

Project: Bay Area Feminists Oral History Project

Interview with Dianne McKenna

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Begin 04-05-2006 Interview - Dianne McKenna.wav

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MOON:

Hi, this is Danelle Moon. I'm the director of San Jose State special collections, and I'm here with graduate student Amy Fonseca, and we are here at Dianne McKenna's home to interview her on her experience on Santa Clara County politics. The date is April 5, 2006, and we will begin the interview.

(pause)

MOON:

OK, well Dianne. Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of this project. And just as kind of an introduction about what I'm trying to do. My background is in Women's History and I've been documenting the post-suffrage activist work that took place between 1920 and about 1948 or so, and coming out recently due to San Jose, and now my project has become much more modern. And so one of my goals is really to try to get women who have been really active in politics both as politicians and office holders as well as women who have been active in different social organizations, and also documenting women historians, who have been really part of the activist movement that took place in the 70s, and sort of the whole rise of the civil rights movement, and looking at the women's movement. So, that's the whole baseline goal of this project, is just to get some reflection of women who were so much part of the building of the feminist, kind of capital pier, and of course that whole terminology, the feminist capital was really -- was a popular term that was applied to San Jose, and so -- initially, what I'd like you to do, is maybe talk to -- express what the Feminist capital meant to you, or whether or not you think that term really represented, or had some impact on your entry into politics.

MCKENNA:

Well, I think the term, Feminist Capital actually came after I was elected. I believe the term was used by Janet Grey Hayes, when was mayor of San Jose and I believe the first woman mayor of San Jose. But, I was elected to office in 1977. And at that particular time, there was one woman who was on the Singal (sp?) City Council. And two of us -- two women were elected at that particular time, and then I think the term, Feminist Capital of world, and came about because Janet Grey Hayes was in San Jose, she had one other woman I believe was on the council with her. She was seeing that cities like Sunnyvale had picked up a couple of women council members. And there were other councils that had women that were just getting elected, or had been elected. So, it was kind of a growing mass of women who were not in political office. And I think that when you look across the country, and looked at how many were in congress, and how many were in state legislatures, and other places, that San Rafael County was somewhat of an anomaly. We had more women than other places on a percentage bases. But, by no means did we have a majority of women, and that -- if you look at the population, where we make up more than half of the population, we still don't represent, we still don't own half of the elected body, either locally, or at the state level. So, in reality, we're not nearly represented as I think would be healthy for the community. But, I think the thing that was interesting to me during that time was -- when Janet Grey made that statement -- Janet Grey Hayes made that statement about being the feminist capital of the world, then the newspapers came around and asked women, "Well, are you a feminist?" And what surprised me more than anything else, was the number of women that said no. I had no problem saying, "I'm a feminist." Because, I believe you're a feminist -- if you believe that women should have equal opportunity, equal representation and all those things. But, what surprised me was

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even those women who were elected were saying no, and would say things like, "No, I'm an implementer, no I'm this, no I'm something else." Afraid-- there was still the -- reluctance, or the stigma of what feminist meant. So, I think that while women were running for office, there were a number of women who were not necessarily feminists or believed in women's issues. So, I think it was kind of interesting that we were the feminist capital, but when you start talking to women, we weren't all believing in the same issues.

MOON:

And the whole concept -- right. Right before we started to get this group together, and working with some of the students on this project, I raised the question of what feminism meant to them individually, or whether or not they considered themselves to be feminists. And I don't think any one of them said that they were feminist or -- we were talking about the negative/positive attributes that people think about when they think about that term. So, I think that's really interesting -- and reading some of the documentation on women's experiences, there were a number of women, like you say, who didn't really call themselves feminists, but they certainly were doing feminist activities --

MCKENNA:

-- right.

MOON:

And it wasn't that they didn't believe in equal rights necessarily, but that they weren't working for the movement, so to speak. But, I think that's a really interesting idea. Looking at your entry into politics, how did you actually -- what actually inspired you to go into politics? Were your parents involved politically? Can you talk a little bit about your background in what really inspired you to go into the public ground?

MCKENNA:

Well, I think there are a number of factors and it's hard to pick just one, but I have found that -- and I think it's interesting because of the religious debate that goes on right now in the country at this particular time. But, when I went to Catholic School growing up, and in the Catholic School there was a real commitment to giving back to your community. So, there was an ethic, there was a cultural bias that you had to give back to your community. I also went to an all girls Catholic high school, where the girls did everything. We were the student body, we were the math club, we were the science club. So there was nothing in the school -- going to school you were, you could do -- and you did everything that any "other high school" would do, but it was all done by girls. So, there was no stigma as to running for office, no stigma to being a math major, or specializing in math -- So, I had that background. And then my parents were not what I would call "politically active" but my parents were the type of people who read the newspaper, voted in every election, discussed issues. So, it was part of my growing that you participated in your community in a number of different ways. But, what really pushed me to run for office was something different from that. And that was basically from someone telling me, "No I couldn't do something." And I think when people talk about role models, or -- mentors, as people who get you involved in things, I find equally motivating, is when somebody tells me I can't do something. And what had happened was -- I had gone to San Jose State and I got my masters degree in Urban Original Planning. And I thought, well, it's time to give back to the community. So, I applied for the Planning Commission in the city of Sunnyvale. And the first time I applied, it was before the open meeting that had been passed, and I sat around the table with the counsel members, and they asked questions, and I didn't get appointed. I thought that maybe I didn't answer some of the questions correctly to their political disposition, but I had no idea that my competition, if you will, for the city planning commission. So, I didn't get appointed, and the next time the planning commission had seats available, I thought well, you know, I'll apply again. Now, this time, the open meeting act had passed, so now I see -- since now we are now interviewed in public. Now, I see who my competition is. And so I listened to the questions being asked, and there were about eight or ten of us applying for two slots, and I

realized, I'm sitting here listening like I'm -- you know two or three of us would be really good, listening to the question and answering session. And I read in the newspaper, who got appointed. And it was everyone who said, "The city is being run right, I have no ideas." (laughter) And I thought -- well, how -- you would think you be a little astute in being political aware, but I realized how politically naïve I was to go in thinking that you would necessarily appoint the best person. So, I said, you know what? I'm not going to get appointed to the planning commission. Maybe I'll run for political office instead. And so there was a citizens group that was basically a group that was organized to protect the environment and parks and things -- and they were endorsing candidates. And I went before them, and I told them that I had no experience in running for office, but if they endorsed me, I would run for office. And so I ran for office, and 20 years later, I retired from office. So, actually it was someone telling me, no I couldn't do something that got me involved politically.

[01 – 00:10:40]

MOON:

Got you started in the whole process. After you did actually successfully run for this city counsel in Sunnyvale then for -- a period of time you also served as mayor, did you run for mayor?

MCKENNA:

No, in the city of Sunnyvale, the mayor is appointed by the council.

MOON:

Oh OK.

MCKENNA:

But, I'm just very fortunate in that I served less than eight years on a council when they selected me twice to be their mayor. And I thought that was kind of nice and so I had two years of being mayor and that was fun, that was the best job. (laughter)

MOON:

Now, after that you, from that point, you went to Santa Clara board of supervisors.

MCKENNA:

Supervisors, right.

MOON:

And one of the things that I read in one of the articles about you, they said that that was one of most expensive campaign races of that time period. N

MCKENNA:

For that time.

MOON:

For that time.

MCKENNA:

The next election beat doubled what we did -- each succeeding one, because I think... You know I don't remember how much that was -- did they tell you it was above a \$100,000

MOON:

They didn't say in the --

MCKENNA:

I think, then, that was 1984, it was about -- I think it was about 100,000, but you can check my records, because the next race, which was two years later, was something like \$250,000.

MOON:

Oh OK. So it just got more expensive.

MCKENNA:

So, we were quickly surpassed.

MOON:

Well, one of the questions that was raised by this political scientist who wrote this book, Janet Flaney. In her study, she had done a lot of interviews of women in San Jose specifically, and what she found that women who were redistricting in San Jose really helps women in minorities and politics, that doesn't seem like it had the same impact at the county level.

MCKENNA:

No, I don't think so.

MOON:

It must have been really cheap to run, I think it was like \$5,000 to run a campaign in those early years of the redistricting process. So, there was a question of whether or not middle class women could actually run as well under the redistricting plan, versus minority groups. And so I was just wondering if you had any -- if redistricting had any impact on any of the types of things that you were doing when you were running for office.

MCKENNA:

Well, there are boards of supervisors. What would be interesting to take a look at is that there are boards of supervisors who run on a countywide basis. But we and Santa Clara County ran on a district. Santa Fe County runs county wise for their states. We run based upon a district. Now -- you know redistricting is a whole -- there are benefits and real drawbacks depending on the size. Now if you look at Santa Fe County which has about a half million I think in population and you look at Santa Clara county, and there are a million and 800,000. It seems to me that when your district is -- over the size of the congressional district, then the districting seems to make a whole lot of sense. Because if you had to run in Santa Clara county and get your message out, that's very very difficult. And it would be very very costly. So, I think the districts make sense to a certain size -- yea.

MOON:

OK, well I think that whole question of redistricting is just one component of Latina Carroll, government runs effectively, and how people can run in it -- how regular people can run as candidates, versus people who, you know have much more money behind them. So, looking back at your process into politics, what resources did you have to fund your campaigns, what groups were really behind you as part of your board of supervisor campaign?

MCKENNA:

Well, I think that -- actually when I ran, I ran against a woman that was an outstanding candidate. We were

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friends, and continue to be friends to this day, but -- so, we split -- we kind of split the support between the typical people who tend to support democrats, which were environmentalists, women's' groups, some labor groups, different friends -- so I think my race may have been a little bit of an anomaly that two of us were running against -- and so we were splitting support for everyone.

MOON:

And Betsy -- what was her last name?

MCKENNA:

Bektel. Bektel.

MOON:

OK. Now, that's kind of interesting that you have kind of a different sort of process in looking at the whole election. Once you were elected, and you -- started participating in the whole county process -- what was that experience like? Did you find that you faced a lot of discrimination as a female working for the board of supervisors and working within the kind of political -- spectrum that you would have to interact with in policy making?

MCKENNA:

Well, when I got on the board, there were already two women on the board. So, when I came on the board, we now had a majority. And -- I think that was the last time that we had a majority on the board -- was when I was on the board, the three of us were serving together. So I think that -- if there was any tendency, and we had a county executive who was a female. So, I think if anyone felt any inclination to -- say anything or feel that women shouldn't be running it -- they weren't going to say it to the county executive and they weren't going to say it to the board of supervisors. So, I never experienced anything like that.

MOON:

Well, a lot of the newspaper reports during that time period were -- youth, the typical sort of -- housewife, becoming politician, and you'd have various people comment on those types of -- oh (inaudible) comments because you're going from the home to the public -- political -- spot, so I was just curious if you had that feeling as you were going from --

MCKENNA:

Well, I sat in on meetings where someone did say -- speaking of the board of supervisors which was interesting. Speaking of the Salsday city council, oh they're a bunch of housewives. And I said, "Wait a minute. I don't hear you comment that you're a bunch of husbands, or the male on the council." But, most of the women that were running -- that I knew who were running had -- I had a job before I ran. And -- other women I knew had jobs before they ran too. But that doesn't mean that women who decided who had been home who were running, weren't as equally qualified. I'm not disparaging women who started in the home, but I had heard that. But, it was never at a point where it did anything or stopped anything -- or changed anything, and I think since that time -- I had only heard it once, and I haven't heard it -- I didn't hear it after that.

MCKENNA:

Well, I know Janet Grey had once commented that she had a lot of experience and she could run a nine year old's birthday party, she certainly could run the men (laughter) around trying to teach them how to be politicians (laughter) and I thought that was kind of a clever response to the negative, criticisms or critique she was getting from the journalists talking about women's roles in politics. But, I was curious if you had experience in that --

MOON:

Well, what had you done before you had been into politics, what sort of work were you in?

MCKENNA:

Well, then I worked when I graduated with my master's degree, I was working in Alameda County. Actually, it was a federally funded program that was -- providing services to small cities. So, it was kind of interesting in that there were a group of us, five of us that basically would be on a contract with different cities providing -- some planning services and other kinds of services.

MOON:

So, it's planning related services.

MCKENNA:

Yes, it was planning related.

MOON:

Was that something that you had done as an internship when you were at San Jose State or was that just a totally separate sort of --

MCKENNA:

No, I hadn't done that as an internship. In fact -- the only internship I did with -- when I was at inner-planning school was with Mary Davey, who is an elective woman now on mid Peninsula Regional Open Space district. And Mary was working for... I'm forgetting the name, but it was a well-known agency that was providing services, primarily to -- I wish I could remember the name -- different services to people of low economic status, and she asked me, basically, to do some housing research, so she connected it with my work in urban planning.

[01-00:20:29]

MOON:

Oh OK.

MCKENNA:

So, it was just fortuitous, number one that I had a chance to work with Mary Davey, who is an outstanding individual, but now, she's also an elected official now with Mid-pen.

MOON:

You had kind of a diversity of interests that you focused in on when you were on the board of supervisors and environmentalisms was most certainly one of those areas that you seem to be really committed to. In referencing the open space program, can you just talk about that program a little bit and tell us what you had hoped that program would actually succeed in doing, and whether or not you thought that what you did towards that was a success story?

MCKENNA:

Well, there were a number issues as you said. I worked on it, and I think that the environmental one was a success a story. And other people would say -- because I think now there's a measure to tighten up the general plan, but when I first got elected to the board of supervisors, there was a proposal to -- double the

density of development in Hillside. And there were only, at that time -- out of the five members on the board, one or two that were really committed to environmental, so it was kind of those things that was going to be a swing vote. So I asked my board members if I had gotten the proposal to develop a program for the future and we called it -- vision 20/20 and we took a look at what we wanted the county to look like, 20 years on -- more than that -- 30 years on. And so, we got a group together and basically changed the momentum that was going from doubling the density in Hillside to coming back to where things were maintaining roughly the policies in the programs on development in the areas. And you know, I'd like to just tell you why. What was going on to put this into context. The Santa Clara County was one of the few counties that believed that planning and development should occur in cities and not in the county areas. As a consequence, once proposition 13 passed, as a consequence of that, all the tax revenues for the development went to the cities and not to the county. If you look at Santa Clara County, out of the 58 counties that exist in the state of California, at that particular time, we were in the bon-five of generating our own revenue. So, if the planning became a revenue issue, more than the planning issue, so there were members in the administration and members on the board supervisors who wanted to look at changing development plans, because they were looking at revenue, they weren't necessarily "anti-environmental." And I said, wait a second, this makes good planning sense, I know it doesn't do well for revenue, but it took -- that's why there was some resistance to it, but basically we came back with maintaining our existing policies and procedures, and changing a few -- and I consider that a success. Well, then I was on the board of supervisors for about 12 years, but then for the next to the last couple of years, the general plan came up for review. And again, this was a different proposal. This was looking at the entire general plan. And there was a real push to change a lot of the components of the general plan that maintained open space, kept from developing agriculturally has arrest. And the board at that particular time, appointed about a 21 member committee. No two committee members agreeing on any proposal that was going to come before us. I think that was much more of a challenge for me then the vision 20-20 that I had. And now I had 21 members all with different knowledge of the general, all with different beer points, all across the spectrum. And the staff was excellent. But, I said, that I wanted a consensus document, and I almost watched the staff faint in their chairs, because they thought, there's no way that we're going to get consensus on this general plan. And the reason I said that was, if we just started this discussion, and started voting, everyone would dig their heels on "this is my issue, I'm not going to move from it" and then when it comes to yours, this is how I'm going to vote on it. So, it took a little longer to get through it. But, then I said, we're not going to take votes, who are going to talk about the -- we're going to go through, we're going to discuss all the issues, we're going to talk about where everybody is on the issue, and then we're going to move on to the next one. Once we've gone through the whole general plan, then we're going to come back, and then we're going to take our vote on it. And -- it took the process longer, but I think in the end, we ended up with a better general plan that still maintained a lot of the environmental and planning and development issues that I wanted to see as I left office.

MOON:

Oh OK. So one of the -- in looking at some of the reports on through the mercury news that there were a number of people who were talking about your strengths and weaknesses and what sort of politician you were -- and Suzy Lilksness (sp?) was talking in reference to the work you had done in the creation of the children's shelter, and the fundraising process that went into that, and she had noted that you were instrumental in that whole process and -- let me just read what she said, because I thought it was a really a interesting commentary on some of the work that you had one, specifically on the children's shelter. And Suzy had said that, "You were the only one who had the connections, the personal commitment to children and the talent to get it done." With half the money raised from private donations, which to had never happened, for county building in the district of Stanford County. And so -- in going back and thinking about some of the other work that you were involved in, the children's shelter seems to have been a very important part of the work that you did on the board and then I would imagine also personally. So, can you talk a little bit about how -- what got you interested in promoting the children's shelter and -- the success stories behind

that whole process?

MCKENNA:

Well, coming to the county -- if you ever visited, the old children's shelter -- once you saw it, you know that it had to be replaced. It was inadequate -- with leaky roofs, kids living in dormitories. Not adequate buildings for education, not adequate space for recreational activities -- I'm trying to remember the building. It was really not where you wanted to put children, who for no fault of their own had to be removed from their family -- they were being removed because they were being abused or neglected in some way. So these were children who were victims. And so you're taking children who are victims and you're not -- and you're placing them in a less than adequate facility. So -- once just seeing the building was enough to convince anyone that this is not an appropriate place to put kids who are victims who need to heal and get well, and understand that there are adults who really care about them. So -- the county at long talked about building a shelter. I wasn't the first one who said, we've got to build a new shelter, they had long talked about it. But, there was no funding available for it. So, there was no way that we could get enough money to do it. So, I think that -- I'm trying to think who actually came up with a public private partnership. It certainly wasn't me, so I don't want to take credit for it, but they said to me, "What do you think about that idea?" And I said, that's a great way to do it. And they said, "Well, would you be willing to help lead that campaign." And so I said, "Yes," that would be something that I would be committed to, and I was committed to children's issues anyway. So, that -- the first thing that we did though, which was kind of interesting -- was that we brought a group of people together from the community and said, "Here's our plan, here's what we would like to do." Do you think the community would support such a project?" So, even long before we launched it, we brought a group together for kind of what I would call -- I'm trying to think --

[01-00:30:16]

MOON:

Like a focus group?

MCKENNA:

Can we break a second?

MOON:

Oh, sure. Absolutely.

MCKENNA:

(inaudible). I'm trying to think what we called them. (pause) (coughing) What did we call the group? I want to say (inaudible) but I want to say that... What did we call that? It was a strange name -- (pause) My mind's gone. (laughter) (coughing) Well, we brought a group together to review the plans -- to review what we had hoped to accomplish, and wondering that, they thought we could build a (inaudible) private partnership. And the thing that was interesting about the group was they thought that we had -- that our vision was too small. That we should go bigger, and we should -- add so many other amenities to it. And with a goal -- always with a goal of getting children back into their own families, or back into extended families, we said, "No, if it got too big, it would be kind of an issue where it would be too easy to house too many children there." So, we compromised, and basically then took that forward, and formed a group -- a non-profit group. And the non-profit group was represented by -- half the people were from the private sector and a few of us were from the public sector. And in essence, we built it, and then turned it over to the county. So, the success was -- it didn't have to go through all the processes, all the county requirements, I mean we met all the requirements for building safety and all that, but the governmental process takes much

longer and can be much more costly, and so we did that. But, I think the thing that I'm quite proud of was that we set our sights on raising about \$11 million as we're getting near the end, we really wanted to furnish it. And furnishings weren't included in the development. And we raised about \$13.4 million, so by the time we turned it over to the county, we had not only built it, but we furnished it. And it's a wonderful facility.

MOON:

Right now -- so the part where you actually created a non-profit was really what allowed you to go out and do the fundraising that you needed as for the process. So, were you directly involved in the fundraising?

MCKENNA:

Yes.

MOON:

Would you say -- Suzy said that your connections, your husband is very well known in San Jose, and Silicon Valley, and has been --

MCKENNA:

Called one of the architects of the valley --

MOON:

And the whole business and publicity and marketing for the Silicone Valley. How did you interact -- you might even speak to this generally about your political -- how did your husband, what role did he play in your political life, and how did you balance the strength of politics versus the kind of work that you had at home with your family.

MCKENNA:

Well, let me first wrap up the children's shelter, and that is my husband also agreed to serve on the board, although he did not at that particular time charitable work. But, he was wonderful at making connections to businesses in the community. And -- he helped a lot with getting companies in the community to contribute to the project. So -- he was a wonderful source, and he continues to this day, because now, that particular non-profit is now working for, foster youth -- with college scholarships for foster youth. And so, it's really done a remarkable job in that area. It's moved from the shelter to doing -- to that challenge. And he continues to be on that board. So he's really had his own commitment to children. Now, if you were to ask him how he was involved in my campaign, he would say, "I didn't give Dianne any advice," He would say, "I know the high-tech industry, I do not know politics." And it's not necessarily transferable. But, from my prospective, he was tremendously supportive. He is someone who believes everyone should have the opportunity to reach their own potential. And so that would apply to anyone across the board. So he was always encouraging me to do whatever I wanted to do, and was always very supportive of that. Never complained, never said, "Oh if you weren't doing this, we could do this." Always supportive. So, I think that -- that made my life a lot easier, when number one, I either had to travel, or I was coming home late, or going to evening meetings or whatever, he was always tremendously supportive.

MOON:

Were your children high school aged at that point? Or were they younger?

MCKENNA:

When -- in '77, I think my oldest probably would have been roughly -- I think my oldest was just going into high school, and my younger -- and my one son would have been a junior and my daughter was just leaving elementary school. That's when I first went into office.

MOON:

So, you still had to balance the whole childcare.

MCKENNA:

But they were not toddlers or -- babies or anything like that.

MOON:

I think Zel Lofgren (sp?) had said, when she was elected to the city council that she had an infant at that time and she said that she brought the baby with her to the council (laughter) and she found that it was really an impossible situation, and so she ended up getting her mom to help her take care of that children. (laughter) But, I think that's a really important issue for women getting into politics and that's why so many women tend to enter it after their children have grown because there are such competing interests there, and whatever you're doing it's hard to balance.

MCKENNA:

Well, it depends. I was someone who had my children early, so I had my children and not my education while they were little. And as they moved up, I could move out -- I mean, there are women who delay having their children and so they get their career started and maybe take a couple years off and then come back. You know, each person has to decide for themselves, what's going to work best for them.

MOON:

Right. Well, getting back to kind of the whole concept of gender ideology and feminism in politics -- what do you think women offer in the political process -- do you think that there's a distinctly feminine personality that comes in -- kind of the interconnections of Bookmen, women working in politics -- was that the case when you were really active -- how do you look at the measurement of women as politicians versus their male counter-parts.

MCKENNA:

I'm going to speak in generalities, because if I say that there are things that are different, then there're always going to be men who I work with who share those same things and so, you run into problems when you speak in generalizations, but when I was in office, I tended to find that women were more concerned about the issues that they were dealing with then who got credit for it. Again, I want to make it clear there are men who did the same thing, but in general, women focused on the issues, wanted to find out how to get something done and weren't as concerned about whether or not they would get credit. And I have to tell you something interesting about politics too, is that you will get credit for things you never did, and you won't get credit for things that you did do. So, you learn to accept the credit for the things you didn't do, and you forget about the fact that you didn't get credit for what you did do. I mean, that's one of the first things you find -- people will say to me, oh it was so great you did this. And I'm thinking, "Oh, I really didn't do that." (laughter) You know? So you just kind of -- that's the way life is. And if in general, I found that women were more interested in the issue and finding the solution to it. In general, I found that women were more -- and this I think would surprise people. That women will take -- a difficult position and take a side of courage on an issue. I think of a couple in Santa Clara county that ended up being the three women voting for it and the two men not. So, when push comes to shove, I tend to find the women willing to stand up and say, "No, this is the right way to go, even though it was a difficult position." And maybe it was -- again, not thinking about the next step, or the career step that you might be challenged on. I don't know, but I tended to find that was true, that women would do that. I found that true too at the city council level. I tended to find that the woman that shared the city council with me who was a friend of mine, but we were on opposite sides of the political spectrum, when the issue came down to -- a city issue that was difficult, the two of us were -- willing to stand out. And I would watch the men not necessarily being there. So, I think those two things

stand out in my mind historically about the way women are. And then I think it's important to handle a woman's perspective on issues that deal with things that are relative to their life experiences. And I can't -- I think that we tend to think that we think of women in education, we tend to think of women as being in healthcare, we tend to think of women as being -- on those kinds of issues, and that's true, but we also deal with transportation, we also deal with the criminal justice system. But there's something that -- I think congress would be voting differently now, if 50% of Congress was women.

[01-00:41:35]

MOON:

Oh certainly.

MCKENNA:

I absolutely think it would be different.

MOON:

Well, I think that's why this whole idea of women re-entering politics in the 1970s period, is such an important area to study, because it really helps provide context for understanding what women are today in politics. Part of this conversation is really about -- the differences between men and women, how they interact. On one level, it sounds like men have more of an ego in politics, but I'm wondering if that's true today, looking at the role that women play in politics. Do you think -- was an ego thing today? Or just the division used in which men are socialized to be the breadwinners and the women are socialized to be more of the peacekeepers?

MCKENNA:

I don't know if I would have called it an ego so much. When I said I wanted credit forth. To me, ego, is something is different from that. It's going out and saying, "I've accomplished something." And so, I don't know. Because I think, all of us -- the men and women in office -- all of us have egos, otherwise you wouldn't be running for that. You wouldn't be in political office. So, I don't think it was so much an ego thing, although some people would argue that's what ego is. But, what seems to me is a little more subtle than that. Is just the personal -- taking credit for things you know an accomplishment. Because there's a -- in political office, no one ever accomplishes anything alone. I don't care who it is you're talking about. You can say, well I did this. "No,no,no." You had -- you had to get four other votes, or you had to get seven other votes or whatever for you to accomplish that. So, whatever you do, you had to convince, or you had to work with, or you had to bring on board to move that long. So, that's why I say, I think it's a little more subtle than that.

MOON:

Well, I'm sure it more subtle than that. Than just looking at the gender studies that have been done on differences in men and women in politics -- some people really focus in on the whole feminist sort of ideology as part of that orientation of women going into politics, like for example, right after the Watergate episode, there was a whole period, going back to the progressive ideology of cleaning up government, and that women had a special opportunity in that time frame to come into politics, because they were fresh, and you know -- presenting kind of the old-fashioned idea of cult of domesticity, where women had more will to come in and really clean up government. So, I just thought if you had any reflections on that.

MCKENNA:

Well, that would be the only thing that I would add to it. Is when you run for office, people tend to trust

women more than they do men. So, I think you can talk about cleaning government, but I think it's a matter of trust. I think, whether or not it's true, they think women are in it for a different reason than men are in it. So I think that trust issue is there. And so -- I know that when I ran for the first time that I ran for office, I ran against -- well I think it was three gentlemen and one dropped out. So I think it was two men against one women. Now you can say that they split the male vote, I don't think that was the case in my race, but -- I think that -- I had to have -- at least in this area, it might be an advantage to be a woman.

MOON:

I think some of the studies have shown that women have had some of the political -- local political sciences like Christian Sander -- he would have think that women had a certain advantage during that time period because of some of the issues related to corruption, and women having a certain advantage because they were a fresh face within the political spectrum. But, then there were some other studies done in Santa Clara County where they were polling to see -- this was right before Janet Gray Hayes was elected. And they were trying to determine what women's vulnerability was as political candidates and the pole showed that there was no real discrimination against women going into politics. It as almost a 50/50 sort of response. Which I thought was really interesting. Which brings me back to the whole concept of the female political networks - - and what sort of female political networks were you involved in, like for example, did you take part in NOW, were you a member of NOW, were you part of the National Women's Political Caucus -- were you --

MCKENNA:

I wasn't involved in NOW, but I was involved in the National Women's Political Caucus. And then once I was elected, I was involved in CEWAER. But -- you know at the time I was running, they weren't as - - when I first ran for office in '77, they didn't seem to be as involved in the local elections as they seemed to get there. Because, I don't remember them in my first campaign in '77.

MOON:

The National Women's Caucus?

MCKENNA:

Yes.

MOON:

OK.

MCKENNA:

I remember them more in my race in 1984 than I remember them in 1977. So, I don't think -- it wasn't that they weren't involved. I just think that in some cities, they didn't pay that much attention to them. They paid an edgy move up to the board of supervisors for a larger scale.

MOON:

And what was CEWAER again?

MCKENNA:

That's once I was elected. That's California Elected Women's Education and Research Association?

MOON:

California Elected Women's Association for Education and Resources --

MCKENNA:

California Elected Women's Association for Education and Research.

MOON:

OK. I wasn't familiar with that -- that acronym.

MOON:

So, another sort of organizational question -- could be -- so you weren't necessarily involved with the legal women voters. You came to San Jose or you came to Sunnyvale, that wasn't an organization that you were really --

MCKENNA:

Well, not at the time that I ran for office. As I said, I was working, and I had my family, and I was just more or less, keeping everything together. So, I wasn't out doing much involvement. Now I worked -- there were campaigns that I would work on, or something like that.

MOON:

Now, you also have been very active in the democratic party -- could you talk a little bit about that -- I know you did a lot of fundraising for the Clinton administration during the Presidential campaigns and -- can you talk a little bit about what that experience was like and any of involvement that you may have had with the National Women's Caucus or with the Elected Women's Association.

MCKENNA:

Well -- I had worked -- the first president that I ever worked for -- you know campaign, the first campaign I got involved in, I should say -- was when Johnson was running for president. And -- I did phoning and I did -- precinct walking. And since that time -- over time I've done precinct walking, phoning, and efforts in different campaigns, and raising funds. I'm involved in bond issue now for Dienza College districts -- I've always been involved in campaigns. Most of the time, they were for democratic issues, but they were also for issues that deal with college districts and other kinds of things, so -- I haven't been just involved in democratic campaigns, but the Clinton campaign, we actually got involved in because a friend of ours, in fact -- this is somewhat ironic. When I ran for the city of Sunnyvale, two of us ran for a slate. And the fellow who ran Dave Barron and I ran together for the city council and I got elected and Dave didn't. And then Dave and his wife, Joan who was on the school board knew the Clintons because of their involvement in education. So it was Dave and Joan who got us involved with Clinton when he was running for office. And so that's basically how we came to be involved in the Clinton campaign. I think that the campaigns are different than the national women's organizations because -- the campaigns are phoning, contributing, walking doing all of that. But, when you look at the National Women's Political Caucus -- and that's more of an endorsement kind of effort. So it's more getting involved in -- getting candidates, educating candidates, going and speaking to candidates that you are interested in learning about how you got in office -- your recommendations which I what I did. They were whole seminars. And you'd go and you'd talk to women who were interesting in running a campaign. So it was altogether different. That was much more the basics of helping women, encouraging women, and endorsing women. And the other was more of the day to day -- the kinds of campaigns for an issue or a candidate.

[01-00:52:08]

MOON:

Well -- looking at -- your experience as a female politician, do you think that women have parity in politics today or that are closer to having more equality within the political system as an office holder and then also

as -- hearing women's voices through that political process?

MCKENNA:

Well -- Let me take two snapshots in time. When I was -- in 1977, there were two women on the Sunnyvale City Council. Two out of seven members. There's one now. When I went to the board of supervisors, there were three women on the board of supervisors, we basically ran -- and we had a county exec. That was a female. We now have two women on the board of supervisors, and we have a male county exec. When I look at -- from the 1970s to now 2006, I basically see that -- we didn't keep up with where we were headed. And so locally, I'm not as excited as I should be about seeing women in political office. I'd like to see much more. But, I also think that now -- it's really hard to see there are so few women -- I mean we're lucky that we have two women that are state senators. That's really unusual. But you look at who's in office, and -- women just are not represented accurately.

MOON:

I agree with you 100 % on that. Now -- going back a little bit to the whole political franchise business for women, the equal rights amendment was a huge issue for us in the 1970s, and you had done some interesting things -- let me see if I can find some quotes that you had said. [I'm going to change tapes real quick] OK I'm actually studying the ERA, so this is one of the key areas that I'm really interested in. You had said -- in the (pause) According to a (inaudible) news article, you were quoted as stating, you once pushed for an entire year before winning support for Bayonne city, finance travel to states that had not ratified the equal rights amendment.

MCKENNA:

That's absolutely true.

MOON:

That's true now. Now, what sparked your interest in the Equal Rights Amendment? Not so much personally, but if you're looking at from the organizational process, a lot of people would have aligned the ERA with now, and you weren't necessarily a participant in NOW, but you were really interested in the equal rights amendment. So can you talk a little bit about what that amendment meant to you and reflect on the sad, lack of ratification of the amendment, and whether or not you think we could push for another amendment?

MCKENNA:

Well, the equal rights amendment to me, at the time meant -- exactly as I said, that you would have equal rights across the board. And that's what I was interested in. And some things have changed to me -- that have happened -- that the equal rights amendment was looking at. I was looking at equal rights for -- when they were in education, in sports, in politics, in business -- you just name it. I thought that women should have all of the same opportunities. Not any special privileges. Just equal opportunities. So, I was looking -- I supported the equal rights amendment. I tried to get my fellow members of the city council to support me. And there were some who supported me from the start. The one I'm thinking about in particular is Larry Stone who is now our county assessor and Larry always supported me. You know on that issue, but I have a couple of council members that I knew that were never going to go there. So I think we had a change in election where something happened that I thought -- yea I think we had a couple of council members come on and I said, "This is the time --" And what was interesting was, the person that I assumed would automatically just jump on my bandwagon, and say you're absolutely right, because I thought maybe him in particular had experience in discrimination in his life -- didn't jump on it. And so, I said to -- I was talking to Larry about it. And in counting votes, thinking, who's going to support me and who's not going to support me. Larry said to me, You better full up the chambers with some supporters of the various members that are

on the board. So I had to spend my polling people, and saying, you better get to the city council, because this is the night we're voting on it. You support so and so, and he or she needs to know that we're going to be voting on it. And I want them to vote on it with you sitting there. So that's basically -- how it happened. I was not only -- having to twist the arms of my fellow members but also, to get the support so that people would be conscience.

MOON:

So, when you look at your activism -- (inaudible) was really a sort of personal activism within kind of the local context to your city council or to the board of supervisors.

MCKENNA:

No it was the city council

MOON:

Oh the city council -- at the time. But it wasn't necessarily connected to working through an organization, and doing the sort of endorsements for the campaign that was done. Or working with John Edwards who was the congressman at the time, who was actually promoting it in the House of Representatives. But, I thought that was just a great story about what you were trying to do in enforcing some sort of --

MCKENNA:

It's actually quite interesting -- and I remember it because there was a conference right after that. But, I think it was in Louisiana. And every member of the city council wanted to go to Louisiana. And they knew what they voted for when I brought it up, that they weren't going to Louisiana. And nor were there going to be members of the staff traveling to these states. So, it became an issue of where you had to really equip your money where your mouth is so to speak. Because it was an issue that once you voted on it, you couldn't go to those states. And of course, you had people from all of those states who would be calling and saying, "Don't penalize us, you had women -- calling from Louisiana and other kind of states, don't penalize us, because we're trying to do it here." But it becomes an issue of -- if they don't feel it in the pocketbook, what's ever going to change that -- and then of course it fell by the waste side and nobody was interested in it. But, I think it spurred something. It's like title IX and some other things that came out of it. And that's basically what we're trying to say.

MOON:

The success -- well the failure of ratification was -- well what it was that positive things did come out of it, I think.

MCKENNA:

Yea, I think a lot of good things did come out of it. I think the thing that was most discouraging to me. And it's true in a lot of political issues is that -- things that have nothing to do with it, become the -- model against it. And there's no -- and you find yourself defending something, or talking about something you never intended to. And it happens so many times on issues. Because the issue that became -- the issue that everybody talked about was -- would men and women have to share the same toilets. And I thought to myself, "I can't believe this is the issue that has now come up because of the ERA" You have the Phyllis Schlafly saying, "Oh, we're going to have the same toilets and the same -- " And I thought to myself, "That's not what we're talking about." But, it became a way of diverting and making everyone -- basically who would be aligned now with the red states, gave them some issue.

MOON:

Roe v. Wade apparently was contentious issue too that was brought up towards the end of the ratification

campaign. And I hadn't really thought about that until I had been to this historical conferences, but I think that -- I remember the military issue being the most significant issue, when I was a young teenager when that was all taking place in 1972, and then the whole ratification campaign into the 1980s. But, I thought that was very interesting -- I never put it in Roe v. Wade, but apparently Phyllis Schlafly used that as an argument of the -- but you've had such a broad-based sort of experience as a female politician. What would you describe as your strengths and your weaknesses as a politician?

[01-01:02:00]

MCKENNA:

I think... Let me start with my weakness first. I think my weakness was that... I think one of the weaknesses I had is that I didn't... I was willing to listen too readily to people who wanted to convince me on particular issues and probably should have just said, you know, "No." I probably shouldn't have been... You know, it's the opposite of consensus building. I mean, that's one of your strengths, is your consensus. But on the other hand, it could be one of your greatest weaknesses. And I think that that was probably one of my greatest weaknesses, is that I should have just said, "No." You know, to some things and just said, "No, that's not an issue that we can negotiate on." And I think one of my strengths was I was able to bring people together around an issue and then move it forward because I was able... Because people... In essence, I feel that one of my strengths was that people trusted me in that I -- when I said that I was going to do something, I did it. And when I said this is the way I was going to vote on something, that's the way I voted on something. So people pretty much saw what they got. You know, they got what they saw, whatever.

MOON:

Yes. I've been reading a lot of different descriptions of your work and what people thought about you and newspapers...

MCKENNA:

[laughter]

MOON:

Some of the very puzzling things that came out included your forthrightness, your honesty, your integrity, your non-political politician kind of behavior, your consensus building, your good sense of humor. And then everyone said that you had the most infectious laugh. And so I think that must have been a really positive trait. I think even Ron Gonzalez had said...

MCKENNA:

[laughter]

MOON:

It was just interesting in the context of the politics right now. [laughter] He said that you're a very honest and forthright person and that you had a lot of integrity. And I thought well, that was a really interesting thing, you know, [most?] complimentary thing for him to say. And Suzy Wilson had wonderful things to say about you in the press. But I thought that, you know, those are all really wonderful attributes that certainly, you know, speak well to the work that you did as a politician.

MCKENNA:

Well, I think there's no finer compliment, for me. I mean, as someone -- who you can ask what do you want people to say about you. And at the end of the day, if somebody said, "This was a person of integrity," I would be very, very happy.

MOON:

Yes, that's a great compliment.

MCKENNA:

Yes. Because I think that says a lot about the political world, where it seems as though... So many people would argue that you can't --

MOON:

[Happens?] --

MCKENNA:

-- you can't be in the political arena and maintain integrity. And there are people who do it every day.

MOON:

Right.

MCKENNA:

So...

MOON:

Well, another interesting point in looking at the newspaper articles about your work. You were reported to be one of the most significant potential politicians in the state in 1987, and they had predicted that you would go on to higher office --

MCKENNA:

Office.

MOON:

And you had made some comments at one point that, "Well, they never asked me."

MCKENNA:

[laughter]

MOON:

So I'm just... I'm wondering, you know, in reflection whether or not you wished that you would have gone forward and, you know, gone into higher office or, you know, what your reasons for not wanting to pursue higher office were.

MCKENNA:

Well, Anna actually tells me she still has the 'while you were out' pad that -- when the congressional seat opened up. I called up Anna, and I said, "Anna, I want to be the first to tell you. I think you should run and I will support you." And she said, "You were the first one to do that," and I still have that. I grew up on the East Coast. I grew up in Pennsylvania. There's no way that I wanted to go to Washington, D.C. I had no interest whatsoever in going back to the East Coast. And I had no interest in the commuting kind of... I'm not a good commuter. I knew that about myself. And I also knew, just from watching people who had been in Congress -- I'm going to speak about Congress -- who have been in Congress, the toll that it takes on your family. Now granted, my children were older but my husband and I have now been married for 45 years. And I'm not saying it would have, you know, our marriage would have gone under with that. But that's not the kind of life that I wanted to live -- lead. But, I mean, I admire tremendously the women who do; Anna,

and Zoe, and others. You know, I would support them and do whatever I could because that's something that they wanted to do. I just never wanted to do that. And at the state level, I mean, working at the state level, it was a level that didn't have an interest to me. I don't know why, but I really liked... I liked working locally. I liked being non-partisan. And the minute you go the state you're in a very partisan office, which is why, I think, people said I should go work with both people. But there was... The state... The county was more doing state government at the local level. And the thing I never wanted to do was state government at the state level. So I just didn't have an interest. And so when I said, "Well, nobody asked me," it wasn't so much a lack of ambition. I think it was a realization of what the job would entail. And so I just... I didn't want to do that. But I really admire women who do. And I think I'm prob.... And maybe that's why we don't have as many women at the congressional level. I have a feeling if I were living in Pennsylvania, this whole sphere - - this (inaudible) in Pennsylvania, going to Congress would have been a lot more appealing.

MOON:

Would have been easier.

MCKENNA:

Oh, yes. You're less than, you know, an hour flight away. And here, you're time changed, you know, four hours. You're trying to, you know... I can't imagine being a member of Congress for the State of Hawaii or the State of Alaska. That's got to be deadly for your (inaudible) -- any type of normal life.

MOON:

Well, now, since you're been out of office for a while, you've been actually active, still, in a lot of really policy sort of related organizations. And I know that you had been appointed under Gray Davis on the California Transportation Commission. Can you talk briefly about that experience and what you were doing in your (inaudible)?

MCKENNA:

You know, I loved being on the California Transportation Commission because it was a policy board but we also made decisions on transportation issues. And what were my... Over the period of time that I was on the board of supervisors, I had worked a number of transportation arenas. I worked at the regional one while having chaired the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. I was a founding member of the CalTrain Service on the Peninsula. I mean, that was taken by the three counties. I was a founding member of the BTA. So I had a lot of background in transportation. And I thought without getting -- without being elected and without it being a full-time job, I could take my talent and I can use it on a transportation commission. And I actually served as chair, I think, in 2002 or something like that. And I just loved that because it was two or three days a month that the meetings took place. I had other meetings that I would go up to Sacramento for. So it was -- it took enough time and yet you had enough... It could keep you interested and up to date on what was happening throughout the state of California. When Arnold Schwarzenegger won and my appointment came up for reappointment he chose not to reappoint me.

[01-01:10:47]

MOON:

(inaudible).

MCKENNA:

And I don't think it was because I didn't have the experience, by the way. [laughter]

MOON:

I'm sure that's really not the case.

MCKENNA:

But then I served on non-profit boards at Peninsula Open Space Trust. And we just completed a very successful campaign to raise \$200 million to save the endangered San Mateo coast. And that was a wonderful effort and a wonderful project. And the fact that it was successful is so great. I served on the Children's Fund, which became... After the children's shelter was -- that was completed, we turned it into the Children's Fund. And actually, they'll tell you it was my idea for these college scholarships for foster children. If you look at kids when they get to college -- and a lot of foster kids never get to college because they've been moved from school to school throughout their foster child experience. When foster children get to school, the dropout rate is 66%. Two-thirds of the foster kids drop out of school. And it's not because they're not intelligent. It's because they've got too many pressures on them for... Because they're emancipated at 18. They now have to work to support themselves.

MOON:

Right.

MCKENNA:

They have... You know, housing is so high in this area. They've got so many pressures on them. And so I said, you know, let's... Actually, I saw an article in the newspaper. And it was a story about a young man who was -- had been a foster child who went to San Jose State. And at that time -- San Jose State has since changed. But at that time, they closed the dorms during the holidays. He had no place to go home to. So he was sleeping in the, you know, in hallways, waiting for the dorms to open up again.

MOON:

Oh, my gosh.

MCKENNA:

I saw that story and I said, you know, "This is wrong." These foster kids, once they're emancipated, have so many burdens on them. And if they can get themselves into college, we should at least find a way... So our funds are basically to help them with housing, with some college tuition. We make up any difference in grants that they don't get to keep them in school. And so I'm thrilled about that project. At present we have... I think we've had about 40 or 50 kids. We've completely flipped the statistics. We only have a third of the kids who are dropping out. We have two-thirds staying. Now, I'm not satisfied with that statistic. We've only... You know, we started with a pilot program so I would say it's about five years old. So I'm thrilled to death that we've flipped the statistic but I think we have a way to go to make sure that we ever get it better.

MOON:

Well, Amy, did you want to go ahead and ask one of the...

FONSECA:

Sure.

MOON:

I'm going to have to answer to her. To her, yes.

MCKENNA:

OK.

FONSECA:

You previously mentioned that you're disappointed at the lower representation of women in politics. Where do you think feminine (inaudible) --

MCKENNA:

You know, could we do something? Could we happen to shift seats?

MOON:

Oh, that's fine. Totally. Absolutely.

MCKENNA:

It's real hard to talk to (inaudible).

MOON:

[laughter]. OK, that's perfect. That's good.

FONSECA:

So what role do you think feminism plays in politics in society today?

MCKENNA:

I don't think people talk about it as they did before. And I think... I don't know why that is, but you know, the things that I read about the younger generation, meaning the women who are now currently in college or recently in the workplace, it seems to me that they're afraid of the word feminism. And I don't know whether it's because the media and the people who are not feminists have made it a word that's not acceptable. When you have people like Rush Limbaugh calling you 'feminazis' and things like that, it... You know, people are afraid of the word. I'm not afraid of the word but I think that some of that has had an impact so women don't want -- are a little reluctant to say they're feminist. And I think that because there were things that happened -- because of the ERA push with Title IX and with other kinds of things, that younger women have had some advantages. And they haven't seen -- they weren't pro *Roe v. Wade*. They weren't... They... They perceive - - they came after that. They came after Title IX. They came after these things. And so I don't think that they see the sense of urgency about getting women involved. And women have moved up in some ranks. Not as much, but there are enough that they say, "Oh, she's doing that." So I think there's a little bit too much of a complacency. That in addition to worrying about the word, there's a complacency that, "Oh, well, we've achieved it." And I don't share that complacency. And I'm a little bit frustrated that we don't see women, you know, in the boardroom. We don't see women in -- as well represented in Congress and other places.

FONSECA:

So would you say that feminism is dead? Or where do you see feminism -- where do you see it going in the future?

MCKENNA:

I think that... I think that I'm looking not only at feminism -- at feminism, but I'm looking at the country as a whole right now.

FONSECA:

Right.

MCKENNA:

Project: Bay Area Feminists Oral History Project

And I don't think being a liberal is, you know, the word liberal has a negative connotation. And other things have a negative connotation. I almost think that there has to be a shift in the whole way we talk about issues and look at issues. And I think feminism is just one of those many things. It's not the only thing. And so I think there has to be a different way of looking at issues and talking about them that... In particular, Democrats -- because they're the ones that are usually associated with those issues -- have to take advantage of what's happening and get the message out. I mean, as an environmentalist, I'm offended about what's happening in the country. As a feminist, I'm offended by what's happening in the country. As someone who believes in being upfront with the public, I'm offended by the way the whole Iraq situation was handled. So, I mean, there are a lot of things, I think, that are going on in the country. The corruption, for goodness sakes. I mean, you know, I have... You know, I've never remembered a time when I have felt that this nation was, you know, so corrupt from Halliburton down to Delay and all the rest that's happening. So I think there has to be a wholesale change in the way we talk about issues and the way we kind of take back the country and talk about what we have a vision for this country. So I think feminism just kind of fits in with all of that.

FONSECA:

Do you have any suggestions on how we might inspire young women to become more engaged in politics and more engaged in their whole -- in the whole process so that their voices are heard and that they are actually participants rather than just walking around as zombies and not really having the...

MCKENNA:

Well, the one thing I don't know how much women participate in the college level and in the voting. I mean, I would be concerned if that wasn't the case but I don't know that's the case. So, I mean I would need to know that they're not voting, that they're not participating and things. And I don't know if that's true or not.

FONSECA:

OK. Well, I think that what we're going to do is let Jennifer... She had a few questions she wanted to ask about Madge and some of the women --

MYRONUK:

Did you go the 1977 National Women's Political Caucus in San Jose? Did you go -- it was a big convention --

MCKENNA:

Convention, yes.

MYRONUK:

Do you... Just think about that because that's a huge... I'll just stop this for a second.

MCKENNA:

1970 -- no, I didn't.

MYRONUK:

You didn't go?

MCKENNA:

No, no.

MYRONUK:

OK.

MCKENNA:

1977, no, I didn't.

MYRONUK:

Because that's when the National Women's Political Caucus -- they fell apart locally because they supported Republicans and there was no Republican support. The [treacherous Republicans?]. I actually worked for Seymore. I'm on the Commission on the Status of Women currently under Jim Bell and I was on the National Women's Political Caucus Board for several years. So (inaudible) documentary work. I have one five-year project and a lot of thoughts on this. Would I be interested in -- if I can actually match (inaudible), I'd be interested in knowing in when did you first meet Suzy Wilson, under what circumstances, and how would you describe her? When did you meet Zoe Lofgren (sp?), under what circumstances, and how would you describe her? And I'd like for them to say the same thing of you because I think that is -- those are the stories that are really interesting. Because I've heard that Suzy Wilson started more organizations in the women's bathroom than anyone else I've ever heard of. To pull people aside and... So those... I don't know. I mean, would that be an interesting story like (inaudible)?

[01-01:20:27]

MCKENNA:

Yes. I probably know them better than I know Madge -- or we're not supposed to...

MYRONUK:

Oh, no, and that's what I'm realizing.

MCKENNA:

Yes.

MYRONUK:

I would... Yes. Because I interviewed Zoe Lofgren two years ago and she shared a bunch of great stories. And I think that there's that bond.

MCKENNA:

Yes.

MYRONUK:

But she was much younger coming into the whole...

MCKENNA:

Yes.

MYRONUK:

And then Suzy Wilson was this feminist Republican.

MCKENNA:

Sue -- yes. No, Suzy's a Democrat.

MYRONUK:

Now. But she was...

MCKENNA:

Oh.

MYRONUK:

She went Republican back in the '70's.

MCKENNA:

She was?

MYRONUK:

Um-hmm.

MCKENNA:

I didn't know that.

MYRONUK:

I think it was more non-partisan but (inaudible) our office.

MOON:

Well, we'll have to ask her next week when we meet with her.

MCKENNA:

Yeah, yeah.

MYRONUK:

My cassette is cleaning for some reason.

_: Oh, my.

_: OK.

MYRONUK:

So maybe we can just do those two lines of questioning, and you can just respond to her. Which is what year and under what circumstances did you first meet Suzy Wilson? And just describe your initial... What stuck out for you about meeting her?

MCKENNA:

OK. I can't remember the year but I think I... I mean, I think... I mean, I can't tell you exactly.

MYRONUK:

But just (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MCKENNA:

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Yes. Do you want me to answer that?

MYRONUK:

Yes.

MCKENNA:

OK. I think that I met Suzy Wilson in the late '70's when I was on the city council and Suzy was on the city

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council in San Jose. And I just remember that she was such a dynamo in that... You know, she had so much energy and she always had -- she always had something that she was organizing or something that she was doing. And she was the type of person who was very supportive of other women and very encouraging. And I just remember Suzy as being somebody who would -- kind of would take you under her wing and give you advice and support you in whatever you wanted to do. And I remember seeing her one time on San Jose State campus. And I don't remember... I don't remember exactly where she was going or what she was doing. But I see this woman with... I mean, so much energy and such a great stride about her going by me and I thought -- I took a look and I said, "That's Suzy Wilson." And she looks more energetic and more alive than half the students on the campus. And I said, "Oh, no wonder she is like she is. She has the energy and she has the wherewithal and the energy." And she's just been a role model. I hope she doesn't mind me saying that. We're not too different in age but she was a role model because Suzy left the city council and then went to the board of supervisors and then I later went to the board of supervisors. So I can say I followed a little in her footsteps.

MYRONUK:

Can you describe an issue or circumstance that you worked with Suzy? And you can use her name in responding.

MCKENNA:

Well, the issue that I remember most working with Suzy... And actually because it was an issue that... One of the few of the issues that I actually lost sleep over. You know, you wonder whether or not... How many are going to keep you awake at night. And this one was one of the few that kept me awake and that was the jail issue. And we... And it involved so many aspects of the jails from, you know, we were being sued and we're in court and there were other things going on. And so Suzy, Zoe, and I were the only ones who supported taking the jail away from the sheriff. And we decided to run a campaign. And because the... Historically, in the state of California, the sheriff has controlled the jails. And so we say, "Well, we'll put it on the ballot and we'll see if there's public support to do it." And we had one member of the board of supervisors who was somewhat of a lame duck and had personal issues. So we really didn't want him on our side. And the other one said, "No." He couldn't be on our side because it dealt with labor issues. So it was the three women running the campaign. And, you know, all you need to do is tell Suzy that, you know... We decided on... But all I could do is say there's a campaign. And Suzy's eyes light up and she gets all energetic. And by God, we're going to run this campaign and we're going to do this. And she just took over. She -- I mean -- I mean, Zoe and I helped but there was no one who did the work like Suzy did. And there's some stories about the campaign I really wouldn't want to tell, but we were successful. And, in fact, the only piece of literature that I've saved on any of my campaigns... I mean, I know where I can go pull it out of my drawer is the piece of literature that has the three of us sitting up on the dais and an audience saying that we supported this campaign. It's the three women. It's my favorite piece of literature and it's just one issue. I mean, we worked on so many. But that one stands out in my mind and Suzy more than anyone else because of just... I mean, she was determined. And once Suzy is determined, you know, get out of her way.

MYRONUK:

Zoe Lofgren was someone who has been involved behind the scenes in turn and then moved her way up into elected office. When did you first meet her and then how did you get to know her, subsequently, working on board of supervisors?

MCKENNA:

I first met Zoe Lofgren when I was going to be running for the board of supervisors and I went to seek her support. And most people told me that I would have... And I, to this day, don't know why. I should ask

Zoey. But people told me I would have a tough time getting Zoe's support. Suzy, who had known -- Suzy Wilson is also on the board -- knew both of us, knew both the candidates. So Suzy stayed out of the race because she knew both of us were running. So they said... I think they said to me, "Well, Zoe's going to probably stay out of the race, too." And I represented the "high-rent district" on the board of supervisors. The area I represented was where all the high -- most of the high-income people came from. And so I think people said, you know, "You're going to have a tough time with Zoe." And I went in and I sat down and I talked to Zoe and we had a wonderful conversation. And before I left she told me, "I'll support you." I think that that was a tremendous risk because there was going to be a woman serving on the board of supervisors and she knew that if I didn't win she was going to have to be working with a woman that she didn't support. And those things can be... Obviously, once you start working with somebody you forget about it. But I never forgot. I mean, there are certain things that I never will forget and I never forgot that Zoe supported me then. And the other thing that Zoe and I had in common was the fact that we both came from families where our fathers were truck drivers. So people tended to think because I lived -- or I represented a high-rent district, that I myself came from a background of having, you know, unlimited resources. And that wasn't true. So the fact that both of our fathers were truck drivers was very interesting, particularly when we would have discussions in executive session, and that would be a closed session of the board, talking about issues. They'd say, "Oh, those two, you know, the truck drivers daughter's, you know." Kind of like that every time we said something that was a little awful. "Oh, they're truck drivers daughters." So I think we kind of had a bond in knowing where each of us -- how we grew up. But then the friendship deepened because I think Zoe and I complimented each other very well on the board. Zoe is one of the brightest people I have ever worked with, and I say that bar none. I think she is extremely brilliant. And she had so many ideas. Suzy had all the energy, Zoe had so many ideas. But I was the one that could say, "Can I sell it? Can it work?" So Zoe would call me up and say, "Dianne, come on down, I want to talk to you about something." So I'd shoot down to her house and she'd say to me, "What do you think if we did this?" She said, "I've been reading the California code." I mean, who reads the Cal -- who sits and reads the California code? But somebody like Zoe. So she said, "I've been reading the California code and I think we can do this and this. What do you think?" So I would say, "Well, here, this is what we'd have to do." So I was kind of the one... Zoe was the person who had the idea and I was the one who could take the idea and then figure out how we could make it work. And so I think we complimented each other in that regard. And we have a friendship 'til this day. I mean, we stay in contact, she calls me. Because she's in Washington and it's 12:00 at night there and it's only 9:00 here. Although when she calls me and it's 10:00 o'clock here, I'll say, "Zoe, what are you doing up at 1:00 o'clock in the morning?" And she's saying, "I have to talk to somebody." So we'll talk. So our friendship has really been strong ever since I first met her on the board of supervisors. And I always enjoy working with her. She is a person -- she's somebody you can absolutely trust, which is something that, you know, I wanted. You know, and I think that's what she wanted, too. And I remember when she asked me to come into her office, and she said to me, "I'm going to run for Congress. And I'm going to be running against Tom McHenry (sp?)." You have to understand, Tom McHenry supported me also when I ran for office. So she asked me if I was going -- if I would support her, and I told her I would. And I said to her, "Zoe, I... " She said, "Do you think I can beat him?" And I said, "I think you can but I think it's going to take two things. You're going to have to out-campaign him. You're going to have to out-phone, out-walk him, out-him." I said, "You can beat him, but you are going to have to basically out-campaign him." And that's exactly what she did. And I think that people were surprised by that election. Zoe and her --

[break in audio]

[01-01:31:51]

MCKENNA:

-- he did, to be successful. And I think she's been an outstanding member of Congress. Zoe --

[break in audio]

MCKENNA:

Zoe, you know... Things that deal with electronics, from you know, all the intricacies of an electronics issue to then talking about immigration to talking about... And she knows it. I mean, she knows the issue. And I just think she's done a fantastic job as a member of Congress.

MOON:

Great. Well, thank you, Dianne. This has been like a great opportunity for us to get you to tell us some of your wonderful stories and experiences. And this definitely will be a great contribution to this whole project. So thank you so much.

MCKENNA:

Oh, you're welcome.

MOON:

One of the things... And this is great. One of the things... My theory is that why the feminist movements works is because there were friend --

[01-01:32:50]

End of Transcription