

Interview with: Susanne Wilson

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[Interview #5]

Wilson Interview 5.wav

[1:19:47] at beginning {start at [00:00]}

**Moon:**

My name is Danelle moon. I am the director of San Jose State University Special Collections and Archives. And today I am talking to Susanne Wilson at her home in San Jose, California. Today we are going to be talking about her work with the YWCA, and today's date is August 7, 2006. Okay. So today we are going to talk a little bit about kind of the beginnings of your work with the YWCA-

**Susanne:**

Okay

**Moon:**

-and then... we can... this may take longer than just one session-

**Susanne:**

Sure, okay

**Moon:**

-to talk about that because you done so much with them and because you know going forward to where they are today I think would be an interesting-

**Susanne:**

Yeah

**Moon:**

-process to get you to talk about. So why don't we begin with how you got involved with the YWCA and when and some of the people-

**Susanne:**

Okay

**Moon:**

-and again reminding you to give me the dates and the names of the people when we talk about people. You know...

**Susanne:**

Yeah. Okay. Sure, you need that.

**Moon:**

Okay

**Susanne:**

All right...um 1960, uh December 1960 we moved to San Jose. In 1961 we established our home at the [Cambrian?] Park Methodist Church. And there I met 2 special people. One was [Ruthidale Soccer?] and the other was Lucille Wright. Ruthidale was a volunteer who ran a mother's day out program for the YWCA at the Church. Ruthidale was a founder of the church, and Lucille Wright was not only the president of the YWCA in 1961 or 62-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-she was also the pastor's wife. So the church was the church that had a heart in the community. And so they had the local YWCA there in the building uh for the mother's day out.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

They expanded, the YWCA, expanded that program to a youth program in the summertime because a lot of the women wanted their children to have something to do in the summer time-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And so we started a , the Y started a program there at the church uh for the kids in the summer. They taught cooking-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

-something today we don't even [appreciate?] the kids learning-

**Moon:**

I know

**Susanne:**

-cooking uh sewing-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-uh dance and arts and crafts-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And in their summer program, and Ruthidale and asked me if I would teach the sowing class. At this point she knew I was a seamstress-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And so I said I would. And so that was about 1960 to summer of 1961 or 62-

**Moon:**

Okay.

**Susanne:**

-that I started that. And [thus?] Ruthidale and Lucille became my best friends and they kept saying that I needed to be on the board of the YWCA. And I was busy by that time I was heavily involved in the church. I worked in the youth program. I have become an officer in the YW, in the uh Young Women's Christian Association-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

[inaudible] excuse me...um WS CSO women's Christian social service program of the Methodist church. And I was an officer and I was going to be the president of the, of that association. And I tell you I didn't have time for it with my 3 boys and my mother-in-law was here living with us and I didn't know why they kept insisting I belong there.

**Moon:**

[laughs]

**Susanne:**

And finally they said what I said was because your values are the same values of the YWCA. And I said all right well that's a good answer-

Both:

[laugh]

**Susanne:**

I finally said yes I would go on the board. And that was about 1964. I had been working with the Y and on the uh and at the same time the church was building a new youth building. And Ruthidale and I both were on the building committee, which gave me my first opportunity as how you build something and all the ins and outs of city government-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-with that building. And we were going to build a YWCA youth building that would have a component of the YWCA being a part of that [Cambrian?] center.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm. Oh okay

**Susanne:**

The YWCA was going to be in that building. And the Y signed a lease with the church to rent out part of that space which gave the church the money to build the building, part of the money to build the building as well as the pledges.

**Moon:**

Oh, okay.

**Susanne:**

So it was just a win-win for everybody-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

-and particularly with the connection Lucile and the YW and Ruthidale and the YW and they were both such prominent people in the church that everybody felt that it was a good idea.

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

So I um became a part of the Y there teaching sewing as well as going onto the board at the Y. And I went on for a 3 year term. And then at the end of that 3 year term I was elected president of the YWCA.

**Moon:**

Uh when you were on the board what sorts of things did board members do as part of that responsibility?

**Susanne:**

Establish the policy of the YW

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-and with uh [Lois Colorson?], was our executive director. And the philosophy of the Y was something I took into government with me. Which was we worked as a team.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

Uh Lois and I when I became the president we worked as at team we worked on what uh on what was on the major issues we'd be facing-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-and how what we were going to do about those issues and I could discuss some of the really major issues of the Y at the time. But we determined programming, we determined uh, staffing, and when we had money crisis. You know-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm, budget issues

**Susanne:**

[inaudible] budget issues. And we had committee for those different personal. I remember uh the head of our personal committee was the head of personal at IBM. So we always had connections with the community even then.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And, and of course we were very small. Our budget was very small. I have some of the materials showing the budgets of those days-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

Which were kind of ridiculous. But that was a lot of money. And the years between 1967 and 1970 when I was the president, the civil rights bill had passed in 1964. We had started by the time I was on the board when I was on the board we had started even before it really became proper, uh affirmative action or anything like that-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-we determined that we needed to support the black community and the minority community much more. And we looked at goals and I chaired a committee that looked at how we can help uh better serve the total community and one of the policies that we brought to the board was that we would try our best to hire minority contacts-

**Moon:**



Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-uh minority contracts like with our stationary-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-or whatever we could do our janitorial or whatever it was that we could hire we hired out.

And also we make sure that our staff began to reflect the community more and the minority community. And we had some very dedicated staff that worked hard to integrate.

And we had worked on the eastside as well as the Cambridge center-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And we [drawed up?] programs for the girls on the eastside as well as the Cambridge center. And we were [inaudible] scholarships so that some kids in our neighborhood could come and learn sewing and no one ever knew they were a scholarship child.

**Moon:**

Uh-huh, all right

**Susanne:**

They were usually a minority

**Moon:**

What was the ethnic composition of San Jose at that time? Do you recall? Was it-

**Susanne:**

About the same as it is now. You know there were a large Hispanic, uh about 2 percent black which is what it is today.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm. Right

**Susanne:**

And uh Asian. We had the Japanese community-

**Moon:**

Right

**Susanne:**

Japanese was always a part of our YWCA-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh.

**Susanne:** And in fact on the board there are the uh we had, we had uh a [Westley?]

Methodist church in Japan town that was a Japanese church.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And the preacher's wife was on her board of the YWCA when I first came on.

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

And she was on my board when I was president. So that uh we had a black beauty shop in our building-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-for uh, black women and white women. It didn't make any difference what they, it was a downtown beauty shop.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

[inaudible] something. And so there was always that effort to be a black and white-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-uh organization. And then we began to preach so that we had with, when I was the president, we had 2 very good black women on our board, and we began to have Hispanic women on our board.

**Moon:**

Uh-hmm

**Susanne:**

We had of course, we have always had Jewish women on our board-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-but we had gone uh, uh in fact mostly we never even thought about that- [Susanne says bye-bye to someone who leaves], -that even today when there was a Jewish person who became a board member you never even stopped to think that YWCA meant Young Women's Christian Association-

**Moon:**

Right. That's interesting huh?

Both:

[Laugh]

**Susanne:**

Because it was a the YWCA and there was no one ever never a list of what you had to be to be a board member-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-and to really fight for equality and for women and children and take care of the family.

So there was never a [inaudible] west it was the YWCA who took care of women.

**Moon:**

Right

**Susanne:**

And it didn't make any difference. There was of course early in our history, way early indeed there was a little, just as all the society was very [rock] and religion and teaching the girls morals-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh. Right, in the 19th century especially

**Susanne:**

-yeah in the 19th century. And so uh it uh it just changed over the years because of and uh I believe that [Susanne Hamlin?], Bill {Hamlin's?} mother was the first board member of the YWCA in San Jose-

**Moon:**

Oh is that right?

**Susanne:**

Yeah. The uh first Jewish board member-

**Moon:**

Oh ok

**Susanne:**

And uh one reason she joined the Y they were very prominent in the community very liberal family, was because she back on the east coast was the first Jewish woman to ever to be given the scholarship to the Jewish [inaudible] university by the YWCA.

**Moon:**

Oh really?

**Susanne:**

Yeah

**Moon:**

Wow! Interesting.

**Susanne:**

So and then so of course she [inaudible] YWCA

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And uh what is also interesting now her great grand-daughter is a board member of the YWCA.

**Moon:**

Hmm

**Susanne:**

And of course [Susanne Hammer?] was a big supporter when she was mayor of San Jose.

**Moon:**

Right

**Susanne:**

But the tradition continues today. And uh the uh [Ms. Jackson?] became-well I'm getting ahead of myself on that. But so the issues of the day then were whether we had really 2 major issues, the redevelopment agency had condemned one half of our building. We had two parts of our building. The building built in 1918, 16 and the building built in 1925.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And to expand. So they condemned the 1918 part. Excuse me-

**Moon:**

Okay.

**Susanne:**

So the redevelopment had condemned the 18 uh 1918 portion of our building

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

1916, excuse me it is 1915-

**Moon:**

1915 right?

**Susanne:**

Yeah. I'll have to get out my history book

**Moon:**

Laughs

**Susanne:**

Uh and, and not the other. Well you can't operate on half, half a building

**Moon:**

Right

**Susanne:**

Because, because it was, it was an integrated building. It was for our housing, of our, we ran of course a housing program in there in the rooms. And there was a program area and it was all the same. And so we had to fight that. And that was one big decision was uh taking the redevelopment agency to court-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh

**Susanne:**

-over it. And, and so that was one issue. The other issue was dealing with the issues of race.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And the third issue that was really very important was that if we won the case, which or even if we didn't win the case, we had to have property. And the uh the city had become a suburban city now. The programs were out in the community, we had community programs in several parts of the city. And the [YMCA?] had moved from downtown-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-to the Alameda, which is out more in the community. And so one of the issues that we faced as a board, do we stay downtown-

**Moon:**

Uh-hmm

**Susanne:**

-or do we move out to the suburbs like everyone else was doing? And so that, I became the chair of the building committee that had to make that decision. And the, I became also the chair of the racial justice team that was looking at the minority situations, and making policy decisions about those such as what were we going to do about the Angela Davis trial that was here in San Jose.



**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

And, and see what was going to happen with the city of San Jose and the redevelopment agency. Uh, so those were the major issues. We had some other issues that I think was very important for women and that was, as we came along, the San Jose School District came to us and wanted to have a program for pregnant teenagers in our building. And the problem was that the girls could be taught at home, but they could not be taught in a group.

**Moon:**

Oh.

**Susanne:**

It was against the law to teach them at uh on the school grounds as a group. So that, we had to go to the legislature to change the law. And [Allen Cranston?] had become then the uh, superintendent school of San Jose Unified School District. I knew because when I first came to San Jose I was on the school committee-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-right, the first year I was here. And so we went to Allen Cranston and we changed the law. So that we changed the law from the girls being sick to being handicapped.

**Moon:**

Oh.

**Susanne:**

And then they can be taught in a group.

**Moon:**

Oh.

**Susanne:**

But if they were pregnant before they were, had to stay home, couldn't be brought into the schools. And one of the battles that we fought was on the board, was when we started talking about it some of the older women, very older women at the time, said well what will the community think when they see all these pregnant girls coming into the YWCA? And I remember in the debate, I said well number one, some of these young women are married and can't go finish their school, high school because they got married-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-got married. And then [came our school?], except being taught at home and being isolated. And number two, then they are not getting no care because we want to teach them how to, the school wants to educate them, but we want to help them understand how to be good mothers.

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

How to take care of themselves physically and be healthy-

**Moon:**

Right.

**Susanne:**

-healthy mothers. And that's our job. But you know every Christmas, we have a Christmas party for our young mothers and their children. And we see pregnant those at Christmas time, and a lot of other times we see pregnant women coming in and out of the YW all the time-

**Moon:**

Um-hmm

**Susanne:**

-and nobody ever questions whether they're married or not.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Susanne:**

They're just younger and coming in and out of the Y. And that broke the log jam and they decided yeah that was true, we never denied entrance for any pregnant women before, why would we do that now?

**Moon:**

Um-hmm.

**Susanne:** Cause nobody looks to see if they have a wedding band on either.

**Moon:**

Right.

**Susanne:**

So it was unanimous. In support. And so we started the program with the school district up on the third floor of the building.

**Moon:**

That was the San Jose, ummm, sch—

**Susanne:**

Unified School District.

**Moon:**

Unified School District

**Susanne:**

And the program was on the third floor, which was the Julia Morgan, uh, room and, uh, banquet hall. And it was fine until the fire department shut us down. And so we had I can remem- I had that meeting with the fire department and that guy says, “Come and look! Just come out here and look!” So we went out to look at the fire escape. And he says “Now how could a young woman nine months pregnant get down that fire escape?” And of course I looked at it, it was about this narrow, and I can remember being as big as a barn when I was pregnant, and I said “You’re right,” you know. If we had a fire up there, those girls couldn’t get down. ‘Cause we had a, we had an elevator that was one of these old, old elevators, you shut the door to make it come down and all that. An elevator’s not safe in a fire anyway. So we had to move the program down to the basement. But that was just a kind of a sideline that was really, when you start with good intentions you don’t even think about things like that, ‘till it turns out the fire department’s right, but-

**Moon:**

It wasn't, though, they were trying to sabotage the program...

**Susanne:**

-no!

**Moon:**

They were just really addressing-

**Susanne:**

They just said "Put 'em in a different room!"

**Moon:**

Uh huh, yeah.

**Susanne:**

"Please, get 'em out of the first floor because it's not safe for them!" Which was true, so we had to put them down on the first floor in the basement where it would be easier to get outside, which the basement was kind of half and half, I think. Whatever, it was downstairs, and, we were trying to give them as much privacy as possible for the teaching. Well, we, it worked out all right until, and then, the laws changed again, and the school district finally got the ability to have the special school, Broadway school (?), and have a, have kindergarten.

**Moon:**

When that law was, the first law was changed though, that was in the, um, between 67 and 70, or was that-

**Susanne:**

Yes, mmhmm

**Moon:**

Okay

**Susanne:**

Yes. So that's um the, and in those days its hard to remember, but the girls in the Catholic church, and from the school down the street, Notre Dame, could not go to the YWCA. They could not participate in programs.

**Moon:**

Why not?

**Susanne:**

Because they were Catholic. Catholics and, I found out that I, in Texas, in the 50s, I had a friend who was Catholic and I wanted her to come down here and do some nice words, a musical on Good Thursday or Good Friday or Thursday, and she couldn't go. I'd gone to midnight mass lots of times when I was growing up in my little home town, and I says why not, and she said, "Because, we're not allowed to." It was-

**Moon:**

So, that was the doctrine of the church to say they couldn't attend on Catholic-

**Susanne:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

-services or-

**Susanne:**

Yeah, they couldn't, uh, yeah, they couldn't do it. They couldn't mingle in a, in the Christian church. Or any church other than the Catholic Church. And so the girls at the school could not come and participate in the programs at the YWCA. Now, at

Cambridge centers, when we're teaching classes, didn't notice much because by that time I was teach-, well, that was in the 60s, I was teaching classes, and my classes were composed of, there, a lot of the Catholic schools did not, in junior high, teach sewing. So I had a lot of Catholics stu-

**Moon:**

They didn't teach jun-

**Susanne:**

No.

**Moon:**

Really?

**Susanne:**

No. No, they didn't have sewing classes, so they, uh they came to my classes to learn to sew.

**Moon:**

Oh.

**Susanne:**

And that, I had a lot of Jewish girls who came to my classes, though, because they just, it was a thrifty thing to do.

**Moon:**

Uh, huh

**Susanne:**

But, uh, it was, but now as far as programs that they felt, down at the central YWCA, they wouldn't allow the Notre Dame girls to go. So, we had a Mary Molly who was our

program director, who had a program with, uh, some Hispanic women, uh, in the community, and they came through and said, “You know,” said, “our girls are going to Notre Dame, and they want us to come to a tea, and we don’t go, because we don’t know what to do at a tea.” And this was the perfect opportunity so Mary Molly went down to talk to the head nun at the, uh, the Notre Dame, and explained why she didn’t get any Hispanic women at their introductory tea to the High School, because they didn’t know what to do, and neither did the girls. And so we want to have a program at the Y to have them learn how to perf-, act, at a tea, what a tea was, and what the program would be when they were introduced to the school, because they’re not gonna, they don’t go to your church and learn that, they won’t go to the school and learn it, but they trust us. And so they allowed the girls to go down for that.

**Moon:**

Oh!

**Susanne:**

And that was their first breakthrough with the Catholic Church in downtown San Jose.

And then it-

**Moon:**

That’s just so interesting.

**Susanne:**

Yeah

**Moon:**

It also shows the differences between the cultures, too-

**Susanne:**



Yes.

**Moon:**

-that were represented.

**Susanne:**

Yes.

**Moon:**

Because of course, you know, the Hispanic culture isn't, like, you know, inbred with this whole, kind of, like, Northern European sort of mentality, right?

**Susanne:**

No.

**Moon:**

So they wouldn't know how to do a tea.

**Susanne:**

No, they wouldn't know how to do, uh they were afraid. They were afraid to, they would embarrass their daughters, and the daughters were afraid they'd embarrass their mothers, so they just avoided it. And, uh, just as we found out later when we were trying to recruit Hispanic women to be on the board, and, 'bout that same time in that same, 1969, I was the, working with the United Way, I was a volunteer. It was some program to raise funds for the whole community at the United Way. And I left the nominating committee when we were making the discussions of why we can't attract Hispanic women. And we were saying, "Oh, they like to stay at home all day," you know, "uh, not very interested in these kind of cultural kind of things, social things." Like, or "Social programs like we have, and I walked down to the meeting at the YMCA where the United Way was

meeting and I had to walk through a picket line, um, MACSA (?) was about to get defunded. And there was a picket line of Hispanic women. So I walked in the building, and I called Lois Cullison, our executive director who was at the meeting. I said, "I need to talk to Lois," and she came on the line, I said "would you please, all that bunk we were talking about, as we were talking about why we couldn't attract Hispanic women, that was all just bunk. We don't know what we're talking about. The reason we don't attract Hispanic women is we're not relevant to 'em. And she said, Then, uh, I said, because I just walked through a line of about 15 Hispanic women and they're active, and they're socially active, and they're working hard for what they want and for what they believe in.

**Moon:**

Mmm Hmm. Now what is the, um, full, umm, tilte of MACSA. The abbrev-

**Susanne:**

Uh, Mexican American Agency for....M – A – C, Commit, Mexican American Committee for Action, maybe? Something like that.

**Moon:**

Okay, something like that.

**Susanne:**

Uh yeah, it's still around today.

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Susanne:**

Its in, its still part of the United States (?)

**Moon:**

Yeah.

**Susanne:**

Um, she said well what are you gonna do about it. I said, well, I'm gonna go out and talk to them when I finish this meeting, and, uh, so I did. And I got two board members off of that picket line.

**Moon:**

Oh. (laughing.)

**Susanne:**

And I convinced them that we cared about the same issues they did and that we, they needed to represent and I said that I wanted at least two, I didn't want one. Because they needed to have unity and feel comfortable that they had support. And they came on the board. And that was very important in those days. And because they had a voice. And in other organizations besides MACSA.

**Moon:**

Right, and did the things that were being done at the YWCA fit in to some of the same program ideas that they had.

**Susanne:**

Yeah because they were very, particularly the, uh, equality issues, equal access and, you know, racism and sexism, which we were fighting at that time. And, uh, as we always did. And, uh, they bought in to where we were because they were there too. And when I could talk to somebody who really understood that, the ones who understood it were out on the picket line.

**Moon:**

Right. (lauging)

**Susanne:**

So that's just what I did. But, uh, eh, when we won our case against the Re-Development agency, and they had to take our whole building, then we had the money for the down payment in place and I know that for, as the chair of the building committee, the real struggle was, and we had a realtor looking at property out on the East side and uh, and, there were some pieces of property that they were looking at, we had to make up our mind where we were going to be. Are we uh, there was a piece of property downtown, that we could buy. And I was the one who really did a few things. I said, you know, uh, downtown was depressed." The price was not as high as what was, uh, for the piece of property, uh as it was out in the suburbs where there's more land tied to it, but it costs more. And, and I was one that was convinced that the, uh, value of that property downtown was going to go up. It wasn't going to go down. And I said because, you know, I'm from Texas, and you buy land, you don't sell land, and once you buy it, its gonna go up. That's the nature of property: they don't make any more land. And so if we don't buy downtown, we'll never have that opportunity again. Because we usually don't have any money. So the board voted, and the committee voted to buy the land downtown. And, uh, we did.

**Moon:**

So when the re-development agency condemned both buildings, then they had to buy you out of that property to condemn it. Which gave you the funds-

**Susanne:**

They gave use the market value.

**Moon:**

Okay.

**Susanne:**

And that was part of the problem, was they had to give us the market value of that property.

**Moon:**

Right

**Susanne:**

And so, that's when we bought the property that was between 2nd and 3rd. And our address became 375 S. 3rd Street. And there was oh, about a year or two, and about, at this point I'm on the City Council. And so in 1973, I was elected to Council, about the time they were, uh, tearing down the building and, I tried to save some, uh, I tried to save the Julia Morgan Room. And, uh, I found out it, the cost, we couldn't do it. And they had already started demolishing the inside of the building and selling off part of it. A lady out in the mountains bought all the light fixtures and I couldn't even buy one back. So I didn't, when I found out how much it, they had to have a crane there, all day long. And the cost of the crane to lift all these big timbers out of the room was impossible. And I got an architect, a Rich Sletnidge, who was a local architect, but eventually Rosemary, his wife, started working for me over at the county. But, um, he sent a person over, probably an intern, and he uh identified every piece of the, of the every piece of wood that was to be taken down. I mean he, first, he sketched the room, took pictures of the room which I still have. And uh, I had to go out and I didn't know what to do because at this point, Y had no money, so I went to Cliff Swenson, who is a builder. And

when I went, at the time, I still didn't understand the power of being a councilwoman. And I, all I, first, when I first went to talk to him, first thing he did was to tell me what a good job I was doing and to apologize because he had supported my opponent, and he hopes I wouldn't hold that against him. And I said, "No, that's all right," you know. "You pick somebody and I'm gonna, whatever your needs are, I'm gonna meet your needs too. Makes no difference to me." And so we finally got around when I, he said "what is it that you want?" And he's an old-time San Josean. And I told him that my dilemma, that, uh, what I wanna know how much it would cost to put a crane up there and to get that, those big huge beams out. And I've got, and, uh, San Jose had said they'd store um indoors for us. And I'd talked the council into that. And he says, "I'll do that for you." And so he said "Yeah." And it took a whole day. And that was, it was a lot of money to put a huge crane, get a huge crane up there, and take every piece of the wood down, and the architect numbered each piece.

**Moon:**

Was that considered a conflict of interest for you as a city council member to take that kind of gift from a-

**Susanne:**

Well it wasn't for me, it was for the YWCA.

**Moon:**

Right, right.

**Susanne:**

No, I didn't get anything out of it, except the satisfaction.

**Moon:**

No, I know. I was just curious if there were, like-

**Susanne:**

No, its fine. Oh, there weren't any even laws about campaign contributions. I could have taken money in a brown paper sack. There was, at that time, they'd gotten enough laws that if you had given a hundred dollars you had to notify, you know, you had to write it down, and you had to notify them. But if it was \$99 you didn't have to, and there's many a people that talk about their \$99 brown bags sitting on their doorstep. But I identified every penny that, when I ran for office, which is another story, it's not about the YW. But there was no conflict. I didn't even, and there was no such thing then as being, It was just helping the community.

**Moon:**

It was just helping the community. That's great that he did that.

**Susanne:**

Yeah, and, uh, you know, my whole campaign was, for both primary and the final was \$10,000. Six thousand for the first. So you weren't talking about more money than you would see today, you know. But it just was-

**Moon:**

So he was able to remove the, with the crane move the, the big, um

**Susanne:**

These huge beams that were solid redwood and gorgeous. That the, this was the beams, and they came down, and I can show you the pictures, and [inaudible] took um over to the place that the YWCA was going to store them indoors.

**Moon:**

Now how did that room come to be known as the Julia Morgan room?

**Susanne:**

I said Julia Morgan. Julia Morgan was the architect. It was uh, she was the woman who gave us \$25,000 for the first building, uh, Schofield, Maria Schofield. I'm sorry. Julia Morgan room, uh, but she designed it, and that's what, but, uh, it was Maria Schofield, Schofield Hall, is what it's called.

**Moon:**

But Julia Morgan had designed the room?

**Susanne:**

Designed the whole building.

**Moon:**

Oh! Okay, I guess I missed that.

**Susanne:**

Yeah. That was long before I came along, but yeah, it's all in the book basically. It's in the book.

**Moon:**

Yeah, I have to go back and look at that.

**Susanne:**

And um, and, and so uh, the, uh Maria Schofield is in the book, too. A picture of her is in the book. And Schofield Hall, and that's what it was called Schofield Hall. Now I'm getting my memory working better. And, uh, then they took it to the, uh, city buildings. And then when, and I wrote, well what I wanted to do was to have, rebuild that room out of the history museum which was just starting at the time. And I was one of the



supporters of the museum, and I wanted them to have it as a, uh, 'cause there was a stage, and I wanted to make it so there was a stage out there, and they could perform, have performances and have a theater. And use those beams. So, uh, the city had no interest, hardly, in the history museum, and not, I couldn't get anybody interested in doing that. But they were stored, they were supposed to be safe. And then when Jim Bell got on city council, and the Y came around to say, you know, what's happened with those things? 'Cause they knew it was there, and the city had moved them out into the open, and it was destroyed.

**Moon:**

Ohhhh

**Susanne:**

I know.

**Moon:**

After all that work!?

**Susanne:**

All that work! And so, um, you know, you care about something, people can be so shortsighted. It wasn't valuable to them. It was a piece of history. It wasn't, it was valuable to the city of San Jose. But it didn't get saved. So, that took care of that. But we did, after we moved out of the building, after it closed down, the Y rented a building over on Heading, close to the Alameda. Uh, then, design, Goody (?) Steinberg became our architect for that first building, and he's always been a supporter of YW. And women's causes, and so that's where I got to know Goody Steinberg and his wife, Gerri Steinberg. And I can remember the night that we were having dinner at their house and

she was walking a, we went out for a walk after she said, “You know, I said, I’d said people ask if I’d go on the planning commission of the county. What do you think about that?” And I said, “I think it would be a wonderful idea.” At this point I’m on the city council, and I understood planning. So, uh, she did, and of course eventually she became a supervisor, wanting to be a supervisor. So that, uh, and then we served together, as the uh, supervisors.

**Moon:**

Now after you build the, um, after you went to the new property, was part of the, I know that part of it had to do with the economics of the property value, and so on and so forth, but was part of the consideration also that you felt that there were certain communities within the downtown area that you really wanted to service still?

**Susanne:**

Uh, well, uh, some of the real changes, this was in the 60s, and the 70s, and some of the changes were, first we had to decide that uh co-ed living at colleges had become the vogue. So that YWCAs no longer built residences. No residences built in its life, so we became a headquarters and a [inaudible 00:37:30] quarters. Because at the time, you know, we felt traditionally, we’d build a residence and we’d serve the kids coming in just as it always had been. We’d always functioned as a downtown center for women, and for the college. And see the college had a YWCA before there was a YWCA in, in, uh, San Jose.

**Moon:**

Oh, okay.

**Susanne:**

The YWCAs had come across the water from England to the colleges first. And so there'd been a college YWCA in the 30s and I don't know how far back it went, but, uh, I think it went back before we started in 1905, I think there was one there, but I'm not sure. I'd have to check the book on that. An, um, so we really looked toward the land being used for residence, but when we got down to the point of looking at a building, we knew it was not viable, we couldn't make it work, financially, because nobody wanted to live in the YWCA.

**Moon:**

So the students didn't, there weren't opportunities for students, um, to come over to that building though, and live on, and live in the YWCA facilities.

**Susanne:**

We had a very, by that point, we had, they had dormitories for those who wanted to be in, students, they had dormitories. And they said we're not going to be commuter students. And we had mostly young women who were coming to town. The majority of the people would come into town the first time to get a job in a big city. Coming from Gilroy, we had a lot of people coming, a lot of young women coming just from our county, not from outside our county.

**Moon:**

So they were really workers, not students that were being housed there?

**Susanne:**

Yes. Yes. Mmmhmm. Yeah. And business, and we had a lot of business type of programs in the early YWCA as well as I presume. But we really were, became the hub of a spoke in the, even in the 70s. And it began to change, and Lois left, and, uh, I was

no longer, during this period when I went on to politics, I, of course resigned from the board before that, when I started running. And no longer was elected to the board again. I had been a chair of the advisory board for many, many years, and whenever they needed things, or so....they would come and talk with me. And I always had a staff member, [Sara Jannigan?] who became a liaison with the YWCA for me, and attended some of the meetings and stuff. And so she became involved, got on the board, and became a president of the YWCA. And she was my staff member at the county, first at the, we graduated together from San Jose State in '76, and then she became a staff member for me at the city, and then she went over to the county with me. So, um-

**Moon:**

And then she later on became president?

**Susanne:**

Yes, she did.

**Moon:**

Oh.

**Susanne:**

Yeah, and Inez Jackson became the first black president of the Y and she was on my board. And, uh, maybe, I'm not quite sure of the order. Maybe it was, couple of presidents after I had been there, but she became the first black president. She was the matriarch of the black community.

**Moon:**

She was?

**Susanne:**

Yes. And she-

**Moon:**

So was she a member of that, the, uh, garden club?

**Susanne:**

Yes. She was one of the founders, I think. And uh, she also was the, uh, on the human, uh, rights commission of the city, and when, she spoke out very strongly for civil rights. And she'd, she was a school teacher. She'd gotten a degree in Okla, Oklahoma and came to California and she could not teach. They wouldn't hire her.

**Moon:**

Because she was black?

**Susanne:**

Yeah. (laughter).

**Moon:**

It's crazy.

**Susanne:**

No, it's not.

**Moon:**

I know, but you know it's so hard. You, when you put it into perspective its like, jeez!

**Susanne:**

I know. Yes

**Moon:**

Unbelievable

**Susanne:**

And, uh-

**Moon:**

So she became the first black, um, president of the Y?

**Susanne:**

Right, of the local YWCA. We had black staff members national, national renowned and we were going to always, Dorothy Heigt, who's still alive, and she was on the staff of the national board. She was on the staff for the uh, charged with the civil rights, uh, leader and that, and she was a tremendous woman.

**Moon:**

Is Inez still alive?

**Susanne:**

No. No. I have her obituary, because I spoke at that service, so she's no longer there.

And, um-

**Moon:**

Do you have any connections to the garden club today?

**Susanne:**

Uh, it was-

**Moon:**

Or, do you know anybody who was, part of that organization.

**Susanne:**

Oh, yeah. It would be easy, it would be easy to get, if you want to talk to them-

**Moon:**

Yeah, I would be interested in talking to them.

**Susanne:**

Oh, yeah. It would be easy for me to get connection with that. Because one of the things that I did, well, that's not about the YWCA. I won't talk about that, but, uh, I got the, uh, the, uh, the African American Community Center. It was an old, old fire station for the city, and Inez Jackson came to me and wanted to have that for the, dollar a year, and have it for their community center. Across from the Baptist Church, which is the big, big community church. And-

**Moon:**

When you were on the city council?

**Susanne:**

Mm hmm. And so, I told her that we'd do it. I said, "first thing we'd do..." Janet Grey was mayor, I said "We get the support of Janet Grey," and she never, It wasn't as important to her to do things like this, but I said "We get her bought into it, and then we'll get the votes for it. And then I'll get Joe Cola involved in it, 'cause he's old time San Josean. He's familiar with all the people at the black church there. So we got it, we got it done. And the city manager was opposed to it, and they all, everybody was, you know, bureaucracy was opposed to it. But we got it done. So they became, that's, so that's still their community center. That's their library. And it's still right there on Julian and 6th street maybe, something, its right around, I think it's between 5th and 6th. Anyway, so that is, all I have to do is call over there and get you in touch with [inaudible: 00:44:06]. I still know a lot of the people in the black community. But yeah, and they've had history books and all kinds of things

**Moon:**

Right, there's one that's in the library.

**Susanne:**

Okay. And, so I became their advisor, and uh whenever they got in some trouble with the, uh, the times. And then when, uh, Sarah Janigian and Mary Katherine Kelly, Sarah was the president of the Y. And they had vision. They were bursting at the scenes in that location. And they'd only build on half the lot because they never could build, they'd hoped to build something on the other side, but they never were able to, so when they had a vision that they would at this point, housing for women was single mothers, children, they were needing safe places to go. And they wanted to have a, have a residence for women that would be a program residence where they would assist them in, by having an all-women building, and the children would have a kindergarten, and we'd have programs to help them get on their feet. And it would be a three year, they'd stay there three years and it would help them so they'd be self sufficient, go out on their own, get jobs, do whatever they need to do, finish college, and then be independent. And it started out this great idea, and they came to me to talk about it. And I guess it was about 97 perhaps, Sarah might have even the figures of when they first came, the first year, and I asked them if they were in the red or in the black by the end of the year, cause this was about in May. She says, "we're in the red." I says, "Don't come to me to ask me to get up anything 'till you're in the black. I won't go to the community for an organization that isn't managing their money." They said, "okay." So they came back the next year and they were in the black. (laughter). Yeah, we'd have too many, I, a city cou-, well, council, and I was on the board then, organizations who really couldn't get it together. And, you know, the symphony finally, that's why the symphony finally closed. Nobody



ever said to them, you know, "Get your stuff together." And cause they were, \$3 million in the hole. And never got out of it. And so I knew I couldn't support what we wanted to do, and I knew that to conservative community that we still are in San Jose wouldn't support it. You couldn't show them a ballot sheet that was red and say "help us out." So, they got busy and they got in the black, and I said I would chair their building committee. Well, I'd share their capital campaign, not their building committee but their capital campaign. Which was, and I was on the BRIDGE Housing at this point also, and I think I was the founder of that and was still work, still am on it. And so I thought that what they needed was the competence and the knowledge of BRIDGE Housing and in order to put the financial package together because it was complicated. Because the residence part would get tax credits for BRIDGE good, and get re-development money from the city of San Jose and put together a financial package to make it fly. But the program part, could not be a part of that. And the program part, no one, you know, we'd have to raise the money for that, which was about \$3 million. So that, which is a lot of money in 1990. So I agreed that I'd chair their capital campaign. And it was probably, I left the board in '91, so it was about 1990. And I worked and I got organized. we organized a committee, and we raised the money. And, I'd, Course I'd, by this point, I knew so many people in the community, and they knew that I was working to get the job done, because it was such a, it was my organization and I loved it so. So that I got some great responses, and I got the pledges. And so we could start the building. And it took longer though because then the bottom dropped out. That was one of those horrible times in '89 when the bottom dropped out again. So some people had to renege on the pledges that we got. And we went to the Pacific Bank, and got a loan and to finish financing it, and we,

eventually we got that loan paid off. You know like \$300,000 or something that that bugged us for a while, then we finally, yeah and Jackie, um, Lauer, who took on the task to finish raising that money. And she'd gotten it raised and she was the chair of our luncheon that we have every year, the annual luncheon. The day after the luncheon, she was killed in a car wreck.

**Moon:**

Oh, how awful.

**Susanne:**

Oh, oh, it was terrible. Yeah.

**Moon:**

Oh, what a tragedy.

**Susanne:**

It was right at the corner of Coleman and Meridian, coming in from the Almaden Valley. She, uh, yeah, she didn't see the light change, and she, a truck ran into her. And her purse slid under the, off the seat, and they didn't identify her for about 18 hours.

**Moon:**

Oh. Cause they didn't have any identification?

**Susanne:**

No, 'cause they couldn't find, they didn't find the purse.

**Moon:**

Oh my gosh.

**Susanne:**

Yeah it was really tragic, and, uh, she'd been such a force for the YWCA. And she was quite a- quite a gal. But anyway, so her husband then finished raising the money that she'd pledged to us, he'd been in high tech, so he finished raising the money that she pledged that she would go out and get.

**Moon:**

Oh, really?

**Susanne:**

Yeah, he did. So he went out and he got the rest of the money. Gave some himself, too, a bit extra, yeah, in her name. But, anyway, so we built the building. And we had some troubling times with executive directors, and we really took off when Keri McLain became our executive. These last eight and a half years have just been velocity years because she is so dynamic. She's a great, she was the head of Agnews. She was the first woman ever to get the position of running the institution for the state. And sh- at one point, she was on the City Council of Santa Clara, so she's just a political person. But, uh, a *very* good administrator. And, she's also passionate about the YWCA.

**Moon:**

Yeah, she seems to be.

**Susanne:**

And so, uh, so it's, it's just a match made in heaven for her to be there. And she's just done tremendous things and created greatness for us.

**Moon:**

Right. Now when did that program actually begin, where, um, kind of de- prior to Sarah Janigan's, um, role in trying to develop the program for women, for the, kind of the living system sort of program for women?

**Susanne:**

And we couldn't do it because the federal law changed and we would be discriminating if we did it.

**Moon:**

Oh so it couldn't just be for women?

No.

Right, okay.

No, no we lost that, because we were going to get the federal backing, and the federal dollars, and they changed their, changed the laws. So, we would have been discriminating.

**Moon:**

So, now, but there is a living facility there, is there not? And it's for families, then?

**Susanne:**

It's for families, or for single men or women or whatever, whoever. And it's, it's largely minority. But, and I'm on that because the way it's—the organization—is set-up, the governing body—because by law, there are two members on the board of the Y, and two from BRIDGE housing, and then one from the community. And so since I've, I'm both of them. And then we—I'm the primary community person, 'cause I have one leg in BRIDGE and one leg in the YW, so I've been on their governing committee for the function of the total building, and, uh, paying the debt. Following it, making sure the

reserves are there to repair the building. All the usual kind of things that you do to keep residents. And so there—we have breakdowns of what the composition of residents are in terms of ethic, how many children. We have fewer children than we thought we were gonna have. But w—and we—we—we never have been successful in integrating program into ev—because those people, a lot of the people there, we have, you know, Chinese, Asian, we had the Eritreans [00:53:31] from Africa. And, they're busy getting their lives together and working, and not seeking the kind of program we were looking for—for women who were struggling. But, but there's some there, but there's fewer children, and, but there's some, as we've had some cases where a young woman with her child, and she starts, we got her a scholarship to go to San Jose State, and go the child into the childcare. And she worked at the Y some. So, you know, we've had successes with some, but not we'd anticipated

**Moon:**

Oh, okay.

**Susanne:**

So the program's not what we thought it was, but it serves the community.

**Moon:**

Yeah

**Susanne:**

And low income people. It's for low income people.

**Moon:**

How many, um, people, actually, are—um, live in that facility? Do you know?

**Susanne:**

Well there's 64 apartments, and—63 because one's for the manager. And I don't have the breakdown now-

**Moon:**

Oh okay. That's okay, I was just curious how many.

**Susanne:**

Yeah. Yeah. But it's an easy—yeah, we keep those, so it could be gotten from Graciella, at the YW.

**Moon:**

It might be even in the records that we have at San Jose now. There might be some documents in that, because you brought those papers over. We're just going to be hiring somebody in the Fall to start processing that collection.

**Susanne:**

That would be over in the new building part.

**Moon:**

Well I think its, really, it's such a fascinating history. And that it's had such a long term sort of presences, and as a really viable non-profit organization, which isn't the case with a lot of other, you know, non-profits that started, you know, in the nineteenth century, and you know, moved in—have—has maintained itself all these years.

**Susanne:**

Well, you know, people have always asked, why don't you merge? 'Cause some—some areas they merge the YWCA with the YMCA, and—as a joint. And I say, "Well that's because the YWCA and the YMCA have different agendas." And I say, "I always look at it like the Y—YMCA is interested in the physical and the—and the moral integrity of

the young people, and you know those kind of—but, really, it's been a physical ed program. And it's [inaudible 00:55:48]." And I said, "We—we really don't do physical ed. What we do is the changing of the social situation of a human being. And the YM doesn't touch that really." And, so—which is different, and, so, that's why we couldn't merge, because our—our core values are different. Where our value is to empower women, and get rid of racism, and YMCA, while they do a great job and they've a lot more integration over in the other communities, but they just were *not* a social organization like we were.

**Moon:**

Right. So even though the—the, like the legal, um, process has changed as far as looking at, you know, housing, and not being able to just, you know, have a segregated sort of housing offering, like you had tried to do previous to the—you know—the, the better law changing. It sounds like the YW has tried to maintain its identity as a women's organization. Or a support network for women.

**Susanne:**

And families

**Moon:**

And families.

**Susanne:**

Yeah. And, of course, youth. Because youth is always new (?) [inaudible 00:56:57], boys and girls. But it's also the one program, if you look at—it has changed to meet the changing needs of the community women and the community period. And so that today we have parenting programs that men come to who are single dads. They get the children,

and they don't know how to be a father. I mean, that's got to be a mother, too. And they've taken the parenting classes at the Y. We've had—we've had classes on divorce, were we—what we're trying to do is show the effects of their—what they're doing on the children. And we use—that's one of the most powerful programs. One family—which is kind of typical, really. We use art with the kids to express their feelings, and this one poster this one child did made the parents realize what they were doing to the child. And what he—she—the child had drawn was these two giants and this little bitty girl with her arms up there and these giants holding up her arms. It was like, you know, they saw themselves as these giants that were just pulling this child, pulling her apart. And they changed their attitude. They divorced, but they got her out of the middle of the divorce. And so it's, so it's things like that that the Y will work so hard to change. You know our pregnancy teen program, called New Options, that's just a *strong* youth program. It was Overfelt High School, who had the highest pregnancy rate in California. We brought this program from the East Coast, New York City, and started it with the Catholic Church across the street, and the school district, and the YW, and the colleges, City College and the San Jose State to form this program. We were the [inaudible 00:58:51] after going to the school's after school programs, and, kind of the guarantee is “we'll show you a—we had programs, like, they'd go down to the event center. Most of them had never been there. And they'd take them on tours, and they'd be at the art museum, different places. They would—they'd sign a pledge, boys and girls, that they will not get anybody pregnant, nor will they get pregnant before they leave high school, and we'll guarantee them we'll work our best to get them into college. Most of them hadn't even thought about college, but we'd take them to the college campuses and they walk, and they'd see



that there's people like them there. And they'd begin to get ambitions, and they—they'd change. And we've had a success rate, the rate was, let's see, of a thousand kids that went through at one point, we had about seven failures. And Overfelt High School became—is not even on the charts as far as their pregnancies. We expanded it to three other schools, but we had to pull back when all the money—federal dollars dried up. And so we're back to just Overfelt, but we still give—we go to, to all the middle schools to teach about how you take care of yourself as far as violence against children, and careful how you prevent being raped. But then you do it in age brackets, you know, where in the elementary schools and junior highs and high schools, depending which curriculum depending on it, and we teach those classes as part of the health ed classes. And of course with our rape crisis, which continues to be a long standing program in the community, we answer all the police departments carry a card, and the card says "If you would call this number, rape crisis center, there is someone that will meet you at the hospital and be with you the entire time of the process you have to go through at the hospital." And we were at the hospital—then we train volunteers, and then, if they can't get somebody, the staff go. We were at the hospital, from ages 6 months up to 92, I think, 500 and some-odd times last year. And that's every year.

**Moon:**

Now why don't you just go back a little bit, and talk about, kind of, how that rape crisis center evolved, because I know you were involved in trying to address the problems with the police department interactions with these women.

**Susanne:**

This was back in 1974, when I was on the City Council, and Jackie—McClure is her name now—came to, came to me and said, you know, “We’ve been trying to-” They’d started a rape crisis hotline, and started that as a program, and they could not talk to the police chief, Chief Murphy, of the San Jose Police Chief, they could not talk to him. So, I said “Oh! That’s simple. I can get you a meeting.” So I picked up the phone right there and called him and said “Chief Murphy, I’d like to have a meeting with you, and some people from the YWCA.” And he says, “Oh, okay! Fine. Now what—what’s the topic?” And I said, “Well, a training.” And he said “Okay, well I’ll bring the training officer,” you know his chief, assistant chief, “to the meeting.” I said, “Fine!” So I told her we’d set it up. So Jackie came with a young woman, and later the young woman said she was never so scared in her life, that she was petrified, ‘cause she never thought she’d be able to look across at the police and tell them what they’d done to her. But she did. And she told the chief exactly how she’d been treated by the San Jose police department when she was raped. And how they—they were callous, you know, they almost said she asked for it. They were asking her the kind of questions, “Well, why didn’t you do this?” or “Why did you—why were you there in the first pl—?” You know, things like that, that insinuate that it’s all her fault that she got raped. And, at the end of the—of the—her saying all these things, the police—Murphy turned—the chief turned to me and said “Well, what do you want me to do about this?” And Jackie says, “I want to train your officers. I want to have a session at the City College and train your officers [inaudible 01:03:17] or whatever they were, on how to treat women. I want them to carry this card that they will call the YWCA and get somebody at the hospital for the-“ ‘Cause the process at the hospital, when she talked about that process, you know, where she’s treated just—she

didn't know what to expect. And at the hospital, they don't even get to take their clothes home. They go—they walk out of that hospital without even their own clothes.

**Moon:**

Right 'cause it's considered evidence.

**Susanne:**

It's evidence! And so, in the Y, yeah, there's sweat suits and jogging suits and all that, so we have a wardrobe of different sizes for the women now. But he said, "okay." And that was the start of the real change in attitude. And San Jose was the worst at the time, and now it's the best. We even have a police chief on the board.

**Moon:**

Now were there not that many female officers at the time that were—would have been involved in some of that work.

**Susanne:**

There weren't any.

**Moon:**

There weren't any.

**Susanne:**

There was 'assistant' police officers.

**Moon:**

Oh, that's right.

**Susanne:**

Remember?

**Moon:**

Mm hmm. So that was pr—the, that was dur—before the legal changes took place for the women that were actual-

**Susanne:**

Remember this is in '74. Yeah, yeah, that's right. No, there weren't any police women out there. There had been assistant police women who'd been out there in the trenches, but they were being—had been pulled back in. *'Cause, you know, they didn't want to face that (?)* [Inaudible 01:04:43].

**Moon:**

So how does it work today? Is it more—I know there's, you know, the police force is much more diverse than it was obviously in '74, are—do they have a certain, like, um, segment of the, you know, police force dealing with the issues related to rape? Are there women officers that are part of that process?

**Susanne:**

Uh, not necessarily. It's just that they're all trained to deal with it, because you never can tell which officer's gonna be on beat when they're- and so, where it's going to occur. It occurs in Almaden Valley as much as it does the East Side, and in West San Jose as much as the downtown San Jose. I mean, you know, it's all over. And the colleges were prime examples of it, San Jose State. And so, uh, its that—who, and lets face it, some of them don't call, and they don't deal with it 'till later in life. And also we have our whole counseling department grew out of the Rape Crisis Center. Because, they discovered the phone calls that they were getting that was long after the rape had occurred, and they were still feeling victimized, and it—and we turn 'em into survivors. Because then they just become survivors and learn how to deal with their lives, and go on with life. But, um,

so it was just a complete change. And now you see, again when the whole domestic violence had become a major issue, and the Y is very involved in that, you know, “Walk a Day,” walk a mile in their shoes. And, with men walking in the women’s shoes—sandals or thongs. But there’s a whole week, and, of course, George Edwards and I worked on that. So it’s just the—there’s always just been a thread to try to protect women.

**Moon:**

Right. Well all of these areas kind of come together, you know. Whether it’s—not that all women are necessarily rape victims, but—but a lot of women are certainly domestic violence, so-

**Susanne:**

And, so, so then, and of course, and when you look at the—the world, there was an article in the Christian Science monitor that last year 113 million women were missing.

**Moon:**

Just vanished, huh?

**Susanne:**

Just vanished. Sold into slavery, murdered, stoned. Just gone. Yeah, 113 million.

**Moon:**

That’s a lot of women

**Susanne:**

That’s a lot of women. And we’re the—deal with women the best of any nation. I’m convinced of that.

**Moon:**

I think that's probably true, too.

**Susanne:**

And we're a long way from being humane.

**Moon:**

Yes! [Laughter.]

**Susanne:**

And we can't brag. We can't brag.

**Moon:**

No. Well that's where organizations like the Y are so important, because they provide a lot of important community services to help women, and their families, and-

**Susanne:**

Well, what they do is they keep the community aware of the needs—of the present needs at the present time, here in 2006. What they were doing in 1961 was providing for the needs of women who had been transported from all over this nation into this valley with nothing to do. They'd left their home, were adventuresome, with their engineering husbands and come to this valley. And they had a yearning to do more than sit in their house. You'd be good housekeepers and good mothers, but they were not married to a house. That's what I always say when someone said, "You're a housewife?" I said, "No, I'm not married to a house." [Laughter]. "I'm a homemaker, but I'm not a housewife!" [Laughter]. "I married a man! Not a house!"

**Moon:**

Yeah. That's a good response, actually [Laughter]. Well, there's, you know, people who in—particularly in the '70's, when there was such, kind of a—the degrees of feminism

kind of represented. You know, kind of the bra-burner mentality versus the conservative or more social sort of feminist. I think that it, you know, pit women against women, against each other on things where they shouldn't have been, and they should have recognized that, you know, it's okay to be a 'housewife' or 'homemaker,' whatever terminology that you apply. And, I think a lot of the housewives or house—homemakers were alienated from that movement to some degree because of that.

**Susanne:**

Well, but, it was dominated by the thinking of their husbands. Because—and I worked on that in my own way when, in the '70's when people would know that I was a feminist. And I'd say, "Yes!" and I wouldn't say any more. But I'd start talking about, you know "Do you have children?" "Yeah," they said, you know, "We have three sons." And "Yeah we have two daughters and a son." I said, "Oh, what are your daughters doing?" "Oh, oh, my child is going to the University of Berkeley and she's taking—she's taking Chemistry." I said, "Oh really!" I said, "You mean you want her to be—What's she gonna do with that?" "Well, you know, she—she's really good." And they said, "—Or she's gonna be an attorney." I said, "You mean, you don't want her just to be a housewife? And be, be a wife of somebody and stay at home? She's got—she's bright enough to do both?" And they'd look at me, and it was a 'gotcha!' moment! [Laughter]. And this—I'd say, "That's all we want," you know, "and I piece of the sky too." And *yet, be able to* [inaudible 01:10:39] —you know, I've always been a homemaker. Yeah.

**Moon:**

Well, and that's something I think a lot of younger women today are going back to the idea of not, you know, having these high powered sort of careers, and wanting to be home with their children.

**Susanne:**

Well, I think most women, when they have children, realize that somebody's gotta take care of these children in a way that is—is—has always been the maternal role.

**Moon:**

And it's healthier for the children.

**Susanne:**

It's—but it's kind of born into us. There was—when I held that first child of mine, and I was, I had a friend of mine that was going back to college. She wanted to know if I wanted to go back to college. Well, I had two little boys. I said, “No, I'm not interested in that at all.” I was still interested in doing the things that I was doing, you know: learning to sew, and taking care of my kids. I had my little house and my neighborhood. That's—that's all I wanted to do. And, so she was at a point where she wanted to—had some yearnings of her own, this is back in San Antonio. That was always one of the things I—when Ruthidel and Lucille were talking about the YWCA, I said, “I don't even know,” I said, “They didn't, we didn't have a YWCA.” And I guess there was one in San Antonio, where I lived ten years, but I never even walked in the doors. “Why do you think—why do you want me there?” [Laughter]. That's what I kept saying to 'em.

**Moon:**

Well, they obviously saw something in you.

**Susanne:**



Yeah, that's what I-

**Moon:**

Now Ruthidel's the woman who put together all of your scrapbooks, right?

**Susanne:**

Yeah, and she's the one that I—wear my ring. This is my ruby ring. And she's the one I speak of in the forward to the book.

**Moon:**

How long ago did she die?

**Susanne:**

1978.

**Moon:**

Oh, a long time ago! She died young, huh?

**Susanne:**

Yeah. She was fifteen years older than I was. She was born, well, yeah—she was born in 1915, and I was born in '24, so I guess that's, maybe that's not fifteen years, ten years older than I was. And, yes, she did die young though. She died in '78, and was born in '15, so she was in her sixties, but when—she fought 20 years with breast cancer. First, breast cancer, and after, she was *deemed* [01:12:53], after ten years, it was gone. And she was clear. And then she popped up with cancer again.

**Moon:**

And it was, it ended up being terminal?

**Susanne:**

Eventua—after ten years. Ten more—well, she lived ten more years fighting that. She was a fighter, she really was. And she—they—when she got this huge sore back on the back of her neck that had erupted. And she went to the doctor, and the doctor said at the time, said, “You know,” he says, “we could operate, but we don’t have great success there and there’s a lot of new things coming along in chem—chemotherapy that we’re just beginning to try.” So this was in ’68, and so, she said “okay, lets do that.” And she became the guinea pig for every drug that was new and she tried to—sh—and she, it began to work. She worked for the YW practically until the day she died, she began to work, and then, it would just stop [snap] like that! She was taking testosterone, and she was growing mustaches, and all that. By the time she finished all that electrolysis to take all your beard off, got it finished so she had no more follicles in her face at all, it stopped working. She went down and ended up in the hospital, and at death’s door, and so they switched chemos on her. She got up, and she lay in my bed at my house for about two months...two or three months, when another friend who was also suffering cancer came in and said, she would her hands behind her, she said “Ruthidel! When are you gonna get up out of that bed?” And Ruthidel said “tomorrow”. She said “All right!” And she got up. She was three inches shorter, she’d lost so much of her, of her back. She was just a tiny thing at that point. But then, you know, and she got up, she worked, and so about the next time she was down at death’s door in the hospital, they gave her something new to pop her back up and she worked and—

**Moon:**

Did she live with you?

**Susanne:**

Only for the three months, she was in between—she couldn't live at her apartment. She had divorced at that point. I'd been helping her daughter—her daughter became my daughter, our daughter. She had two children, and my children grew up with her children, and we grew up together. So Catherine, I've been helping her, she's moving. I've been doing estate sales this past couple weeks, three weeks. The hottest day of the year. A hundred and five! I'd worked eight days getting everything labeled for her. She had three generations of stuff. I won't call it all junk, cause a lot of its antiques and things like that. And got it all, every—priced. She'd taken everything she'd wanted there and's *settled* it where she's going to live, and she's come across—I came across a trophy that was, as I read it, it was 1929 and I threw it in the garbage. She said, "That was my grandfather's football trophy!" And I looked at it and I said, "Yes," and I said, "You didn't take it with you. Evidently you don't want it." "No." I said, "You want to take it with you?" She says, "No." And I threw it back in the garbage. [Laughter]. I found out later—I found out from the chef she'd taken it out again. So I said to her, "Catherine, do you want this trophy?" She said, "No." I said, "It's going in the trash!" She said, "All right." And I said, "If you don't want it, nobody else wants it." [Laughter]. So, I've been doing that, and we have our *last*—we had two Saturdays in a row and the first one was the 105° day that San Jose had. It was, *annoying* and we didn't have as many people come, so we did another Saturday, and so our last estate sale is this coming Saturday.

**Moon:**

Oh, gosh.

**Susanne:**

But, anyway-

**Moon:**

Well, at any rate, it sounds-

**Susanne:**

So, Ruthidell was—she was a good parent, she—Catherine was 9 months old when she got polio, you know, that was back in the '40s and the polio epidemics. And, you know, my granddaughter Amanda said, “What’s polio?” When I asked, when I said that Catherine wa—had polio. And she didn’t even know what polio was. Isn’t that amazing?

**Moon:**

Yeah. It’s interesting, in the, you know, the American History Museum at—in Washington D.C., the Smithsonian, you know, *walk*, they have a huge exhibit on polio, and it’s really quite an interesting sort of thing because it did really take, you know, the country and other places in the world by storm, you know, with that epidemic, and it, you know, they show all these different people that-

**Susanne:**

The iron lungs, and the, and the braces, and the, and the cripples. She was six, nine months old, and her—she was in braces, and—and when she was three the doctor told her that she’d never walk without braces, and Ruthidel threw them away, taught her how to walk. And then she went through the operations of cutting off the growth of the leg that was growing too much to keep her balance. She’s, you know, she’s one of the few people who can walk, she’ll stand straight, and she doesn’t limp. One foot’s six and one’s and eight. I mean, you know the leg was so crippled, that, so she’s always had to buy two pair of shoes in her life. [Laughter].

**Moon:**

Oh my gosh. That's an expensive proposition.

**Susanne:**

Yeah, very expensive. There's a place in Sacramento that still today sells individual shoes, so you can buy one eight and one six, and *nothin' bad's gonna come* [01:18:33].

But, we had the Gonzalez warm springs outside my home time that became the polio center. And, then, of course, after we conquered polio then it became a rehabilitation center for all kinds of uh crippling diseases.

**Moon:**

And you really forget about how significant that disease was

**Susanne:**

Oh yeah, people in iron lungs for the rest of their life. Catherine and now they have these post-partum, uh post polio syndromes like uh these other syndromes that eventually you, your, part of your body, her knees gave way and so she said, she has new knees you know, soft knees. And uh, but she's a strong woman too, like her mother.

**Moon:**

Good for her

**Susanne:**

Yeah

**Moon:**

Well, Gosh, I think we-

**Susanne:**

-yeah we covered a lot

**Moon:**

-we covered a lot today on the “Y” and I think that uh what we can do is continue this next week.

**Susanne:**

Okay

**Moon:**

I’ll have gone through those other two books-

**Susanne:**

Yeah

**Moon:**

-that I have and bring those back next, on uh next Monday

**Susanne:**

I left you a message about that I made contact with the county on the uh-

**Moon:**

Oh right

**Susanne:**

-and uh I was, tried to call-(end of interview 01:19:46 )