come out of that whole feminist capital era, is an area that I'm just like intrigued by, because what I'm looking at in looking at the earlier history is that there are -- what I was trying to argue originally was that there was this consistency of female political activism as office holders starting from 1920. And what I found is that there wasn't -- there was more of a -- there was a continuation of women's political activism on different levels, but there wasn't -- the early impetus, like in Connecticut for example, they had the highest percentage of women office holders after 1928. Between, actually, 1920 and 1928. And then that continued, really, as a pattern, but not, you know, consistently across the board. Women, of course, didn't get parity. You know, there was no 50 percent representation or anything like that, so what I'm looking at -- I'm looking at the feminist capital in San Jose and looking at how that whole sort of came to be. It seems to be that there was a real, you know, re-learning of that political process for women that they should have actually learned, you know, in the 1930s and carried forward, but because of a number of different issues, women didn't necessarily do that. And so I'm really intrigued with this whole idea of the feminist capital and why San Jose became, you know, such a hot bed for female political activism during that timeframe. And I think there's a number of reasons why that happened, but what I want to do is to get you to tell me why you think it happened. So, why don't you start by telling us, you know, why you think the feminist capital kind of took off and what role you think you played on that.

**Wilson:**

OK. I think you have to look at the time. The time was in the late 50s, and 1960, and what was happening is that there were a lot of engineers moving into this Valley and they brought with them their wives who were, on large, educated, who had families, and at the same time, they left behind all their families to come out here. They were risk-takers. They came with their husbands, and they were not typical people that migrated often in need of a job. They were here because they were on the move and going up in their company. So, you make that move from your roots because IBM was a company that -- in order to be promoted upward -- they always sent you away from where you were, because they didn't start you off based on seniority -- it was also based on merit and not seniority -- so that might cause people to be moved, so that was why IBM, you know, meant "I've Been Moved," which was kind of the slogan they had. And you found out what Lockheed was doing. A lot of engineers from Lockheed, at first at Stanford, and the beginning of a lot of the computer world, was just starting, and you had women who were education. AAUW became a very strong organization here because those were all graduates of colleges of the United States, and the League of Women Voters played a very large part in what women wanted to do. They wanted out of their homes. They didn't want to just sit at home because they had active minds. They weren't going to work, but they wanted to have their minds continue to be active and creative. And the YWCA met those needs to having -- and the Mother's Days Out started at that time. And programs for their children in the summertime started. Let's see, they sent children to computer camps. They sent them to the YWCA to learn to sew or to learn to dance or to cook. Sometimes cooking for kids -- which are not taught interests now.

[laughter]

**Wilson:**

So, that's why I became a sewing teacher, which was -- I was self-taught. But the -- those were the kinds of women that became the first crack out of the battle -- I became a PTA president within a year of being here in San Jose. I was, as I was thinking about the thing I needed to talk about in terms of who I am here -- I have to tell you a lot about who I am from my childhood because it had a great impact on me, but here -- I'd been taking my children to school because we were buying a house, and we were at [another?] house, and so in the morning I took the children to the school they would be going to, and chatting with the principal, and he was finding out things about me -- such things, like what I didn't do. I didn't brag on my children. I didn't talk about the school they'd been in. If asked, I'd say it was fine. He wanted me to compare the schools and I wouldn't do it. And he wanted to find out about my children and I wouldn't do it. And finally about a week after asking me all these questions, he said to me, "Mrs. Wilson, do you know that we have five children who are high achievers and we get extra money for them from the state, and we just tested the high achievers here -- and I was taking two children to the schools -- and he said, "Two of them are yours." And I said, "I know that." "Well, you didn't say a thing." And I said, "Every mother thinks their child is the brightest child in the world." I said, "You'd find out." So, from that, just talking to me in those about three weeks, and he asked me to go on the San Jose District-wide Committee to evaluate all of the schools in the district. These were people that I was thrown in with in my first six months I was here. Like Henry Hammer -- he was the brother of Phil Hammer, and he's passed away now, but [they used to have a school for him to budget] so he got into education. Professors from San Jose State and very creative people. And I was thrown in as a stranger from Texas to be on that committee, and I participated. You know, I've never been very quiet in my life, and I always had a knack, I think, in trying to help people get their priorities straight. And one evening -- we had met in the evenings for this committee -- and they were very seriously evaluating whether there was appropriate counseling for our Hispanics --

[01-00:10:00]

**Wilson:**

-- over at Roosevelt Junior High School. And they were lacking. They didn't have any counselors that were Hispanic. And they were getting short-changed. And then they got started talking the rest of the evening

about the Beehive hair-do, and all of these -- particularly, the minorities would come in with these fancy beehive hair-dos, and what was in those, I never knew -- like, a rat's nest -- and all these things that were going on with the beehive. And we spent an hour, and they were all discussing about whether they should establish some sort of criteria about what kind of hair-dos to wear to school. And I noticed the time going -- and I didn't say much about it -- but the next week, when we had our next meeting -- every two weeks I think it was -- I walked into the room and I had a beehive hair-do. [laughter.] And what I said to them, because women just didn't do things like that, but I said to them, you know, I'm the same person I was last week and hair-do has nothing to do with what I think inside. And we never discussed hair-dos again.

**Moon:**

Oh, what a great response to that.

**Wilson:**

Yeah, it just came to me that this was ridiculous, that they were getting off course over such a ridiculous thing as girls' hair-dos.

**Moon:**

How old were your children when you first came to San Jose?

**Wilson:**

David was not in school, so it was -- I'm pausing a minute because I came in '60 -- David was born in '57 -- so, so I guess he was in kindergarten, or going to be, and Rob was probably in the fourth grade and Bill was in the fifth grade or sixth grade. And they were -- Bill and Rob, of course, really went to school, and David was just in kindergarten.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

He was just turning four, so I think that that's where they were.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

Approximately. I'd have to go back and see where they were.

**Moon:**

Right. Now, going back a little -- in going back further in talking about what the sort of modeling was that you had as a young child and as a young woman prior to actually coming to San Jose and getting involved in all of these activities, could you just give us kind of an idea of what exactly -- what you felt was really -- who helped model this behavior for you, and who served as your role models as you were going forward in your life as a -- eventually, as a politician.

**Wilson:**

You know, I never had what I would consider a role model, that I would define, but the influences of people as I go through my life -- they -- I know that my mother had a great influence on me because she was so very confident. See, I always knew women were confident because my mother was. I never had that problem of looking at women to find out if they could do the job. Of course they can because my mother did the job. And so I equated that. And the things that I learned from her -- she was a schoolteacher. She believed so

firmly in education that she was also, I think, raising us in Texas, and it was all separated -- but my mother -- in education, she believed that every child deserved an education. So, she left back the racism that was part of society and zeroed in on important things about people. And at the same time, she had the -- and as a child, I could identify with the things that she picked up about other races, and sometimes, in my insides, I'd disagree with her. She'd get upset if she saw a couple walking hand-in-hand, or kissing on the corner, which is part of their culture, and she was very upset about that. And I would say to her, "They're not doing anything wrong. They're doing the same things that whites are doing." But the difference is because they were a different color. But inside of me, I always rebelled against stereotyping. I always looked at the individual, and at the same time, there was a time when [Ken Santos?] who was a very small Hispanic, and who was a star football player, and everybody loved him. He got all of the headlines. He was just great. And then he started dating [Sally Jones?] who was a white girl, and everyone [winced?], and finally, her mother sent her off because this was wrong, and I thought, what in the world is wrong with these people? They can cheer him on, but then kill him in the next breath because he is defying, in their minds, where he should be. He had a role in life, and it wasn't dating Sally Jones. And I didn't like it. Inside, internally, I didn't like it. And so -- when I was asked by [Lewis Paulson], our graduate CA director, why was I like I was? Affirmative Action and strong on women's issues, and strong on minority issues, and I said, "It came from inside." My father was (inaudible) and he was an influence, and my two older brothers -- there were four in the family -- and I was the youngest of four. And my father was a man who was a man of the people type of person. He never -- but he was a World War I pilot. He came back to Gonzalez, and lived there the rest of his life, and owned a hatchery. And he was a tease, and never, ever, said a cross word to me. Mother had to do all the discipline. She and daddy would talk about it at breakfast, and then she would lay on me whatever he told her. The only time I ever knew that he was an authoritative parent was one night when we'd been -- we had a square in the town -- and I was driving the car and the boys were following me, and we were fooling around, and by the time we stopped, we went into a café to have Cokes, and all of a sudden my daddy appeared and he said, "Susanne, go home." And Susanne went home. That's all he said. And the (inaudible), and my daddy said, "William, go get your daughter." And so he did. I always said when I was running for City Council that if I had been raised in San Jose, I would have had a record and wouldn't have been elected -- but he was pretty much that kind of person. But my mother, in so many ways, influenced me. I'll never forget the time she told me, and I was in the job at the time, but she had three pieces of advice for me. The first, which was very telling: never let a man put you on a farm. My daddy had put her on a farm. The second was, never learn how to kill a chicken, because you wring their neck and then they flop around the yard and then you have to pluck them and all this stuff, so she didn't want me to do that. And the third thing she said to me was, never have a fourth child, this is when I'd disobey -- because the fourth one wears you out. But she was also a teacher who had a student who failed every algebra test -- she was an algebra teacher -- she'd been a first grade teacher, a science teacher, an algebra teacher -- she could do anything. And she worked to get her Master's, and she started out with a two-year teaching certificate in 1920 and came to Dallas from York, Texas -- and so that she really was so influential with the students, and I did all of the grading in the algebra class. And I also made 100, I had to, because she would have killed me if I hadn't on all of the tests because I was good in math, too. And [Dora Dean?] had failed every test. So, at the end of the semester, she gave Dora Dean a "D" and I said mother, "Why did you do that? She didn't pass a single test." And mother always had such high standards for her students, and she said, "You know, Dora Dean will be the first child in her family to graduate from high school, and why should algebra keep her from getting that certificate? She'll never need it. And she is a farm girl." Her whole name was Dora Dean Wainwright. With a name like that -- but you know, with that high school degree, she went into the Army and she became a very successful person, and my mother recognized the worth of her and what it would mean to her family. And it wasn't about algebra.

### **Moon:**

That's a great story. Now, was your mother also engaged in political organizations at all?

**Wilson:**

No. Gonzalez was (inaudible).

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

We didn't think in politics. When the governor came through, and my mother got a picture in the paper shaking his hand, and never thought about politics. And yet, when I recollected, when finally somebody said to me, was anybody in your family in politics, and this was early on, and I started realizing -- my Uncle Robert had been an elected county clerk from the time he was a young man until the time he died. And I didn't think of that as politics. Yet, we'd go down on election night and sit on cars while they put the results on the chalkboard over at Michaelson's Café, and we'd sit there and watch the results come in -- Uncle Robert, my daddy's brother, got elected again.

[01-00:20:00]

**Moon:**

So, there was a tradition of voting, even back then?

**Wilson:**

There was a tradition of voting.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

Very much a tradition of -- Roosevelt was the king, and everybody -- my daddy worked for the WTA because that was the only job he could get.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And he made enough money to feed us. He made enough money to buy us cigarettes.

**Moon:**

So, did your mother teach all of the years that you grew -- from the point where you were a young child until you left the house?

**Wilson:**

Yes. She started out -- she started her -- when she first started wanting to be a teacher, she'd work a semester and made enough money. She graduated 1915 from high school. She worked a semester and then had enough money to go to school for a semester. And then she'd work a semester and go to school a semester. And she was in the 1918 flu epidemic and missed all of that semester, and in 1920, she got in her two years, and she [was done?] so she could teach. Then she married, had four children, and by the time I was five years old, she went back to teaching the youngest. And she and the teacher -- the other teachers -- would go to San Marcos, which was the teacher's college, which was 35 miles away -- and every Saturday they'd go and take classes, and in the summertime they'd go every day for six weeks. And by that time, 1936, I was 8, and I'd go with her sometimes, over there. And in 1936, '38, I wrote poems for her education

thesis, for her degree. And I said -- I still have them somewhere in my scrapbooks. And then she went on to get her Master's, but she was always independent, and I think I get a lot of my independence from her -- such as when she worked -- when you were 65 in Texas you had to retire. And Mr. [Attleboro?] was the superintendent, and mother retired at 64, because she was not going to have Mr. [Attleboro?] tell her to quit teaching. She said, that just gives you -- she was a woman who communicated well with me, and her influence was great -- later in life, I would recognize, you know, this case, but not at the time, I just thought she was my mother.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And the only thing I knew was that I would never be a teacher because it was too hard of work.

**Moon:**

So, when you were -- looking back at your early history and reading some of the articles that have been published in the newspapers, you know, on your life here in San Jose, you seem to always mention your affiliation with the Methodist Church.

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

So, you were raised as a Methodist, I assume. So, could you just talk about how the church might have influenced some of your community activism, and were they part of -- did they inspire you or encourage you to go into politics at the beginning?

**Wilson:**

No. But I was youth director, and always was. I started working with the youth when my babies were very young, and I soon became involved as youth counselor at the Methodist Church in San Antonio. And in San Antonio, I was also a member of the Bluebirds, which we originated in that church, which was a cancer society that raised money to work on the problems of cancer and to have people able to get cancer operations. So, we thought -- that was back in 1952/53-58, along in there. And I worked in the Women's Society of Christian Service. And I was very well versed in the Bible, both the New and the Old Testament, and early on, when I first started teaching youth and started teaching and (inaudible), I decided that Paul, I did not like at all. I thought that his ideas about women were terrible, and that I just thought -- well, he didn't know what he was talking about.

**Moon:**

I thought the same thing.

**Wilson:**

And then there was a woman who was a teacher and she taught a course on Paul and she thought Paul was the most wonderful man in the world and she talked about all these good things that he did, and I thought, well, maybe I'm wrong. And then I re-read it all and I said, no, I wasn't wrong. So, the church was very much a part of my life in terms of the Women's Society of Christian Service. It was a Methodist -- the WSCS -- and it was always a teaching -- it was a society, not just to have coffee and tea, but we always had projects and studied the world. We studied the needs of the world, and it was organized so that you would have a whole series on Africa, in particular nations [in need] in that country, so it was giving you a global viewpoint on the needs of the world. And the Methodist Church has always been a very social conscious

organization, and so that I worked with that, and of course, working with kids, I was always on the forefront of a lot of different issues. And the (inaudible) movement was -- the Methodist Church youth group was over in (inaudible) and we integrated before 64. We were trying our best to meeting the needs of all those who were Methodist, and I was one of the head counselors there for that. So, that was when I came into contact with the politics of racism, and the politics of race at the YWCA. At the same time, in '62, I became involved in politics and racism, and in understanding what was happening. There was one event before that when I was a young bride that made a deep impression on me, and I realized how little I knew was -- when I was coming back from visiting my mother after my father had died, and I was on the train, and it was north of Virginia, and I was en route to Chicago, and in Chicago, the train came down through (inaudible) and through Arkansas and into San Antonio and I got off there. So, that train trip -- as you were getting on the train in Chicago, I started talking to this woman who was back at the back. We all had seats, and everyone was pushing and shoving, and I said it was so foolish to push and shove. We've got seats. And it's all (inaudible) here. And she said yes. She was a teacher and she was going back to Chicago. She was getting her Master's -- working on her Master's. So, we chatted -- we became fast friends and we talked about education and my mother who was a teacher, et cetera, et cetera -- and then all of a sudden, she disappeared, and I couldn't -- I thought, what did I say to offend her because I didn't see her again when we got off and changed trains in [Tutichana?]. She got off in [Tutichana?]. And I said, oh, there you are. Did I say something to offend you because you disappeared on me? And she said, we crossed the Mason-Dixon Line. She was black and I was white, and the Mason-Dixon line, a lot of people don't know what that is.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

It was where blacks could no longer sit in the same car and had to go to the black car, or the Negro car at the time. And here she was -- a very well educated woman who had to get up and leave and go to the second class. And what shocked me so was that I knew so little, and I realized for the first time how little I knew about what was happening in the world.

**Moon:**

And what time period was that when you realized?

**Wilson:**

I was 20.

**Moon:**

You were only 20. OK.

**Wilson:**

When I was married.

**Moon:**

OK. Now, after you got back, once you and your husband came to San Jose and you started working on some of these projects that were looking at racism and trying to address integration and some of these other issues -- how did -- did your family, back home, have a sense of your activism in San Jose? And how did they -- how did you navigate between the old world of the South, versus coming to the West and really, um, also having a philosophy that was totally different from some of your family member?

**Wilson:**

I'll tell you two stories. I'm a storyteller as you know. When we got really involved in preparing for the 1970 Convention of the YWCA, that was the first time that we were going to have a convention -- we had a convention every three years -- but it was the first time we were going to have a convention below the Mason-Dixon line, because we always went north because we would be in the same hotel, so we wouldn't go south. And so in Boston, in '67, we voted to go to Houston, and I was the president of the Y when we voted, and I was still president -- I was president for three years -- first time anybody had been president for three years of the Y. And so that was when we voted -- and we were starting to work on racism, so in preparation for that convention, the black members --

[01- 00:30:00]

**Wilson:**

-- of the YWCA, really started banding together because they had an agenda, and they wanted white women to buy into that agenda, so they started legislating. They believed that they needed to meet before the convention as a group of the black YWCA members. And many of the older members -- and what we've always been together -- we've always done everything together. We stood by you, and we will still stand by you, and they didn't seem to understand that they needed to get their stuff together. And it wasn't -- they were trying to say that they didn't want to be separate -- and we wanted to meet so we would know how to be together with you on the issues that were important to us. And so we were having this national, racial institutes. And we met in Paolo Alto to try to solve this problem. They wanted money, but there was no money to do it because we barely had enough money for their own convention. And then also, what would we do? Would we split the Y apart and make it a black Y and a white Y -- that would be very separate. And I was the president of the Y, and I was in charge of looking at how it would be financed, and that we should just vote to do it. And it was the very first institute to meet for this, to discuss this issue, and so I was chairing the financial part of it. So, and I was -- I was on other different communities that would vote as to whether to allow it. And I Was very strong about it myself -- yes, they need to meet. And yes, you need to support them on it, because they're going to be with us if we're with them. And that's how it worked. And there were several speakers who were very powerful in the black community. And then the issue was -- I was voting to do it, and then I came up with a -- "Well, how will we fund it?" And I said, well, all the locals will have to fund it. And I pledged that my YWCA would give \$100 for them to be able to go, which was a lot of money then, to have that separate convocation. So, we reported it out, and I made that pledge to the group and we got the vote for them to meet, and we also voted that each of the organizations would send money for them to be able to do that. And then I had to come back home and get the YWCA here to support me. Otherwise, I would be out of a job. I did it without any authorization.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And I was always (inaudible), and we voted, and my local Y voted to give them \$100 so they could have that convocation. And Betty Baldwin, who was a nurse who was on the board -- and part of my --

**Moon:**

Betty Baldwin?

**Wilson:**

Betty Baldwin. As part of my -- was the treasurer, and I said we're going to be one-third minority on this board, and I went out to find people who could be the -- minority and women's rights were the two issues that I impacted. And Betty Baldwin was a nurse who was on the board. I had gotten her on the board because I knew her slightly from -- she was a school nurse from over here close by. And I had gotten to



know her through the (inaudible), and was with her there for -- I taught sewing over at the Methodist Church. So, Betty Baldwin was from Gonzalez.

**Moon:**

Was she black, then?

**Wilson:**

Yes. Yes. Excuse me.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

She was from Gonzalez. But I didn't know her.

**Moon:**

Oh my goodness.

**Wilson:**

Because we lived in two different worlds. She lived out in the country, but oh, she knew as much about Gonzalez as I did. But we had never met. We were almost practically the same ladies, but we lived in different worlds. And that's the way the world was in Texas. And so -- the other way that I recruited people for the board -- I was on the United Way for one of their drives to raise money and I was on that board, and the [MARXA?] was picketing outside the United Way, and I got through the picket line, and there was a nomination committee meeting at [Cambridge?] Center, at I was there on the committee for nominating members of the board. And I was saying that I was still trying to get one-third minority and we didn't have any Hispanic. And we'd been discussing that, and the usual remarks were -- they're too busy at home. We can't get them to participate in the YWCA because they're busy with their children, they don't like to come to meetings -- so, I walked through a picket line of all Mexican-American women, and I walked straight into the building and called the [Cambridge?] Center and said to Lois, --"Lois, forget all that stuff about (inaudible). We're not being very relevant, which is why we don't have any women on the board. They're out there picketing right now because they're very interested in the politics of what's happening to the United Way and the funding." And lots of them were there because we weren't meeting all of the criteria, and she said, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to go out there and meet two of them and get them to join the board." And I did. And they became -- eventually those two people, we three people, because very important in my campaign because by the time it was -- and another one, Yvonne Stanley, whose husband was getting a doctorate at Stanford University and she was on the board, so I was doing -- I didn't know it at the time -- but I was building a coterie of women supporters and I was building it from all the total committee, not just the AAMW -- but from the communities of color.

**Moon:**

And Yvonne was --

**Wilson:**

Black.

**Moon:**

Black. And what was her last name?

**Wilson:**

Stanley. And Rosa Mera, who was a -- worked for the Department at California Extension Service, was one of the women who I got off of that picket line. So, we went to the convention and Betty Baldwin was -- who had become my friend -- and so my sister, who was trying to keep herself from being a racist, and who was seven years older than I am -- and she called her to tell her about the convention, and she knew what I was doing, and she knew of my work with the YWCA and work with women, and I was talking about Betty Baldwin, and she said, "Do you know what the Methodist Church is doing?" And I said, no, I don't. They have in the latest materials, they have this black family eating bacon and eggs, and you know they don't eat that for breakfast. It's just propaganda. And I said, well, Maureen, do you think you want to have the black Negroes in the Methodist Church, and she said, yeah, and I said, well, don't you think that if you want them to read the materials of the Methodist Church, they'll have to see their own faces in there? Oh. Well, I don't like it. And I said -- I said, well, we're here, and I just want you to know that Betty Baldwin is my roommate, and in fact she sleeps with me, and she said, I guess you're going to tell me that she's black, and I said, yes, she is, and she said to me, well, you can do that all you want, but you're not going to get me to sleep with her. And I said, I never asked you, to, Maureen. And I said, you're a different person than I am.

**Moon:**

And was she also a member of the YWCA, your sister?

**Wilson:**

No. She was in a small town --

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

And she works in Texas City, and then they moved to the country of Texas, and her husband was more racist than she was. But, she -- about three months after that conversation, she called me one day and started to tell me this story. And she said, I was at work, and this woman came up behind me and put her hands on me, and said guess who. And I guessed all these different people of who it was, and finally I took her hands away, and it was my black friend. And you know, when my eyes were closed, I couldn't tell the difference. And she was telling me, she understood a little bit, of what it was.

**Moon:**

So, you know, it takes some people longer --

**Wilson:**

Longer. And it sounded like she was proud of me. And then I did the same thing, but differently, to my mother, with Betty Baldwin, because Betty was going to have to have an operation, and she had three, beautiful little children. And so her family lived in Corpus Christi, and the brother was going to take care of the children, and her mother was going to be with her. And I said, well, I'm going to Texas. I'll take them to San Antonio. My brother worked for (inaudible). So, I put these three black children -- they were like this and this and this -- on the plane with me, and she -- her brother had gotten three tickets for them, too, so that helped -- and I didn't -- my mother was going to meet me. I didn't tell her. I told her I was bringing three children, my friend's children, and her brother would pick them up. And I didn't tell her anything else. I didn't say what color she was or anything. And in there, while I was riding on the plane, I could see this woman across the aisle, she looked at me and here was one on each side of me, two little girls, and the boy was in front of me, and she looked and looked and I knew she was trying to figure it out -- what was this white woman doing with those three black children?

**Wilson:**

-- and going into Texas. And finally, as we got up to leave, she said, all the children, they're so well believed. And I said, yes they are, aren't they. And she said, are they ---- in your care? [laughter.] And so I said, yes they are. And she didn't say another word. That was it. I walked out of the plane with those three children and there was my mother waiting for me, and I introduced her to the children, and she being a lady, she was just fine. And also, her brother was there, to meet the plane. And he was a tall, good-looking man in uniform, and very nice looking, and I introduced them, and I met him, and so I gave the children off to him, and from the time that we walked from -- from getting off the plane to picking up our luggage, my mother had rationalized in her head that the black people of California are so different. I didn't have the heart to tell her that they were from Gonzalez. I had given her enough shock for one day.

**Moon:**

Yeah. Probably so.

**Wilson:**

But that was what I dealt with in my family.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

That's where I was, and they had to accept that this is what I do.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And my brothers -- when my youngest boy, who graduated from San Jose State, with hair down -- he was a hippie -- with hair down to his waistline, I wouldn't let him go to Texas because I knew that my brothers would just rag on him, so that summer we left him back working in a job because he just -- I didn't want him to be picked on like that.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

So I just made sure to leave him back. And I told my brothers -- you wouldn't have liked him. You would have said something ugly to him, and I wasn't going to have him -- I wasn't going to subject him to that. But that's how I fought my battles.

**Moon:**

That's a really great story about the whole picture of your family and then relating it back to your, you know, experiences going back with these different people who certainly don't fit into that framework.

**Wilson:**

No.

**Moon:**

Looking -- jumping a little bit off the plan back -- can you kind of talk a little bit about how it is you went from the YWCA to actually entering politics, and what were the -- what were the influences that led you in that direction?

**Wilson:**

There was one influence that did -- and two events that happened. The first event was the YWCA was once more talking about this particular camp off of Lake Michigan in the woods around the -- and I guess it was, what was the state, Ohio, I guess, because Chicago was on one side, and they were on the opposite side of the lake, and different states. And it was a stormy night and there was this fiery speaker who was just a college graduate. Her name was Pepper Schwartz, who became a very famous (inaudible) in the 60s and she's written books and you might have heard of her, and she was speaking, and I was sitting there, and here she was, she was this firebrand and she was just so passionate about the rights of women and about the liberation of women and equal rights for women and I sat there and I said -- and this was before my birthday so I was still 43 -- and I said, here I am, I'm 43 years old, and I've never risked anything really. I've never stepped out and done anything. I need to risk more. And that was on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 1972, and I got home, and on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 1972, I got a call from a woman who said they were looking for a woman to run for city council. [Dan Green?] was on the council, and [they had told Dan?] that he could have one woman on the council, that it was all right, but they did not like the first woman -- Schafer -- Virginia Schafer -- and so -- but [Dan Green?] said I need someone else on this council, and people started looking and Walt Hayes, who had retired from seat five -- so I got a call from Gerry Steinberg, who I knew, and because her husband was the architect of the YWCA, and we were planning our new building, and she asked my advice about going on the planning commission for the county, and I said she ought to go for it because she was so articulate and she had these definite ideas about planning, and I was at dinner at her house one time, so we were close enough to help each other, and she called me, and said -- actually, Pat called me who was a friend of hers, and said, Gerry Steinberg asked me to call you and talk to you about running for the city council, and she said, don't make a decision now, but would you think about it, and --

**Moon:**

And what was Pat's last name?

**Wilson:**

Shelton.

**Moon:**

Shelton. OK.

**Wilson:**

And I had met Pat, and I said immediately, yes I will.

**Moon:**

Now, were they --

**Wilson:**

And that's because I had decided I needed to do something more than to be on the board, and I had come to the realization that you had to make policy in order to change the system.

**Moon:**

Now, was Pat representing a particular organization?

**Wilson:**

Yes. She was representing the Committee for Green Hills and for Conservation/Environmentalists.

**Moon:**

So, the environmental and neighborhood communities or --

**Wilson:**

Just environmental.

**Moon:**

Just environmental. OK.

**Wilson:**

The Committee for Green Foot Hills -- which was to save all of the foot hills -- when they came around to start talking about it, I said yes, I'll think about it. And [Chris?] had asked me, have you thought about being in politics and I said no. I've had men in the church say that I have such good common sense I ought to be on the council, that I make more sense than a bunch of them, but I never paid much attention to them. I've been (inaudible) all of my life, so there were people who saw in me -- and obviously a group of them who saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. They saw strength. They saw -- and she said I'd belong there because I have values. And she was my best friend. So, I said yes. And I sat there at the table and said I'd be interested. And I said to my family, guess what happened to me today? I got asked to run for the city council. And so we discussed -- what do you think about it? So, my three sons and my husband sat around the table and the consensus was -- well, if that's what you want to do, we'll do it. And Bill, I'll tell you, he said, yeah, if you do it, there are more Wilsons in the phone book than anyone else. You can win.

[laughter]

**Wilson:**

So, they finally said, if you want to do it, do it. So, that began discussions and there was a lunch with Walter Hayes, and we were at the Pruneyard at (inaudible), and there were all these people with potential for wanting to take his place. There was a [Jim Sells?] and there was a representative from the League of Women Voters, and there was the ALUW woman, and so all these people and normally there was a representative from East Stanton, and they were having a state confab, and I didn't know any of them. I just wasn't in that circle. And they asked me who I know, and I said, I didn't know who I knew, and that was one big part of it, which later on, in the campaign -- we walked outside the restaurant, and Walter was about 6'2" and I stood up and was sort of looking at him, and we started talking, and I said, you know -- and he was very much an environmentalist -- and I said, you know --

**Moon:**

He was an environmentalist?

**Wilson:**

Uh-huh. And on the council as an environmentalist. And I said to him, you know, what I'm really interested in is opening up the system to women and minorities. I said, it just -- we need to bust open that system and give them a level playing field. And that's where I really got off. I said, I'm a conservationist. If you want to save a hill for the hill's sake, I'm not that person. But if you want to save that hill for people to enjoy, then I'm a conservationist. But I'm not going to just forget people. And he looked down at me and he said, I'm going to support you. And I nearly flipped because here I was telling him all the things that I -- and I thought he was looking for a different kind of person, and I said, these are the things that are important to me. I want to change the system. And so he said, I'll back you. And he supported me. And he started sending me out to meet people.

**Moon:**

So, in reflection on that first campaign, do you recall who you were competing against for that, or --

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

-- or was it a difficult sort of campaign process?

**Wilson:**

Would you believe that there were seven [councilors?], that there were seats, and I was seat five, that was the seat I was running for, and there were 20 candidates?

**Moon:**

Oh my goodness.

**Wilson:**

The first crack out of the barrel was an article that is over there. Susie Who?

**Moon:**

I saw that headline, actually.

**Wilson:**

Yeah. Susie Who? And I -- what happened was that people didn't know me in the political world, but in the world of the community, lots of people knew me.

[01 – 00:50:00]

**Moon:**

Right. Through the YWCA and through all of the work you'd been doing.

**Wilson:**

Through the youth -- I used to teach adults how to work with youth, in every Methodist Church in this valley. So, I'd hold classes. I'd been a counselor, and I had taught children to sew. And I knew their mothers. And I didn't know that I knew their grandfathers, and I walked into one man's office -- Mr. Fox, and he ran a very wealthy company -- and there was Mr. Fox, and I said, "Hello, there. How are you?" And he was the grandfather of three girls who I had taught to sew. And he said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm running for city council." And he said, "Well, if you can teach my granddaughters to sew, you can do anything. I'll support you." And I asked for \$100 and got it.

**Moon:**

That's a great story, because I don't think that a lot of the other women who were running at that early time period necessarily had the same kind of community activism that maybe you had experienced. I'm not sure. I don't know. I will be talking to Janet Grey about her experiences, and I'll be curious to see what she felt about it.

**Wilson:**

She was in the League of Women's Voters.

**Moon:**

She was involved in more of the organization than --

**Wilson:**

She was. She was also on the Redevelopment Agency.

**Moon:**

Right. And she had some additional connections.

**Wilson:**

She had all of those.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And in fact, when I was running, there was one person, Earl Crandall, the superintendent of schools, who I met through this committee. He said, "Well, I think you should start with the school board." And I said, I'm not interested in the school board. I said, that isn't what I want to do. And he said, well, don't let it bother you, but you should probably start with the school board. So, people kept that approach, and Walter created a lunch for me with all of these -- 15 men -- and so, they said to me, what makes you think you want to be on the city council and why are you doing this, and I said, you know, I guess I just have a question for you. I said, a lot of you have been to the city council, haven't you? And they said, yes. And I said, "Well, what makes you think that you want to continue with six men instead of another woman when I can do the job too?" I've always been quick to throw things back at people. And so -- Walter opened doors for me and I walked through them. And that's -- and I had to -- people had to be either committed to me or not at the time because I'd ask them. I was always willing to close a deal. I was willing to ask for the money. And that was not the experience of most women. And I didn't experience it in high school because I saw the edge for the first year after World War II, and I asked, and people didn't turn me down.

**Moon:**

So, you were a born salesman?

**Wilson:**

I was just born, you know. I have this article in my scrapbook from when I was in the girl scouts one summer and we shined shoes to raise money for something and the article was about shining shoes for ten cents a shoe shine, and I raised \$2.60 -- it was the most of any of the girls -- because I asked very nice people to shine their shoes.

**Moon:**

Well, once you got onto -- once you were elected and you were serving with Janet Grey, right, when you first went into the City Council --

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

-- what was that like and what sort of issues were you committed to supporting and what kind of -- and on the other side of that, what kind of discriminations did you face along with Janet working with the kind of good old boy network that was part of the politics?

**Wilson:**

Janet Grey and I had very different styles. And she was really [good at?] telling voters that this was policy and this was how you do things, and I remember one time we had an interview together with her partner, and she explained how she evaluated and she said I'm a League of Women Voters and I look at the issue and I just find the pros over here, and I find the cons over here, and I make what I hope is a wise decision. And I looked at her and said, that's not the way I do it, and a reporter joined in and I said, I have a commitment to certain things and they've got to fit into what my core values are. I'd like to open up the system for women and minorities, and so my position coming first is -- does it meet the core values that I have. So, I wasn't going to go and evaluate things. I had to decide if this was something that I was interested in and if it was where I was interested in going. And I just read an article in that scrapbook over there that I was telling you about that I had forgotten until you read through those things -- we were forming an affirmative action committee and the City Council -- and the article said I raised an issue -- and I thought -- there were nine men and one woman, and then there were seven men and three women, and I said, I thought we were going to do half and half, that we were going to have five men and four women. And what happened? Well, everybody started talking and nobody could make a decision about it, and finally, though, we sent it out to committee, but somewhere or another it came back and they had five men and four women and the tenth seat -- or the ninth seat -- and I guess there was a tenth seat -- and they couldn't decide whether or not it should be for a gay person, and they couldn't decide whether it should be for a male or a female. That was in an article in the paper. So, I pushed the issue. I pushed the issue. I pushed the envelope, and I said, this isn't what we agreed to, and I was willing to say it from the podium. And they created changes. I also -- I joined that affirmative action committee, but I also chaired the committee that evaluated the equity issue of the city council.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

I did that at county, too.

**Moon:**

All right.

**Wilson:**

And --

**Moon:**

Prior to the big strikes of the 80s?

**Wilson:**

Yes. And so, that was something that I -- I just did it. That's something we should do. That's the way we should do it. Why don't we look at it and study it and see what we come up with. My style was also different from Janet Grey in that I could get people to go along with me. And she'd get -- she was good, as mayor, and I admired her, but she and Joe [Kola?] had a feud going, and Joe [Kola?] never believed in her federal project at all, and I was the chair of the CBDG committee and I had gotten on the first day I was in office, I was sitting in the office next to Joe Kola's and Joe Kola hated Janet Grey and Janet Grey hated him and so --

**Moon:**

Was this when she was a councilmember?



**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

And so I walked into this office and sat down, and Janet Grey also did not like his secretary I found out later, too, and I sat down and I was talking to them both -- very nice people -- and about this time, Janet Grey came walking down the hall and she said, Susie, what are you doing in his office? And I said, I'm visiting. And she said, well, I need to talk to you. OK. So I go in there and she said, he's a [hollow?] man. He does this, that, and the other. And he curses at the city council, and he does these things, and he's always mean to me, and I said, oh, OK. And we went along. And one night she said to Joe, "Joe, you don't curse anymore. You don't use bad language anymore." He said, "No. We have a lady on the council now."

[laughter]

**Moon:**

So how would you describe your relationship with Janet? Did you have -- was it a friendly relationship?

**Wilson:**

We conferenced in the women's bathroom. That was our caucus room. And when we needed to work on an issue, and it wasn't going -- I'd ask for a break -- and we'd go to the bathroom which was the only place -- they had to put in a bathroom when she came on the council, and when I came on the council, they really had to do a bathroom for us.

**Moon:**

Oh. OK.

**Wilson:**

And we'd talk in the bathroom and we'd discuss the issues and how we would get the vote and what we needed to do. So we were very, very congenial. And she supported me when I ran. So that it was a friendly -- a very friendly time. I was her vice mayor --

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

-- for the two years.

**Moon:**

How come you didn't run for mayor after Janet left office? Had you thought -- had you considered running for mayor?

**Wilson:**

No. I never did.

**Moon:**

No?

**Wilson:**

At the end of my second term -- and they were four-year terms -- and I was in my second term, and I was really tired of learning these issues, and I wanted to deal with people's lives. I was very much more involved with the social policies. I did change the city council -- I helped create some really great changes for women and minorities. One of them was dealing with the YWCA and the rape crisis council.

[01 – 00:60:00]

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

I might have told you that story.

**Moon:**

Why don't you tell it again? I think that's a good story to tell.

**Wilson:**

I think it was in 1974 -- right around '73, '74 -- the Y had started a rape crisis center -- and they had hit a stone wall with Chief Murphy. They wanted to train their officers to do that. The (inaudible) PD and women who had been raped more than any other station in the county. They had a horrible reputation and the horrible things they said -- you know, well, you asked for it, you wore that short skirt -- those kinds of things. So, the councilor Jackie McClure could not get to first base with Chief Murphy, couldn't even get in the door. So they came to me and they told me and I said, sure I can get you in. And I picked up the phone and I called Chief Murphy and the power -- you have to talk about power and I understood the use of power. I always did use the power of the seat. And I picked up the phone and I called Chief Murphy and I said, I'd like to have you meet this person and talk with her. OK. Sure. When do you want to do it. And I said, sure, when do you want to do it. And I said, what about next week. And so and so and so and so -- and he checked his appointment and he said, well, who should I bring -- I said bring whoever is involved with the courses you take, your training. OK. I'll bring the assistant who is in charge of all the training. And I said good. So, we had a meeting and Jackie brought a young woman who had been raped and who had been handled by their PD, and she said she was trembling, so she didn't think she would ever be able to tell her stories, to tell it to the authorities who had treated her so horribly, who had been so frightening to her. But she did. And at the end of her story, when she told about how she had been treated as a young woman, when she had been raped, [the officer who did the training?] said, well, what do you want me to do. And she said, I want to train your officers. I want them to carry the card of the YWCA that you can call this number and we will meet you at the hospital so we can help you, help these young women, go through the ordeal. And we'll provide them with clothes because their clothes get left at the hospital and they have to leave the hospital with no clothes of their own, and we'll provide them with clothes. And she said, we want to train your officers. And he said, all right. And he turned to his assistant and set him straight. And that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been there.

**Moon:**

Isn't that interesting? So, you really had a great influence on actually creating that policy --

**Wilson:**

That's right.

**Moon:**

And then also implementing it. And as I understand it, the Y still has, you know, offers that same service --

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

Right. So, it's been a long-term project.

**Wilson:**

563 times last year (inaudible) went to the hospital -- men and the children -- and we helped the child assault team's start at the Valley Hospital. There was always somebody who would come, and actually, our whole counseling program started from that because so many of the women gained confidence, and as they deteriorated in there because of the past. I mean, we needed to -- some of them were falling apart at the seams and they would call the Y and we started a whole counseling program, that -- there was this family counseling. And it's not that there are more rapes, it's not tolerated today.

**Moon:**

Right. Now, on the council, when you were working this through with your conventions, and you know, holding that seat -- was there a debate in the city council over any of the issues related to it?

**Wilson:**

No.

**Moon:**

So that was never raised as a policy sort of problem in the city, but it was something that you did on a more personal level in trying to change policy within the department of the police.

**Wilson:**

Right. And then there was one other that was very significant, which was the police department. I had an assistant police officer call me, and we met with three of them, and actually it was the wife of the police chief -- I can't recall his name. I'll have to think about that. -- But she called me and wanted to have lunch with me. And I was on the council, and she was talking about the fact is -- before the whole rights of women and the competing for jobs, the assistant police women went on patrol, they went out in cars, they were out in the community. As soon as the whole issue of women becoming police officers and not assistant police women because they were paid less doing the same job -- permanent side of the city of San Jose, and gave them desk jobs so they were no longer in danger and didn't need to be police officers. And peace officers, I think, was what the official title is. So, they were pushing for that. And as they were telling me their story -- there were three of them -- and they told me that they had notes left on their desks and in their lockers -- Bitches. Troublemakers -- all kinds of names. Barbed-wire women. And using the F word. And all that stuff hitting at them for daring to even ask and trying for it. And they had gone to the city council and the question to me was, can we get four votes from the city council. And I told her no. There were only three that were willing to do this. Chief Murphy was the same chief, and we discussed it in council in executive session, and I guess you would say at the time -- you know, these women who are trying to get to be police officers, they're not, they're not capable because they're not qualified. And we don't want them because one of them is (inaudible) nervous breakdown and the other one is too fat and all of these reasons why they shouldn't be police officers, so, no, he'd never support it. And so there were four votes that would never support it. There were three -- I could only the three that we'd ever get -- and so they asked my advice. Should they sue? And I said, you know, you have to make that decision yourself. I can only tell you what I've gleamed from what I know -- you can't get it from the city council. The city council could have ordered it, but they [didn't.] And the only thing I can tell you is right now you are being ostracized, you are being hit

on, you are being -- terrible things are happening to you -- and if you file a lawsuit, the result would be that you would be ostracized, you'll be called bitch, you'll be called all these horrible names -- but you'd be a police officer. And so you have to make that decision.

**Moon:**

So, did they file a lawsuit?

**Wilson:**

Yes, they did. And they won it.

**Moon:**

Good for them.

**Wilson:**

And you see, Murphy came to us complaining, and I said to him in regular session, look it, you had your chance, and if you had gone ahead with a policy, your policy would have been that they would have had to be on assignment, they would have to be to another class, and you could have weeded out the ones that you didn't really believe would fit because you knew there was a whole bunch of them that did fit. So, you've got them all, so you can just live with them.

[laughter]

**Wilson:**

And so that was a policy. And another thing was, at the same time, we had some killing -- there was a black IBM engineer that was killed by the police, and then there was another one -- I think it was Danny [Young?] who was killed unarmed in a car -- and he was killed by PD.

**Moon:**

And was he black?

**Wilson:**

He was brown. He was Hispanic.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

(inaudible). And the community really rose up to the city council and they wanted us to condemn the police officer. And at the time, you know, I said, no. He's got -- he has his -- he will go through the process. When it came my time to argue the situation, I said, you have to be fair to him and to make sure that all of that is done according to law and that his story can be substantiated. I can't tell you if he's right or wrong at this time because we don't know enough. I said, I won't do that. But I will support creating a committee for us to examine the police department to see if there really is racism there, and to see if there really is mistreatment -- and the mayor said that that's to be supported and (inaudible) was still there, and he said, yes, we'll do this. And he made Al [Garza?] as the chair of that committee. And from the communities down there, from all the Hispanics, they said, put Susie Wilson on that committee too. They trusted me. The community trusted me. And I'm proud of that. And I did go on that committee, and eventually the officer was -- he was really a racist kind of thing that was happening, and there was some real aftermath, but at least the community had got, and it amounted to, is that I had paid my dues --

**Wilson:**

-- into the community, and had got to know the community, and they supported me and they found that I wasn't lacking.

**Moon:**

What did you think were some of your greatest accomplishments working on the city council?

**Wilson:**

People always ask that, and it's the -- one is a childcare center, the Alma Child Care Center. I was the chair of the CDBG, and that was an area that people were saying -- what do you want to put a childcare center there? That whole area is going to be torn down in 15 years because it's nothing but a slum. And of course, the houses are still there 25 years later.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And the childcare center is still there. We did have enough money for it, so as the chair as the CDBG, I could continue it for two years. It needed a third year, and I got it from the council. I could get my votes from it, and it was a federal program, and one of my votes that everyone was astonished at was Joe [Kola?] because he had never voted yes on a federal program, but the minute he voted yes, he came to me with a project. He had been trying his best to get a Filipino Community Center, and he couldn't get it to go through the council; couldn't get anybody interested in it. And I said, let me look at it because the Filipinos [have been good to me?], and I got it into the CDBG program. And so he gave for that whole program that year, and Janet Grey said, Joe, you've never voted for a federal program in your whole life, in your whole tenure, and he said well, this one's a good one, and I'm going to vote for it. And it was because his project was one that he had been trying to get through for years. So my accomplishments were, as I think I told you, it was to change the system for women who were raped. It was to change the system of the police officers. It was pay equity. And it was the centers and the projects that I got. It was chairing the CDBG, which I didn't know anything about, and Norma (inaudible) used to be the chair of it, the entire eight years I was on the council, and then the six years, and then over at county, when I was chair of it over there. But, what it did was it got a street paved on the east side that they had been trying for years to get paved. And they were trying to, through the CDBG, trying to get the homeowners to get low-income loans to fix up their houses. And I went over there and they were in decline. And I said, well, no wonder they're not. They've got a mud puddle out in front of their street because it's all gravel. And why fix up your home if by the time you get into your house you're late. We've got to fix up this street if we want them to take out low-cost loans. And I got it done. And it's things like that --

**Moon:**

You were also involved in a lot of low-income housing issues --

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

-- right. So, can you talk -- is there anything that you wanted to say about the work that you did on low-income housing, or was that more at the Board of Supervisors level?

**Wilson:**

Well, it started at the city because there was a [CHAFA?], which is the stage agency.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

They weren't really [into CHAPA?]. They set up my appointment, and by the time, I think -- I believe that either right at the end of my tenure as a council member, and by that time, they'd gone through -- George [Rally?] had gone through three different directors, through the block grant program. Defense Department, Transportation, and Community Housing is what he was -- community development.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And the third one, and they'd been trying in different ways to get me appointed, so finally Alan Stein was appointed to the Department of Transportation, so they'd gone through, and here was somebody who had been pushing on him to get me appointed, so he called and had a meeting and he was -- he worked in San Francisco. He had a company in San Francisco -- a finance company and so forth. So, I went out there and met up with him, and I went up there, and he looked at my resume and he said, you know, you're so busy, you know, with all these different things you've done -- and yes, it was pretty thick -- and he says, do you think you're going to make the meetings? And I said, well, I'm here aren't I? And he hired me.

**Moon:**

Oh. OK.

**Wilson:**

Through that, then, I worked with (inaudible), and he and I were always renegades. We were always pushing for the handicaps and we were the only two on the committee who would push it through and then when Alan Stein of the San Francisco Foundation created a \$600,000 to do something about low-income housing, and we could not make it into a report to put it on the shelf. And Alan Stein asked me to be on that.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

So, I helped Alan Bridge and I've been a member of that since it's founding. And it's been 24 years now.

**Moon:**

Wow. This is kind of just a backwards sort of question to this, I am also doing this university oral history project and Benton Wright, who was the ombudsman for San Jose State -- when they created the ombudsman because of all the racial conflict that they were having on campus in that time period in the 70s. He was saying that one of the things -- the biggest challenges for black students, especially those coming to San Jose State, was that there wasn't any available housing, so his job was to try and find a relationship that could be built with communities who were actually providing the housing, because they didn't really have housing to speak of in that time period. So, what they did is that they went to different apartment complexes and made deals so that they could house the students, and I guess they had a real problem with the black students coming in because of all the racial covenants that were on the sort of housing sort of industry, so did you --

when you came to San Jose, or when you were involved in any of this low-income housing, did you ever encounter any issues related to that, either to the university or have knowledge of what was going on?

**Wilson:**

We did do -- it was a (inaudible), and I can't tell you what the name of the whole organization was, which was to monitor -- because most of the developers in the 60s, in 1960, they had to sign that they were an equal housing advocate in order to get federal funds. So, they signed that equal housing division -- I mean, contract --

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So that Yvonne Stanley and them was wondering why they were providing these couples who would go to try to rent these places that were supposed to be equal, and of course they'd get turned away, and here it was a Stanford Student; and Yvonne, who was a -- I think she's a teacher. I'm not quite sure what it was she did. But -- and they'd of course get turned away. And when a white couple would follow them, they'd get accepted.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So we were nailing people, you might say. Everything wasn't what they said it was.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So that was a little bit of what I was doing. And then also there was a new drive and the census of -- I have to give you some background. About the 1970s, there was the Pumpkin Pie Principle. Did you ever hear about that campaign?

**Moon:**

No. What's that?

**Wilson:**

This is one that the AAEW and the YWCA who were trying to get a district, a district that would be for Mexican Americans, particularly down in the LA area, and we delivered, to the legislature -- we coordinated with them, the YWCA in Sacramento delivered to the legislature when they were voting on the -- when you allocate the --

**Moon:**

Districting?

**Wilson:**

Districting. When you change the district and then the integrating took place in the same year. 1970.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So, what we did is, when they were going to be voting on those issues relating to what the districts were going to be, particularly down in LA County, and we sent them pumpkin pies with whipped cream on the top. What we said was that they were brown on the inside and white on the outside. And we got one district.

**Moon:**

You got one district?

**Wilson:**

That was the first district that we got, and a Hispanic was elected to that district. We didn't get as many as we wanted, but I became involved in the civil rights at that point.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

And there was a Civil Rights Commission, and I've got those names some place -- that met, and so I worked, and in fact the article I wrote for the YWCA was dealing with civil rights.

**Moon:**

OK.

**Wilson:**

And the civil rights came into San Jose and was down on discrimination and various things and I was working on several civil rights commission, set up several civil rights commission.

[01 – 01:20:00]

**Moon:**

Well, kind of moving from the whole ethnic issue -- I mean, affirmative action -- looking at women's issues. Of course, the 70s were rife with lots of tension with the women's movement, and particularly with the battle for ERA. What involvement did you have, or not have, necessarily, with, let's say, an organization like NOW. Were you involved in any of the footwork that was done to promote ERA, and then if you were -- what type -- did you try to bring some of that battle into the city council or into the board of supervisors?

**Wilson:**

Well, the -- in '73, when I was running, the National Women's Political Caucus was established and I was one of the returning member. Lane Easton convened it at the college of -- you know this already. I was there for that convening and joined in with the National Women's Political Caucus. That summer, after that, after I was elected, there was an article, and as you say, there was a lot of debates -- women libbers, as they were called, and then bra burners, which they had never bra burned, but they decided that that's what they were. So, it permeated the city council, so when there was an article in the paper about how the National Women's Political Caucus was just a bunch of disgruntled women who couldn't get elected, and I was already elected at that point -- but it was true. The only time women were candidates were when they were sacrificial lambs -- it was a party that knew they were going to lose the election. So those were the women who would go on. They were the ones who would make a stand, and they would (inaudible) by letting them be losing candidates on their ticket -- in the Republican district if you were Democratic or vice versa -- so that was -- and (inaudible) ran at the same time that I did, and she won, and she ran in a conservative area of



the valley and she won -- and (inaudible) always liked women -- if you look at the record they were a conservative group --

**Moon:**

OK. They promoted women?

**Wilson:**

Yeah. And they supported me the entire time -- I got good votes out of them. So, at that point, I went down, I walked down to Janet Grey's office, who was not involved in the National Women's Caucus, and I said Janet Grey, you're going to join the caucus today because there is going to be at least two women who are not disgruntled losers.

[laughter]

**Moon:**

And so she joined?

**Wilson:**

And she did. She did. She probably doesn't even remember that, but -- and you know, the other part is, in terms of banding together as women, I'd have to say that probably the other -- one of the other accomplishments is teamwork. I had just gotten onto the council in July, and in December, the League of Cities had their meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico -- and so I went. The founder, and her last name is -- I can see her face -- and she called a meeting. She was the president of the city council and she called a meeting. And there were very few women. You could spot them in a sea of 6,000 people. You could spot a few from California. So, she called a meeting, and she asked Janet Grey, who she had known from the League of Women Voters, and then statewide, and who was on the council, and she asked Janet Grey to come to the meeting, and Janet Grey brought me, and at the time, later, she said, I was really disgusted with Janet Grey. What was she doing bringing this woman that I didn't even know to this meeting? How I was organizing women in the state to run for office, and to educate them on the issues so that they could be winners, and that's what we were going to do. And she said, what I found out is that you became the shining star and Janet Grey never came to another meeting.

**Moon:**

Yeah. So, you weren't a member of the league of women voters?

**Wilson:**

No.

**Moon:**

No? OK.

**Wilson:**

No, I wasn't. And I wasn't an AEW because I had already graduated.

**Moon:**

OK. So, what got you -- what got you interested in wanting to form the National Women's Political Caucus?

**Wilson:**

Well, because it was what it was. It was going to be a caucus and -- the people who joined -- the caucus was so instrumental in all of the elections. From my first election, they cut -- they would cut out the district, I

mean, precinct. They would cut out the precinct. They would staple on cardboard -- they would cut cardboard and staple on these packets, and all of the workers -- I had three other workers working for me -- and they provided that as a service to that. And they were just a fledgling because it was a hotbed of politics at the time. And so, people like [Sarah Jannigan?] rose through the caucus. I was in an elected office, so I didn't -- she became the president of the National Women's Caucus. And in fact, that was another way that I was very involved in the caucus because -- and then the screening process and the National Women's Caucus was going to have their meeting here.

**Moon:**

In 1977?

**Wilson:**

In 1977. And I was on the city council and they had no money. They had to make a deposit on the hotel and for the party they were going to give, and they came to me and I signed a loan for them at the bank, and put my name on the loan for them to get the money to deposit for that national convention.

**Moon:**

That's phenomenal. I didn't know that.

**Wilson:**

And I still have the tapes from that convention.

**Moon:**

You do? Those would be great to have.

**Wilson:**

Uh-huh, and I gave one of the speeches there. And that was the convention that during that convention that the (inaudible) and so she was talking and we decided that we were going to -- and I was the one who was always pushing to get the money, to get the money from the people. So, we pushed and we decided we'd pass the hat at Bell Labs and we did and we got all this money, and here was all this cash, mostly, and checks, and Gayle said, I can't take this home. What if -- what if it got stolen? What would I do? And I said, well, I know somebody. I'll call and see if we can put it in his safe. He had the jewelry store downtown. And I did and he did.

**Moon:**

Oh my gosh. That's a great story.

**Wilson:**

So after Bell Labs, we walked over there with the money.

**Moon:**

She was such a character.

**Wilson:**

Yes she was. She was just so [much fun?]. And like I said, I still have the (inaudible) -- that was from the women's convention in Houston. They had their convocation in Houston and I went to that. And I reckon I went down for the state one and then we all met nationally in Houston and that was a great gathering.

**Myronuk:**

Can we pause real quick? That's why I'm here. The (inaudible) speech. I want to ask a couple of questions after about that. We have all the original recordings and stuff. Do you have the original recordings?

**Wilson:**

I have the tapes of the whole convention.

**Myronuk:**

Awesome. We only have one other set of those. Because I was on the National Political Caucus for several years in California, so that convention -- I have a bunch of stuff on it. (inaudible) is a really important person. We're trying to track her down before she dies. She's doing OK.

**Wilson:**

Let me go get something.

**Moon:**

If you can take off your microphone real quick.

**Wilson:**

All right.

**Moon:**

Why don't we just stop for a minute.

[01-01:28:00]

*END OF SUSIE WILSON PART ONE AUDIO FILE*

[39:30] at beginning {start at [00:00]}

**Moon:**

OK. We're back on tape. So let's just go ahead and refresh.

**Wilson:**

OK.

**Moon:**

So, we're going to talk later about the National Women's Political Caucus --

**Wilson:**

OK.

**Moon:**

But I would like you to talk about the Supreme Court Case -- which actually started as a Superior Court Case -- and it was called Wilson v. Superior Court, I think. Is that right?

**Wilson:**

You know, I'd have to go get -- I have the book --

**Moon:**

Mm-hmm.

**Wilson:**

So, if you haven't seen the book I can go get the book. I'm not sure it's called that. There was one Wilson v. Superior Court, which is when we were found in contempt of court. And Judge [Ivasian?] tried to -- wanted to put us in jail because we were not building the County Jail fast enough.

**Moon:**

Oh. OK. So, it was based on the jail issue?

**Wilson:**

That one is based on the jail, and I don't know whether the other one. I think the other one is a (inaudible) district. I think it was the action of a man who got passed over to a point, a woman was his head, and that was his prerogative. And he said it was because of affirmative action. He clearly said, you know, she was qualified, she was not the top of the list, but he could choose one-out-of-10 and he chose her, so that case went to the Supreme Court. And I'd have to go get the book if you'd let me because --

**Moon:**

I think we could just --

**Wilson:**

If you're going --

**Moon:**

-- I think we could return to that in another interview.

**Wilson:**

OK.

**Moon:**

But that was something that I would like to see the book. You can show it to me after we go off tape, or at the end, the close, of the interview. But I wanted to just get a couple of more things in here before we have to close. Because we could be talking for hours and hours here.

**Wilson:**

You're right.

**Moon:**

But one of the things, and going back to your political career, once you left -- when you left the City Council, you then moved on the Board of Supervisors, and the reason why you moved to the board was because you wanted to --

**Wilson:**

I wanted the issues. Once more --

**Moon:**

The social issues?

**Wilson:**

The social issues. I was -- I always try to explain to people what the county does because people don't understand the county. I'd say the city takes care of your physical needs, and the county takes care of -- and your fiscal -- it takes care of your fiscal needs: the police who protect you, the fire who protect you -- the taxes that pay for your streets and all that. That's what the city does. But the county takes care of your soul. It takes care of all the rest of you, like your health and the drugs -- so all those other things are the responsibility of the county to see that you can live a good life.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And it has nothing to do with whether your streets are paved or not, really.

**Moon:**

Right. And so were there particular policies that you thought you were particularly instrumental in getting completed as a member of the Board of Supervisors?

**Wilson:**

Well, I think that probably what I found is that my reputation had proceeded me, and when there was some issue that was dear to the heart of the poor, women -- they came to me. I still dealt with some land use, and I was soon won over the farmers in district one. I have a good story that you probably don't want to hear right now.

**Moon:**

About the farmers?

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

Yeah. Tell us.

**Wilson:**

All right. Well, when I became the -- there were 16 in the race for supervisor and that's a whole -- because I had taken a stand in February before the filing date, I was completely a shoe-in to be on the Board of Supervisors, and then the -- in February, which one of the real issues of the city was -- Gay Pride Day. And I voted, we voted to give a resolution to the gay community for their parade. They always had an event at St. James Park. And it was passed unanimously. And they -- (inaudible) Christian Church came apart at the seams. We had 800, and they filled the chambers and down the stairs and all, and they came to argue that this had to be undone, and they were arguing that there had never been a criteria about who could get a resolution. Any organized group could always get a resolution from the City Council, and that we were following -- there were no rules -- about who was going to get it and who was not going to get it -- and that's -- we were fulfilling our pledge to uphold the Constitution of the United States. It was a regional thing to do. We didn't think about it. We just did it. And that -- so, no, we're not going to change our minds. So, we voted to, I guess just to drop it. And then one council member, who had voted for the resolution as we all had, put it back on the agenda for the following week, and the began to chicken out on us. And so, at that next meeting -- we had meetings in homes, and I'll tell you, one meeting, talking about my church again, I said to the people in the room, you know, I really don't understand it. You know, you talk about that Jesus is Love, that God is Love, and that you bring up your children to love God and to do right for their fellow man. Why are you so afraid? You shouldn't be afraid because if you believe that what you're teaching your

children is going to last them all their life, why should you be afraid, because there's nothing to be afraid of. And it shut them up in the meeting, but it didn't shut -- the board, the City Council. So, they came back the following week, and it was put to a vote to pull back on the resolution, and it passed, five-to-two. And two people dissented -- but once more, they said we will uphold the Constitution, and this is not what we will do -- [and it was?] Jim Self and me.

**Moon:**

So Janet actually voted against it, right?

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

But then she later changed her mind, right?

**Wilson:**

Well, I guess so.

**Moon:**

Because I think a resolution eventually passed, didn't it? I thought that --

**Wilson:**

Not that year.

**Moon:**

Not that year, but in the following years --

**Wilson:**

Oh. In the following years? Yes.

**Moon:**

Yes.

**Wilson:**

But at that time -- and so, I had been a shoe-in, and then I had doors slammed in my face -- and there were 16 people who ran from all over the District of District one. Gilroy. Marvin Hill. Samartine. Los Gatos. Council members and it was a tough race because I had doors slammed in my face for the first time. I had just been this loveable person. And then as my chief of staff, Bob [Brancy?] said -- I had this little, I have this little cloud that protects me and follows me all of the time, and so no harm really ever comes to me. The fearsome foursome arrived at the City Council. The fearsome foursome were the four council members who fired Ted Tedesco. And I was on the three who did not vote for that. That was a big decision, too. So, then, when I knocked on doors -- that was in the summer. I made it to the run-off just barely by the skin of my teeth. So, I made it to the run-off, and Ivan Zubo made it. I didn't know him. He was a developer from South County. And this time, people would say to me, are you one of the Fearsome Foursome, and I'd say, "No, ma'am." [Laughter.] And it turned. The issue turned. You know, the other was an issue and it was a dead issue at that point because there was a bigger issue at stake.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

So, I was elected with 66 percent. I enjoyed that, after barely squeaking in. So, yes.

**Moon:**

Do you think the council just felt the pressure of the Christian community in trying to force their hand?

**Wilson:**

Yes. It was a fundamental Christian community, and force their hand -- they did try it again.

**Moon:**

They did, apparently.

**Wilson:**

They did, voted 5-2, and only two people stood up, and we were -- and -- later, maybe two months later, the YMCA has a prayer breakfast and I was asked to lead the scripture. And I got a scathing letter from the minister of the Los Gatos Christian Church, saying, how dare you read scripture.

**Moon:**

Oh?

**Wilson:**

How dare you read scripture? So, I put it in my file, and I didn't respond, and, oh, about two years later, he was -- they were building a sanctuary and he asked me to come to that, and so that was kind of good -- to help dedicate it and be a part of it because I was a Supervisor and all that, and he was proud that I was coming. So, I sat in his office before we would go out and be in the pulpit together, and I said, "you know, I just want to tell you that I remember that you wrote to me a letter saying that I should not have been able to read scripture, and I thought that as a Christian, you wanted anyone to be able to read the scripture and get value in God's word, and I don't understand why you wrote that letter." "I didn't do anything like that." I said, "Yes, you did." "No, I didn't." And he turned over to his file and pulled it out and he read it and said, "I owe you an apology."

**Moon:**

Oh. Well, that was big of him.

**Wilson:**

So, you know. People change, and you -- sometimes you have to stick to your guns and pray.

[Laughter.]

**Moon:**

Yeah. And looking at all of the work that you've done, and then looking at the sort of Feminist Capital theme of this interview --

[02-00:10:00]

**Moon:**

-- one of the -- I'm sure that you must have met Janet Fleming at some point.

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

She was the political scientist over at Santa Clara University.

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

And she had written in her book -- and this is actually being cited from [Glenda Mathews?] who talked a little about this, and when she, you know, using the interview that you did with her. And she writes that "slow growth, environmentalism, a desire for clean government, a fluent risk-taking, the absence of machine politics, the advent of district election, and effective women's organizations favored women and produced women's policy agenda, and created a really distinct political style." So, thinking about some of those -- I mean, that's a big, long statement to dissect here -- but I'm just wondering: what role do you think women have played in Santa Clara and San Jose politics? Like, for example, what did women bring and how did the change politics? Or, another way of looking at it -- how did women bring a distinct character to the political, you know, forefront?

**Wilson:**

Yeah. A couple of things that I can think of right off the top of my head. One is that women's issues became men's issues. That suddenly, men were interested in rape for the first time. You had to want to do something about it. You had men taking over various kinds of issues that they wanted to say, "I'm with them." They wanted, as men sometimes do, they wanted to be the originator and the women were following them -- and it really wasn't quite that way. Women's issues went on the burner, and they came out front, and so that men found several things, and I really believe that the public trust women more than they do men.

**Moon:**

Dianne McKenna said the same thing when we talked to her last week --

**Wilson:**

They do. And that's why they support women. Women -- they see women as less political and more of a straight shooter.

**Moon:**

Do you think that's true?

**Wilson:**

Yes. I do. You know, an example is that people have always known that I'm a liberal [than a?] nice Democrat. The Republicans have supported me more heavily than the Democrats have because my word is good and they know that if I say this is where I am, I'll stick. They can walk out of my office and if they don't get a commitment from me, they know that, as one fellow says -- you know, she sat there and nodded her head and never made a commitment to me, and I felt pleased about the visit.

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

And because they knew I wouldn't commit. And they also knew that many politicians -- mostly men -- people would say about them -- you've got to be the last person to talk to them, to get their vote, because they will change. And I went to one republican -- he helped start Memorex -- he became a staunch supporter because I had made a commitment of the board, and got them in on the general plan. I came in and the



general plan in 1978 was being adopted, and I came in 1979, I guess it was, or 1980 -- and I had made the commitment that whatever the committee had worked on for four years would do, I would vote for the committee, for what their recommendations were. And the environmental community came in on the last day that they would be voting and got even the chair of the committee -- Geri Steinberg -- to switch her vote, and make it a harder [hillside?] ordinance. And they came to me, and met with me, and I said, "You're coming to me today to ask me to change my vote tomorrow? When I said that I would -- and disregard the committee that worked so long -- and you were part of that committee that said yes, these are my recommendations and now you're going to change them?" I said, "No, I won't do that." And they walked out and didn't speak to me, and I never got their endorsement again.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

And I got the lifelong friendship of one man who was a good Republican all the way, that -- I said, you'd even vote for me to be the president of the United States, which I'm not going to do.

**Moon:**

Well --

**Wilson:**

So, I do know that people's attitudes about women -- that first campaign, I found it -- I found it from women -- an old woman over at (inaudible), said, "You bet I'll vote for you. It's time women take over this government."

**Moon:**

Do you think things have changed -- or, how have things changed, actually, from the point when you were in politics in the '80s to women's experiences today, based on some of the other work you've been doing with your organization? Your solution?

**Wilson:**

I think that women have become, in every field, they keep rising to the top. And I have the Dianne Feinstein's "Glass Ceiling"? -- Have you ever seen that? The, shattering the glass ceiling -- I have that -- because, we still talk about that ceiling. You can't see the sky yet.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

It's got cracks all in it, but there are few over on the other side, but you have more women who are so accomplished that men respect and admire. And that is such a far cry from where we were 40 years ago, that it can't go anyplace but, one of the penalties is -- some of those women who are bright and articulate are going into industry instead of politics.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So, we don't see many women starting at that ground level. But then, it's just time. All of a sudden, Cindy [Gervais?] emerges -- bright, articulate, committed to the politics, the Democratic Party. And in equal playing fields. And she's bold in what she says. So that, frankly the best mayor we've had so far has been Susan [Hammer?]. And people will say that they didn't expect her to be -- but she is fair. She opened up the whole city system to ethnic groups and diversity. Made that a word that's just bounced around by everybody and not really talked about much until Susan got into office. So, we made a difference. Politics right now is very, very polarizing -- but the people that really rise in local government are those who can build a consensus, who are not -- because I always trusted the voter in two ways. When it comes down to the bottom line of who you're going to vote for in local politics, they want to feel like if they want, they can go and talk to the person they vote for.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

Not to sway them, but just that the person is honest and cares about government and I can talk to them. And that kind of person usually wins.

**Moon:**

Yeah. Well, those are all really interesting comments, I think, about both women and men and kind of the whole political process, because I think it is kind of discouraging, right now, thinking about how people actually get into politics without coming from a very affluent background, and having a lot of -- being a real go-getter to be able to get people out there to support them. And I think your story is very unique because you really were a grassroots organizer first before -- even though you come from an affluent background --

**Wilson:**

No.

**Moon:**

Not a background, but you lived a middle-class --

**Wilson:**

A middle-class life.

**Moon:**

A middle-class life, here, and you know, your husband was fairly successful. So, you were home with your children. You were able to do things that other, poorer women, weren't able to do in politics.

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

So, I think the whole grassroots component -- it's a very interesting area. And I'm just wondering -- who's doing grassroots sort of work, you know, as young women today. And so, what would you hope that your legacy would be for future generations of girls?

**Wilson:**

That they have the confidence in themselves enough to be able to stand up and be who they want to be, and say what they want to say, and know that they're heard.

**Moon:**

That's a great ending statement. I'm just going to say one more thing, and then what we're going to do next is get you to tell a couple of stories about some of the friendships that you formed in your work with other women. One that comes to mind is last week, when I was talking with Dianne McKenna, she had some -- she told some really great stories about you and Zoë when you were on the Board of Supervisors in relationship to the jail debate and conflict --

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

-- that took place, so I would like to come back later and talk about that particular incident on the board as well as some of these other issues. I'm also interested in hearing more about your role in founding the National Women's Political Caucus --

[Overlapping dialogue]

[02-00:20:00]

**Moon:**

-- the caucus but also the Commission on the Status of Women in San Jose, because right now, I have the (inaudible) and Dierden papers, and Dierden was one of the fellows on that committee and he takes a lot of credit for actually founding that, and so I would just be curious to know if that was so because -- I'm sure there are feminist men out there certainly. And I believe that he probably is one of those men, but I would just like to hear from you, since you were part of that whole founding of that organization, and of that specific committee -- I would like to get your feedback on that, but I think that we will put those on another schedule for interviewing that.

**Wilson:**

I'd have to turn it off if it's on.

**Moon:**

Yeah. Because the last thing I want is just to comment in relationship to Glenda Matthews book --

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

-- she was talking to you, and in the book she describes this whole concept of what you called the "Good Old Gals Network."

**Wilson:**

The GOG.

**Moon:**

And she said, you created your own connections through what you described as this "Good Old Gals Network." So, what I'd like you to do is just kind of describe what you meant by that, what that group was, and what that meant in kind of the whole Feminist Capital sort of mentality.

**Wilson:**

All right. See, networking was really just networking. There were really people in government and elected officials that were -- they were still in the minority. They'd be women managing the county, the treasurer of the city, the city clerk -- all those people are a part of government, and then there are the elected officials, so that they had a need to be stimulated -- if I can say that. I don't think they would even probably express it that way -- but I decided that I would have an organization called the GOG. You know, there's a good old boys' network, and we needed a GOG -- a good old girls' network, good old gals, as I called it. Instead of the good old guys or boys, the good old gals. And so I needed that network to just kind of --

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

That the women and the men. So, I decided when I came across an outstanding woman that other women would enjoy hearing talk, that I would send out invitations to all the women that I knew, and they could invite people to come, and they would become a part of the GOG. And my -- Sarah Jannigan, who worked for me, would send out the postcards to them saying there's going to be a GOG. Lunch will be \$15 -- (inaudible) out in Los Gatos, run by one of those (inaudible) had a very nice lunch program out there. We met out there to start, and it got too small, so we ended up being at the Hyatt. So, I send out the postcards, and every time I had one, the post card group would grow, and the rule was that this was an organization, that I was the dictator, that there would be no dues, that if you gave your reservation that you were going to come, that you had to pay your \$15 whether you showed or not, and that there would be no discussion or not announcements. If you wanted to bring something to put on the table, to -- no passing around. You'd just pick it up if somebody was interested in something you were doing, or something your organization was doing -- but we would not have any announcements. We'd have no officers. And that we all were members. And I was the dictator, and I would choose somebody to speak. And I'd introduce them and that would be it. And I had people like Irene Dallas, Jean Holland -- all these women who were accomplished that I knew, and those were two that popped into my head right now -- that we needed to hear, and there'd be 100 people come.

**Moon:**

Oh my goodness.

**Wilson:**

And people still say to me some 15 years later, since I quit -- I've been off the board 15 years --

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

And they'll say, I wish you'd start that again. And I'll say, I don't have a secretary.

**Moon:**

How long did you do that for, that particular group?

**Wilson:**

I guess -- I don't know. Sarah would probably remember more than I did. At least three or four years. And I also said, I'm going to have a meeting when I found somebody. So, we might go three months and I know I had at least half a dozen or so. And I guess the last speaker -- and they'd give me names of people and I'd go up and get them. And the last speaker they wanted, I guess, was that they had me be a speaker.

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

And they did. But they'd give me suggestions, and I'd go after somebody.

**Moon:**

Oh wow.

**Wilson:**

And it was wonderful because it was their story. They told their story. And it was inspiring to the women to see somebody else's accomplishments.

**Moon:**

You're right.

**Wilson:**

And it worked.

**Moon:**

That sounds great. It reminds me, though, it's not quite the same organization, but in the turn of the -- or, in the middle of the century, right after the, in the post-suffrage era, there was an organization, and it was called the OWLs, and it was --

**Wilson:**

Yes. For older women.

**Moon:**

Yes. It was the organization of women who were members of state legislatures or who might have been members of Congress and it was organized principally to help support women as they were trying, as they were becoming -- either becoming candidates or as they were office holders -- and give them a support network for dealing with the shenanigans of -- especially in Connecticut -- in dealing with the male-dominated politicking that went on. So, it was like a survival network for women in politics because they represented such a small minority.

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

And in some states -- Connecticut was one that had a pretty good group of women that were in early -- were early officeholders in the state Legislature, but that organization -- I wonder if they did something similar like that. But, I'll have to find out more about that. I'll have to read up on it.

**Wilson:**

And now they have -- they have -- elected women have --

**Moon:**

Their own?

**Wilson:**

They call it the GOG, too. But, and I've tried to explain to them -- it's not the same. They are elected women, and it's just not the same as if you are really -- it's not inclusive, I guess that's what I don't like about that.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

I haven't gone to it, because it's --

**Moon:**

So it's just about women who are actually active in politics --

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

As opposed to being open to other women or innovation?

**Wilson:**

Yeah. Or anybody who is interested in the political -- I probably don't have to tell you that.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

So, that -- and they're fine. They're nice people. They're all elected in the county, so they meet and I think sometimes -- they don't really bring in speakers.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

I don't know what they do.

**Moon:**

Yeah. It sounds like it's maybe just a --

**Wilson:**

A social --

**Moon:**

A social organization for women to kind of talk about the, you know, the chitchat that's part of being an officer-holder maybe.

**Wilson:**

And you know, actually, [CCR?] was a very feminist organization that was -- because of what we were aiming to do -- was to get more women. That was our goal.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Wilson:**

To get more women involve in politics.

**Moon:**

OK. I think what we'll do is I'm going to turn it over to Jennifer and she's going to ask you to --

**Myronuk:**

Or we can wait.

**Moon:**

You want to wait to do that?

**Myronuk:**

Yeah. Because next time, I was wondering too -- I love this setting in here, but I'm wondering if we can find a place to interview both of you a little more formally. Because this stuff is great for just interviewing, just to have it for San Jose State -- but the next set of interview questions will probably be much more documentary oriented. So, if we can find a really good setting, comfortable still, that I can bring in a little bit of light and stuff and really do it, because I think -- we've got your background now, and now you can get to the real story-story, which, you said today -- I don't know. Maybe the library somewhere?

**Moon:**

Well, we can do it in the library for sure. Just, OK. So, if you're not going to do that -- Aime, were there any questions that you wanted to ask Susie now?

**Wilson:**

Hi, Aime.

**McPhearson:**

Hello.

**Moon:**

Aime is a graduate student in history and she's finishing her graduate -- she's finishing in May, I guess.

**McPhearson:**

(inaudible), and I'm actually teaching right now, too --

**Wilson:**

Oh my gosh.

**McPhearson:**

Well, I did have some, but I just forgot what I was going to say, so --

**Moon:**

So, you don't -- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

**McPhearson:**

No, it's OK. It's just --

**Moon:**

I just thought that if there was something that we hadn't actually covered, that maybe you wanted to ask her -

**McPhearson:**

I did want to just ask -- the whole thing of going from the city to the county -- how far in advance had you sort of figured out that that was the direction that you wanted to move in?

**Wilson:**

That was a -- that's a very -- that's another story. That's a story, you know, because I had decided I wanted to go to the board. And I had people that were working with me -- Terry Christensen -- but the real dilemma was, that [Six Sanchez?] occupied District One --

**McPhearson:**

For a long time, right?

**Wilson:**

For a long, long time. And we -- through some pull -- and right at the end of his term, he committed the Alameda Quicksilver Park -- and that just cemented that for San Jose and from the city -- both --

[02-00:30:00]

**Wilson:**

He was too strong for me to run against him. And I didn't want to really run against him. And Dan [McCartell?] and Rob were trying to get him -- trying to get his tenure over City Council to be counted toward his retirement, so then he would have a better retirement. And they got it passed through the Legislature that he was given that retirement at the time, and then he retired from the Mass Health and Pension, so they thought that would do it. The city announced that he would not -- until the first of the year, in January -- say whether he was going to run again or not. And during that whole time, reapportioned -- that was the word I was seeking a while ago --

**Moon:**

Reapportioned?

**Wilson:**

-- was starting, and my house was right at the edge of the district, of District One, and nobody wanted me in the district because they all saw me as potential, so Rob was over here -- he didn't want me in the district. And they were going to put me and keep me in the district if Sig was not going to run. They wanted me in the district, but fooling around, Sig didn't want me in the district because he didn't want me to run or even to think about running, and so he had enough clout, and Rob didn't want me, and then the other person, Dan, would say, you take her, but it didn't work out that way. So, I got shoved out of his district and went into -- I don't know which district now -- but went into -- but I got shoved out of District One. So, I moved into District One. My two sons lived here, and I ran away from home.

**Moon:**

That's when you got the apartment right?

**Wilson:**

Got the apartment.



**Moon:**

That's great.

**Wilson:**

I got the apartment in November over in the same place that my best friend lived, [Ruth Adele Autry?] -- you've run across her name before when I was talking about people -- and moved there in November and paid the rent. Well, we were not as -- we were good managers of money, but I was making \$400 a month, and I was sending that money to my son to go to medical school in Guadalajara -- and so, the kids paid the house payment on this house, so we could pay the rent -- but I paid the rent in January and I paid the rent in December, and I called Sig because the rent was due in January, and I called Sig on the phone and I said, Sig, I'm in a dilemma. I said that you know, you're not going to make your mind before January. You're not going to announce what you're going to do. And I really don't want you to break your word, and I won't ask you what you're going to do, but my question is -- I would run, for your seat, if you were not going to run, because I moved into the district -- but my question to you is should I pay that January rent.

**Moon:**

So, you got your answer, right?

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

And he said, pay the rent.

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

So, I did. And I lived in that apartment, but he didn't break his word.

**Moon:**

That's great.

**Wilson:**

And so then I knew that he was going to --

**Moon:**

What was Sig's full name? Was it Sigmund?

**Wilson:**

Probably. But I don't know.

**Moon:**

But he went by Sig?

**McPhearson:**

He was always Sig.

**Wilson:**

He was always Sig.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Wilson:**

But I don't know. He was Spanish.

**Moon:**

Yeah. I was wondering what his nationality was --

**Wilson:**

But I don't know what it was. So, then, the reapportionment came up again in '80 -- let's see, I ran in '77, '78, and in '79 it was when I went onto the board. And '80 was reapportionment, so I was still living in the apartment and there was an editorial -- a favorable editorial -- and it was Susiemandering. They called it Susiemandering, and they said Susie put her house back in the district, and they said, and that's all right.

[Laughter.]

**Moon:**

Susiemandering.

**Wilson:**

So they coined a word. Susiemandering. And that's the first time that gerrymandering became susiemandering.

**Moon:**

Right. That's great. That's a great story. Well, I think that does --

**Wilson:**

Does that answer your question?

**McPhearson:**

Yeah, I actually did want to ask you one last question about San Jose State.

**Wilson:**

OK.

**McPhearson:**

I read about how you went back to school --

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**McPhearson:**

You know, you had, I guess -- did you start college before you met your husband, or --

**Wilson:**

Yes. I met my husband at the University of Texas and, all of my majors helped me. I was majoring in drama and math.

[Laughter.]

**Wilson:**

Yes. Drama and math. And I took voice. So, those were very good -- acting schools for (inaudible). And then I always said the world lost a great actress when I married and moved to Norfolk, Virginia with Bob. But I went to William-Mary, and I was -- there in Norfolk -- and I took history and political science. And that was just a kick, and I just had a blast there, and those two professors I would meet -- because I was married -- and I would meet after class with them and talk about everything, and I did some United Nations work -- and I guess that's another story -- but anyway, and so then I came -- I went to Texas, and raised -- with IBM, Bob went -- and raised the children and was not interested in college at all, so then when -- and my mother always wanted me to get my degree. I had, really, I was a starting junior. So then when I came to San Jose in '62, I started back as a history major, and -- but the biology was at six o'clock when I had to be feeding three boys who ate a lot of food, and I couldn't work it out, so I quit again. So I always billed myself as a three-time dropout. When I finally went -- after I got on the city council, I realized that when I get committed to something, I'm committed -- and I realized that I was going to be working long hours. It was a part-time job; \$400 a month -- and so I decided, I'd go back to school so then I would have to do something else. I won't be down there all the time. And I will have -- and so I went back to school. And I said this time, I know what I am. And I'll major in political science. And the first time I walked into Gregory Gym -- I walked into the gym -- Gregory Gym is in the University of Texas -- and I walked over to the political science department and Ellen Goodman, Ellen Bonaparte was sitting on the table with her legs crossed, and they all gathered and said, take my course, take my course. They wanted a real life official in the course, and she was teaching women's studies, and so not only did I take some of their courses, but they were very eager to have me sign up for what they wanted, and I -- of course I lectured in all these different classes, and Terry and I ran a summer program together, and then later I did the leader in residence program for the political science. Ethics in politics is what I taught --

**Moon:**

What you were teaching.

**Wilson:**

And that was long before ethics became an issue to the City Council, but there was one very bright person in that class -- his name is Robert Sapier -- and he is not going up the ranks. He was in the fire department, you know, the fire to go up and become a firefighter, and now, he not only has, but he's already a captain, and he's involved in the union, and he will someday run a fire department. He's a very bright, Hispanic man. I really latched onto him. I really remember him as such a student, that he really could analyze ethics and personal ethics.

**Myronuk:**

Do you know Keri Beacham?

**Wilson:**

Oh yes.

**Myronuk:**

Because she went to that meeting with you.

**Wilson:**

Yeah. You see, Keri and Terry --

**Myronuk:**

Were married?

**Wilson:**

No. They ran my second campaign.

**Myronuk:**

They did? I didn't know that.

**Wilson:**

Yeah.

**Myronuk:**

Because she went to be Governor Brown's press secretary.

**Wilson:**

Yes.

**Myronuk:**

No. I interviewed her. She is such a character --

**Wilson:**

Isn't she though?

**Myronuk:**

And she does her documentary stuff -- I sat down with her for a few hours and ended up doing a video interview with her two years ago.

**Wilson:**

Good.

**Myronuk:**

And I showed it to Terry Christensen about two months ago -- because she was pretty young. She was really young getting involved --

**Wilson:**

Yeah. She was a brilliant woman.

**Myronuk:**

And so she went to that first meeting, the one that [Tulane?] organized -- the National Woman's Political Caucus --

**Wilson:**

Yes she did.

**Myronuk:**

Because she talked about that --

**Wilson:**

Yes. And I maintain a friendship with her.

**Myronuk:**

Yes. And I think she's just fabulous.

**Wilson:**

And --

**Moon:**

And that's the thing that I mentioned before. It's the friendships that seem to happen in this county that other counties -- other networks --

**Wilson:**

[walks away from the interview to answer the phone]

And on one side of me, Sarah Jannigan sat, and on the other side, Kim Weaver, and they --

**Moon:**

Oh my God.

[02-00:39:30]

END OF SUSIE WILSON INTERVIEW ONE PART TWO AUDIO FILE