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Renée Marchant Rampton

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An oral history

Produced by:

Las Vegas Women's Oral History Project
Interviews conducted by Dr. Caryll Batt Dziedziak

Women's Research Institute of Nevada, UNLV

Dr. Joanna L. Goodwin, Director

Dr. Caryll Batt Dziedziak, interviewer and Editor

Annette Arndal and Kirsten Wicks, Transcribers

Women's Research Institute of Nevada
Las Vegas Women Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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This interview and transcript have been made possible through the Foundation at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the research efforts of the Women's Research Institute of Nevada (WRIN). Located at UNLV within the College of Liberal Arts, WRIN is a statewide research institute with programs that add to the body of knowledge on women and girls in the state. WRIN has housed the oral history project since 1999. The specific goal of the oral history project is to acquire the narratives of Nevadans whose lives provide unique information on the development of the state and in particular, southern Nevada. In addition, the oral history project enables students and faculty to work together to generate these first-person narratives. The participants in this project extend their appreciation to UNLV for providing an opportunity for this project to flourish.

The text of this transcript received minimal editing. These measures include the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetition. Additionally, responses from multiple interviews were grouped according to the subject matter discussed. The editing served to retain both the narrator's style of spoken language as well as the reader's understanding of the narrator's words. Ideally, this interview would be heard as well as read. A copy of this transcript has been donated to the UNLV Lied Library, Special Collections.

The following transcript was produced from a series of interviews conducted between August 27, 2006 and August 21, 2015. These interviews are part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the Las Vegas Women Oral History Project, Series II: Community Builders. Additional transcripts may be found under that series title.

Joanne L. Goodwin, Project Director
Professor, Department of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Frontispiece: Renée Marchant (undated)

The following photographs may be found in the center of the book listed in the order below:

1. Renée Marchant playing piano at South High School (1953)
2. The Stephen and Beatrice Marchant Family (undated)
3. The Rampton Family (2013)
4. The Roger and Renée Rampton Family (2013)
5. Senator Harry Reid and Renée Marchant Rampton

All photographs are courtesy of Renée Marchant Rampton

Preface

Renée Marchant Rampton has often referred to herself as “One of Fifteen.” Indeed, growing up in a family of fifteen children, Renée experienced the care of loving parents, the excitement of a bustling household, and the engagement of an active Church; all amidst the strains of a depression era economy. Renée’s mother, Beatrice Marchant, provided Renée with a strong role model with which to emulate; a disciplined woman, who rose to the task without hesitation. Beatrice became the family’s provider after her husband’s debilitating stroke and later served in the Utah Legislature during the 1970s.

Renée loved music from an early age. As a young child she found an early job as a piano accompanist for a dance studio. In 1956 she married musician, Roger Rampton, a successful percussionist. They soon settled in Las Vegas, where Roger performed on the Strip and they began raising their four children. It was an exciting period in Las Vegas history as the Strip attracted musicians and performers of wide acclaim. Renée learned to juggle her husband’s performance schedule with the demands of her growing children. During this time she remained very active in her Mormon faith and the Church’s music ministry. When the Clark County School District contemplated cuts in their music programs in the early 1970s, Renée also became a vocal community opponent.

During the 1970s, Las Vegas experienced many social changes. The NAACP had become increasingly vocal in demands for racial equity. Welfare recipients protested

cuts in their monthly stipends by marching down the Las Vegas Strip. Women also began organizing. Women's groups such as the National Organization for Women, the League of Women Voters, and the Women's Political Caucus weighed in on current social ills. It was during this era that the U.S. Congress finally passed the Equal Rights Amendment and sent it out to the states for ratification.

As a member of the Mormon Church, Renée witnessed firsthand the Church's opposition to this proposed amendment. Increasingly uncomfortable with the Church's involvement in this political issue, Renée voiced her concerns to Church leaders. Not satisfied with their dismissive responses, Renée soon joined forces with those working to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. During the course of her involvement, Renée met many women with whom she has remained steadfast friends. In the midst of this activism, Renée and Roger's marriage ended. Renée returned to college, completing her Education Degree and began a career as an Elementary School teacher. She found this work very fulfilling and continued teaching until she turned seventy.

Renée's life story provides an example of a determined and principled individual who stood her ground despite facing many obstacles along the way. Taking a vocal stance in support of the Equal Rights Amendment often left her at odds with other members of the Mormon Church. Her willingness to attest to the Church's political activities has provided historians with a better understanding of the Mormon Church's involvement during this campaign. I am particularly grateful to Renée for her painstaking record-keeping: saving the Anti-ERA leaflets distributed by the Church, the notes left on her windshield, literature distributed by the priesthood youths; all are invaluable in retelling the history of the ERA ratification campaign in Nevada. Renee's

story adds an important thread to the fabric of our Las Vegas history. Her personal experiences reveal the oftentimes contradictory nature of the public narrative. I am grateful for her willingness to share her story with all of us.

Dr. Caryll Batt Dzieziak
September 2015

RENEE MARCHANT



RENÉE MARCHANT

This is Caryll Batt Dziedziak interviewing Renée Rampton. This interview is taking place at Renée's home on Mallard Street in Las Vegas, Nevada. Good morning, Renée.

Renée Marchant Rampton

We're going to start with a little of your family history. Let's go back to your great-grandparents who immigrated to the United States.

My paternal great grandparents came from Bath, England. They were converts to the Mormon Church. They came across the ocean. They came here in the 1850s as converts and went directly to Salt Lake City. My great grandfather was Albert George Henry Marchant, who married Harriet Martha Cooper. My maternal great grandparents were also converts. Francis Peter Peterson and Inger Kjarstena Christensen. They came from

Denmark. My maternal great grandfather, Francis Peter Peterson, was the first Mormon buried at sea. He died on June 15, 1863.

Did you ever find out what he died from?

He had dysentery. They got that on the ship a lot.

Tough voyage!

And his wife had someone with her who helped her and she hired a wagon train that came across the plains. They arrived in Salt Lake City.

So it was an actual wagon train, not the Mormon handcarts that you hear so much about?

Well, they came across different ways, but they had a wagon train. In fact, there was a history -- Sheldon did it. He researched that. It was stampeded by Indians. It was quite a story.

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Good morning.

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Did you ever find out what he died from?

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I'm sure! And this is your maternal great grandmother?

Yes.

Your great grandfather died coming across the ocean. So they already had children?

She had the one son.

And she went directly to Salt Lake, also.

Yes, to Salt Lake. There were two ways that Brigham Young organized the people that came. He put them by ethnic groups and put them in different parts of the state, and then he also put them alphabetically. So you'll find all of the M's -- Marchant was my maiden name. And they're in Peoa, Utah. It's near Park City.

How interesting! Now in your family memories did anyone talk about what motivated your great grandparents to join the Mormon Church?

Mormon missionaries went to Denmark and my great grandparents converted to Mormonism. You know, there was a lot going on in terms of religion at that time.

And did your maternal great grandmother remarry after she arrived?

No.

And she had the one son.

Yes. He later married a Mormon convert from Denmark.

Let's talk about their involvement in the Church once they relocated to Utah.

They were very active leaders in the Church. Well, my mother was born in Koosharem, Utah. It's north of St. George. Her mother died in childbirth when my mother was only seven. They lived on an Indian reservation down there. And the reason she died was that there was no medical care on that reservation. By the time a doctor arrived, both she and the baby, who had arrived early, died. I think Grandpa became pretty bitter.

Well, understandably so.

Anyway, I remember him telling this story. He said when he was young, his dad must have been like a stake president because they'd go visit the other bishops. The heads of the Church would come down and see how things were going and his father used to take him. He said they went to this one bishop and they asked him, "Well, do you have good priesthood members?" The bishop said, "Yes." And my great grandfather said, "Do they live the word of wisdom, which means do they smoke it or do they drink?" And the bishop replied, "Some do and some don't." Then my great grandfather asked, "Well, do the ones who live the word of wisdom take care of the sacrament?" And the bishop said, "No." The Great grandfather asked, "Why not?" To which the bishop retorted, "Sons of bitches steal the sacrament dishes!"

So he had a good sense of humor!

Yes.

Tell me about your mother, Beatrice Marchant. What was her maiden name?

Peterson. And when I asked her why she had 15 children she said, "Well, I figured if a man could run a company with hundreds of employees, I could certainly take care of a dozen children." And she did!

She was a busy woman.

What our mother had she gave us.

She was encouraging.

Oh, yes. Always! Fifteen kids and I never heard her yell! She called us to dinner, but that was the extent of her yelling.

Was she a disciplinarian, so you knew not to cross her?

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely! I told her once, I said, "I thought raising kids would be so easy because, we just did what you told us to do."

Little did you know!

Absolutely!

I'm sure she got a laugh out of that one.

She did!

I remember you talking about your father's health issues. Your mother really had to be a strong person.

Yes. Well, first she stayed home and raised the kids, then my father had a stroke. So, she had to make a living. And then my mother went to work.

And your father was fairly young when he had his stroke, was he not?

He had the stroke when he was in his late fifties. My dad was thirteen years older than my mother. He died when he was seventy and he had been bedridden for about eleven years.

Your mother did not work outside the home in your younger childhood years?

Right. Well, when my dad had the stroke, she went to work and she taught. She was a librarian at one of the elementary schools. And after that she worked in the recorder's office for Salt Lake County.

So, your mother went back to work and was caring for a husband who wasn't able to really do much of anything?

Oh yes, she had to hire someone to come and be with him. And then she ran for the state legislature.

It was in the seventies during the ERA ratification campaign. She was a pro-ERA legislator. It sounds like your mother was a very independent, self-sufficient woman.

Yes.

You've made a specific reference that she became a feminist.

Well, I asked her once. I said, "When did you become a feminist?" And she said that when she was a teenager that there was a road company that came to their town and performed Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House." And she said, "After I saw that I knew that women needed equal rights."

Talk about the influence that your mother had on you. With her being a feminist, how did that affect your views growing up seeing the stereotypical roles for men and women?

Well, the one thing that she saw that each of her children did was get a good education and that each of us was able to make our own living at some kind of a skill. We all were encouraged for education and all of us have professions. Some of the girls didn't go to college, but I think all the boys went to college. We paid for our own education, but I always thought I would go to college. My mother went to college and then did her thing.

I'm curious if you had the attitude as a girl and young woman that school was just something to get through...the real importance in life being married and having a family.

Well, I had that too. I mean, I had to get my education and once I was married, then I dropped out of school. My mother kept involved in the community throughout her life and I followed that example.

You stayed involved in music?

I taught piano lessons and I worked in the Church a lot. I was the Church organist.

And what type of job did your father have?

He was a salesman. And this was Depression times. Well, and while we were living in Midvale, my father met Herbert B. Maw, who was a young law student at the University of Utah and would later become Governor. Well, my father became acquainted with him and there were rumors or information that the power company was going to throw people out of their homes because they couldn't pay their power bills. By this time, Herbert B. Maw, was a young attorney. My father talked to him and had him come and talk to the people at the Rotary Club or Lion's Club and tell them they would not be thrown out of their homes. But, my dad received threats on his life for bringing him there to speak.

Really?

When we moved into Salt Lake City there was, in my mind, a racial line. We lived south of 9th South...one block south. North of 9th South were a number of black families. There was only one black family that lived not far from our home on the South side. And, one of the Stake leaders, Sheldon Brewster, came to my father and asked him to sign a petition saying that the black family would have to move. And my father said, "No, I don't want to feel like somebody might want to stab me in the back." My father refused to sign the petition, but remained friends with Sheldon Brewster, who years later spoke at my father's funeral.

And this is back in the days when blacks were not allowed to be a part of the LDS Church.

And this particular black family was a very well-educated, very nice family. The mother was a nurse. My oldest brother was best friends with one of the boys, so he'd oftentimes sleep over. So, we were pretty progressive, I guess, for those times. In fact, I was eight months pregnant living in Long Beach when my dad died, so I didn't go to his funeral. But

they said that there were people who spoke at his funeral whom my father had given jobs to. He was, I guess, a good salesman. Later, after Governor Maw was elected, my father as a political appointee ran the liquor warehouse for the state of Utah. All liquor sales in Utah are under the Utah Liquor Control Commission. He did that and then when Governor Maw lost his election, my dad had various political jobs. The last one was a garbage man. And I was embarrassed that he had that kind of work. But you know, he did the best he could until his health broke down.

You were born on July 25, 1935 in Midvale, Utah.

Yes.

Is that in the Salt Lake City area?

Yes, it's a suburb.

And you attended South High School. Was that also in Salt Lake City?

Salt Lake City. The family lived in Midvale for five years. We lost our home when I was one. It was the depression and my father and mother had bought a home. It was in a cul-de-sac and each home had a chicken coop behind them and they were supposed to have a business with eggs and it was supposed to help. They lived there for five years. But we lost the house. They came one day and told everybody on the street that they had to be out of there in one day. And my sister Elva's earliest recollection was going next door and seeing the young mother pulling all of her things out of her cupboards and crying. My mother did something that gave them a little more time. But they lost the home and what happened was, the man who sold everybody the house there had taken the down payment that all those people had paid him. Then, instead of applying those down payments, he reinvested it for himself. And then he represented them in court. My mother always

believed that he didn't do that, but Elva researched it and she actually went to the man who sold the homes. He lived only a couple blocks from her as an adult. Elva asked him about it and he affirmed that is what happened. But, since then, President Roosevelt changed some of those laws so that people were protected and that wouldn't happen again. My family then moved to Salt Lake City. They bought a home and lived in the same home until my mother died.

All of this happened when there were already fourteen children in the family?

No, my twin brother Richard and I were the babies.

Short notice! Pack up your children and move!

Yes.

Just incredible! And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Seven sisters and seven brothers. Everything even.

All things equal. What were the expectations in your household growing up as far as the gender divide between the boys and the girls? Were there different expectations?

I didn't think about it then, but there were different things. For instance, the girls ironed their own clothes. And my mother ironed the boys' clothing. All of us had to do dishes. We had our turns to do dishes. My siblings felt that I was given favored treatment because I played the piano and I started playing for dancing schools when I was nine years old. And because I was working on Saturdays, I didn't have to do a lot of the Saturday cleaning work.

I bet you loved Saturdays! You can't wipe the smile off your face! [Laughter]

I didn't rub their noses in it, but I was happy about it. I loved not having to do that work!

Let's go back to fill in about your early years because you're from such a large family.

Oh, yes.

Tell me about your siblings and what life was like growing up.

We lived in a small -- it was really a two bedroom house and it had a sleeping porch.

With fifteen children?

Well, we didn't all live there at the same time because World War II came. And so the three oldest brothers were gone. And my sister went to Ogden to work. So that kind of broke it up a little bit. But we had just the two bedrooms and sleeping porch, and the garage was built into a bedroom. The boys slept in the garage and the girls slept in the house, except for the little ones. We all had our chores. We took turns doing dishes. But we didn't do enough. We really should have done more. But I had a great childhood.

I don't know if I told you this story. When I was living here [Las Vegas], one of our childhood friends came to visit me. Jimmy had been from a broken home. His mother had been married two or three times. I remember seeing him at midnight riding his bike around. So, years later he came to see me. By this time, he was in the Elder's Quorum Presidency and active in the Church and happily married. And I said, "Jimmy, I didn't think you'd turn out so well." He said, "Well, it was your family. On Sundays your family made candy. I just wanted to be like your family."

Well, how nice that even though he wasn't from a family like yours, he could at least see that possibility for his own life.

Yes. And on Sundays we'd make candy. We lived near Liberty Park, a block away from this big park. There were lots of activities there for us. We'd go in the summer. And they'd have classes and they had tennis lessons. *The Desert News* paid for free tennis lessons. So we went over there and I won a tennis racket. So we were able to do good things. And then

my cousin came to stay with us and she was a piano player. So they bought a piano. And my mother taught me the beginning lessons on how to play the piano, and I got through the first book. And then I was able to take piano lessons, but I had to pay for them. When I was eight I started babysitting. So I had enough money to pay for my piano lessons.

And from there I got a phone call from my piano teacher. There was a lady named Nell Taylor, who taught dancing at our Church. She wasn't a very good dancer or teacher, but she was an old maid. She made herself a respectable living and taught dancing. And so when I was nine I started playing the piano for her dancing classes. Then later on my Grace Evans was my piano teacher. My father had met her in Peoa. She had two sisters. And the three Evans sisters used to play for dances in Peoa. One played the violin and one played the cello and the other played the piano. So they'd play for dances in Peoa. One day she called me and said that this student of hers needed a piano player, because she was going to start teaching dancing.

Now, the student was Jo Peacock. When she was little she had taken dancing lessons in Salt Lake City from Pete Christensen. Pete Christensen was the uncle of Bill Christensen, the founder of University of Utah Ballet. Bill had two brothers: Harold and Lew. He and his brothers were the major developers of the San Francisco Ballet. It was the tail end of Burlesque. And the three Christensen brothers had partners. They toured in a dancing troupe and ended up in New York and were in the first School of American Ballet with George Balanchine. And Jo and the two other female dancers were partners with the Christensen brothers. So they danced in the School of American Ballet. And then she got colitis. So she came back to Salt Lake and she nearly died. When Bill came to Salt Lake to found the University of Utah Ballet School, he needed some good teachers. So he called Jo

and asked her if she would be able to do some teaching to bring up the ballet students in the area. So she started teaching and I began playing the piano for her. By then I'm in junior high or high school. And when I auditioned for her, I just couldn't believe what I was seeing! It was like she didn't touch the ground! So I played for her until I went to college. Then I had to quit. Years later, when I was going to UNLV, I needed extra money and I played for Vassili, for his professional class.

Vassili Sulich?

Yes.

So music really opened up a lot of doors for you!

Absolutely!

You're quite musical, as are your children. Were any of your siblings musical?

Yes. Karen sang the lead in her high school opera. My father had a nice voice and loved to sing. He also played the violin.

You were married in 1956 up in Utah and you moved to Long Beach, California right away?

Yes, we left for Long Beach on our honeymoon and stayed there for three years.

And then Roger got a job with the Stardust...

Yes. At the Stardust for the Lido de Paris. When we moved to Las Vegas my husband looked for a house and found it and it was the house Dorothy Thuet was renting. When she started talking, he said, "Are you from Salt Lake City? And she said, "Yes." Where did you live? Williams Avenue, which is where I grew up. She had been my neighbor and my brother's girlfriend. Her mother was a beautician and my sister Lucy apprenticed under her and became a beautician. Anyway, then I stayed friends with Dorothy and her family. So

she moved from there and we rented her house where she was living for about six months and then moved up here. And she lived real close to here. I taught her daughter and sons piano lessons. And I taught piano lessons to their kids. In fact, many years later, I was at a PTA state convention and one of the boys that I'd taught piano was there. And I came over and talked to him and he said, "I still remember that Boogie Woogie."

That's cute.

But Dorothy is still an active Mormon and always been a good friend. She called me when I was on the air stating that the Church had tried to get me involved in the Equal Rights Amendment. She telephoned me and said, "Renee, what are you doing?"

So, she was loyal in the Mormon Church and not an advocate for the ERA?

Oh, no. No, no, no.

So despite that, you could still maintain your friendship even though you were on opposing political sides of this issue.

Yes. Well, she's an adult.

You had four children: Sheldon, Debra, Dale, and Kenneth – all over a span of ten years. Lots of August babies!

Everyone's a Leo but Dale. He's a lonely Capricorn!

Yes, you had a...

Den of lions! [Laughter]

You moved to Las Vegas in 1959. And what type of musician was Roger?

He was a percussionist. And all musicians got paid Union Scale. But for every separate instrument that Roger played, he got a little bit more. They called that "doubles." Because he was a percussionist, he had a lot of doubles. We had a fortune tied up in musical

instruments. And we had a little side business, too. Roger was a musical genius and he was really excellent at building accessories for percussion instruments. He had an invention that we patented and we opened a little office. In fact, we had metal lathes and all kinds of tools out on the patio for a while and then found a location and worked there. Roger played for the Kim sisters when they traveled. And he played for Elvis Presley and traveled with him, because he could get off his regular job and do that. He was the highest paid side man on the Strip.

So you were busy in other ways.

Oh, yes. I've always been busy. But it was fun being married to a musician.

Did you go to a lot of the shows on the Strip?

Yes. And at that time we were able to go sit with the band or sit in the light booth and do things like that. They always had big Christmas parties. At the first Christmas party, Roger said, "Stay real close to me," because the gay guys in the show were after him.

He needed protection.

He wanted them to see that he had a wife!

That's funny.

But, yes, we got to see lots and lots of stuff.

If Roger was working in a show at the Stardust, I'm assuming he was gone afternoons and late nights?

Well, not afternoons so much. They usually played two shows, at seven o'clock and then the late show. So, they played two shows at night and he'd have rehearsals in the afternoon sometimes. And he usually wasn't up in the morning.

Well, that had to be an extra challenge with young children.

It was very difficult to keep up with all of it once the children came. And it was more difficult once they were in school, because I then had to be up in the morning.

So obviously that would impact your schedule.

Yes. I had a breakdown right after Kenny was born.

Explain what you mean by that.

Let me see where to start. I think it was a hormonal imbalance. Physically things weren't right. A lot of it is blurry. Well, what happened was I thought it was the end of the world. I was not rational.

It sounds like a classic postpartum depression. Did anyone ever officially diagnosis that as postpartum depression after Kenny was born?

Yes. I wasn't rational and I thought it was the end of the world. Roger wasn't good about paying bills on time, even though he made good money. He gambled a lot. He went fishing and I was here. And I think the power was shut off, and I just translated that into being the end of the world. And I called everybody and told them to turn their hoses on to stop the fire and went to bed. Then I told everybody I was dying and the world was ending. Anyway, they took me to the hospital and they put me out for two days. I remember waking up. There was a black woman, who was one of the medical assistants, and I said something to her about being alright even if she was black. And she was insulted. But, you know, the doctor kept me medicated. I didn't smile for a year. And I'd go see the psychiatrist. Roger spent several thousand dollars on medical care for me that year. And he loved me being helpless. It was interesting, because once I came back to being myself; then he didn't love me that much anymore.

How interesting.

Yes, it really was.

And you said he was off fishing - is that when this first occurred?

Yes.

Did someone get a hold of him?

No. Well, I was in bed "dying!" I ended up having a living room full of people. There were women from the ward and there were the missionaries and friends.

So people came out of concern.

Out of concern they were all there. I remember the next-door neighbor who was a lovely woman. I don't even know what was said because I don't think I heard a lot of it because my head was not on right. She said there was a lot of stuff said that should never have been said. And I can imagine. One woman who was very smart thought that she needed to lecture me.

Kenny is your youngest child, so this was probably when you were around 30?

No. Kenny was a baby, so I was closer to 40, I think.

You had young children and a newborn.

Oh, yes. Well, they were in Elementary School probably.

Having four children, how did you manage?

We hired somebody. I had somebody coming in all day to do the work. I just sat in the La-Z-Boy rocker and rocked the baby.

And I'm assuming you had women from Church stopping in.

Oh, yes. They would stop in. And I remember Roger had dropped me off one day at the doctor's because I wasn't driving. I was medicated. While I was in the waiting room, I sat down on the floor and thought, "I'm trying to please everybody. That doesn't work for me.

I need to be myself.” And I made that decision. My eyesight was blurred and I had been on these meds for nearly a year. I went over and talked to my neighbor across the street and explained how I was feeling. She said she thought that I should quit taking the meds. Also, my dog had gotten out and was in heat. So, I took her to the doctor and told him I didn't want her to have puppies. He said, “What's going on?” And I said, “I just can't handle her having puppies.” I told him I was taking these meds and he said that the meds can become toxic after a while. So then, because of what he said and because of what my neighbor said, I gave all the meds to my neighbor to keep in case I needed them and just went off of them cold turkey.

That's when I went up to Salt Lake. My sister and her husband came down and they took me to Salt Lake and I saw the chief psychiatrist for the Mormon Church. And the psychiatrist said I seemed to be doing fine, but it can be dangerous to go cold turkey off of the meds. But the day after I quit taking the meds, I woke up in the morning and heard the birds sing and saw the sunshine and felt like I was okay.

I want to just spend a few minutes on your early years acclimating to Las Vegas as a young mother and wife in the early 1960s. There was a lot going on in Las Vegas over the next ten years, a lot of social issues happening. Las Vegas had been referred to as the “Mississippi of the West.” Were you aware of this type of racial divide?

I was *part* of the racism! I was right in a lockstep with the Church. I went to the county courthouse and picketed with the Mormons against the school desegregation plan.

That was the late 60s early 70s.

Yes. The school bussing for the 6th Grade Center Plan. And I remember I was with the Mormon women or Mormons, there probably were men there, I don't recall, but I just

remember Lloyd George, who then became a Federal Judge. But anyway, he came up to us and said, "You keep up the good work."

And was he an official in the Mormon Church at that time?

He was an official in the Mormon Church but he certainly would not be happy if he saw that I said that, because that was not something he should have done as an officer of the law. But he privately walked over to all of us and said, "You keep up the good work."

And was this something that was organized through the Relief Societies where they would call the women and say, "This is a day we're picketing - show up."

I'm sure it was, but I don't know that. They would say it was not official. But that's why we were there, because they told us to be there.

Well, that was really quite a contentious time in Las Vegas.

Yes.

Other developments were happening, shortly thereafter, regarding welfare rights.

Welfare recipients marching on the Strip when their monthly stipends were cut by the state director. Were you aware of any of that happening?

I knew it was going on and my perception was that Ruby Duncan wanted a handout.

Interesting.

Yes, I mean, I didn't go beyond that. I didn't really read about any of the real issues.

That was what my perception was and I was probably like most of the Mormon women.

Well, it's interesting to talk to people coming from different cultural contexts...the opinions vary widely. You mentioned meeting Myrna Williams when you both moved to Las Vegas.

Same month, same year. Her husband was a drummer. And Myrna's brother is Mel

Tormé. *ped that one right in the bud?*

And is she at all musical herself? *out it. And she said, "So who was right?"*

Myrna's very much into the arts, but she's not a performer.

You both belonged to the Musicians' Wives Club. Tell me a little bit about that. *orneys*

Myrna and some of the other women formed the Musicians' Wives Club and I joined it. I went to the first meeting that they had and I met Myrna there. A musician died that we knew and I said, "We need to do something for them." And so, we met at Myrna's house to see what we could do...to help her out during this time. *Clark County School District was*

Was this purely a social gathering?

It was supposed to be, but the women who formed it had ulterior motives. They were good Democrats and they wanted to use it for their agenda. Of course, I was then Mormon and I was believing all of the Mormon political stuff at that time. One day they called and I had just fallen asleep. I had a little baby and had taken a nap and they woke me up from my nap that I needed. *music teachers in the elementary school. I got involved in music in the*

She wanted to know how I felt about the "Right-to-Work" referendum. I said, "Well, what does this have to do with the Musicians' Wives Club?" *had a plan to have the regular*

And "Right-to-Work" meaning? *no teacher teaching music for two years, and then they*

The "Right-to-Work" bill. The State of Nevada was considering becoming a "Right-to-Work" state and they voted to become a "Right-to-Work" state.

Meaning unions were not mandatory? *illegal because you were not supposed to replace*

Yes. I knew exactly what they were trying to do. So anyway, I was outraged, mainly that they were using the organization for political purposes. So, I went to the next meeting and presented - and they passed, a resolution that they wouldn't be involved in politics.

You nipped that one right in the bud!

And Myrna and I have laughed about it. And she said, "So who was right?"

Were the musicians, your husbands, unionized?

Oh, absolutely! Right after our divorce Summa Corporation brought in twelve attorneys that they kept here for about six months. The union had one attorney. And they broke the union at that time.

Well, that's an interesting story! I never would have guessed that's how you met Myrna.

Let's talk about the period, was it the late sixties? The Clark County School District was trying...

I think it was the early seventies.

Okay, you were part of the Relief Society and someone told you that they were letting go of [music] teachers.

Well, in the early '70s the school district figured out how they could get federal money to get rid of the music teachers in the elementary school. I got involved in music in the schools because Roger told me I had to do something to correct the situation when the school district was getting rid of music teachers. They had a plan to have the regular classroom teachers observe the music teacher teaching music for two years, and then they would take over teaching music in the elementary schools.

Was this a money-saving strategy?

Yes. It was a Title III program and it was illegal because you were not supposed to replace teachers. But they had it all planned and had it put together. And I was at Relief Society and my friend said, "We're losing our music teacher."

Is this when Kenny Guinn was superintendent?

He was superintendent. And then the musicians told my husband that they were getting rid of the elementary music teachers, the band program. So I went to the school board.

Anyway, I stood up and said, "What you are doing is a Mickey Mouse program and it's not what we want." I made the headlines. Mary Hausch was the reporter and she wrote about it. She didn't like me, because she said she didn't like her piano teacher. Then I was told that somebody at the LV SUN who had a say in the process at the newspaper liked the topic, so he put it on the front page. Anyway, that was my first community thing.

How did you react at being splashed across the front page?

It was exciting! It was fun.

So you went through quite a period...very vocal opposition...you went on the radio, correct?

On the TV.

On TV? [Laughter] You didn't hold back! Straight to TV! And you got a lot of reaction about that, but you said it was kind of exciting for you.

Oh yes. It was fun! And my sister, Elva Barnes, was a consumer advocate in Utah. So I called her, since she was the one who first told me that they were misusing federal funds. I wrote Jim Santini. He wrote me a nice letter. He was very formal in the typewritten and then he wrote me this little note that said, "You're dead right!" I mean it was just really an exciting thing to get all of that attention.

So that was the early 1970s?

Yes.

What happened to this proposed strategy for the school district? Did they just disband it?

Well, what they did was they had purchased all of these instruments - Orff Instruments. They had already made their decision. They were well into it. In fact, that was another individual who was frustrating to me, Theron Swainston. He was a big Mormon and the School District Assistant Superintendent, who was kind of heading this up. He loved music, but he didn't know much about it. I asked him at one of the meetings, because we had several, I said, "Have these instruments been purchased?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, how is it that the bids will be open in two weeks?"

No reply?

He went red-faced. I mean he hated me. And when I went to get a [teaching] job, he put my job application in a "do-not-hire" category.

Really?

Yes. A Principal, Edna Hinman, told me that she found it there.

You have also mentioned your mother's correspondence with Jean Ford.

I obtained copies of these letters after my mother had died. She and Jean knew each other because they were both legislators. My mother mentioned that I had done music in the schools and Jean said something to her about having a daughter in Las Vegas; inferring would I be interested in working with her. My mother said that it was possible, but I was having problems in my marriage. And that was before I recognized that I had problems in my marriage, which was interesting. Anyway, that's when I met Jean.

It was through your work with the school district music?

Yes.

Was this when your mother was a Utah legislator?

Yes. Well, they had the Order of Women Legislators and they kept in touch. My mother

was working on passing the ERA. It was a top priority for her. Anyway, when I was working on music in the schools, I think I contacted Jean Ford. And in this letter, my mother said that she didn't know if I would be able to help her [Jean] because I was having some family problems. And I didn't know that she was aware that I was having family problems because I didn't like to tell her that kind of stuff. But she told Jean I was a good organizer. And then when I had a hysterectomy, Jean came to see me. And I said to her, "Well, you seem to have figured out what to do for a relationship." And she said, "Well, I guess I didn't do so well - he just told me he wanted a divorce."

Yes. It's interesting. So many women who were politically active at the time were all going through divorces.

I just think that a lot of men don't want independent women.

Did you also continue to give piano lessons at this time?

Yes, that was my spending money. Roger wasted money. He didn't always bring the money home and sometimes he gambled whole paychecks. So we were always, not in good financial shape. We didn't have insurance a lot of the time. But I had my teaching money and I bought necessities with the money that I earned. In fact, one day a musician friend, Abe Nole, came by and I was upset because Roger had only given me, like ten dollars for two weeks to run the house. I said, "Abe, can I talk to you?" So I talked to him, and he said, "Renée, there's no need for that." He said, "Every night Roger is over at Wild Bill's gambling at least twenty-five dollars a night."

I was really distraught at that time and I played the organ for Church. Right at that time we had our ward conference, so the Stake leaders were there and I was playing the organ. Well, I was beside myself and I'm playing the organ and tears were running.

President Farnsworth walked over to me and he said, "Sister Rampton, I don't know what your problem is but you need to talk to the bishop." So I did. And the bishop was very supportive, and he said, "You poor thing. You need an attorney." And I said, "But I don't want a divorce." He said, "I didn't say you need a divorce. I said you need an attorney." So I talked to Mahlon Edwards, who became our next bishop. And I told him what was going on and he really gave me excellent advice. He said, "Renée, what you need to do is tell Roger that he needs to give you this much money a week. You tell him what you need. And tell him if he doesn't want to pay it, then you'll take him to court and he *will* pay it." So, he can do it with attorney fees or without. So, I told Roger and he said, "I'll leave the country." And by then I had my act together and I said, "Well you decide what you want to do, but I need that." So, he paid me that money. Of course, the marriage was over.

Was this in the 1970s?

It was probably... '74. Anyway, from then on he gave me my money every week that I needed to run the house on, but of course, the marriage was over.

I'm kind of surprised that the bishop gave you advice and didn't call Roger in to talk to him directly.

They never did. Roger didn't attend Church, so that made it awkward. They never talked to him and that really bothered me. But nonetheless, he was Mormon. His father had been bishop for ten years and high councilman for many years. But they never said anything to him. And towards the end of our marriage, I know that certain people, who were fairly high up, would say, "Well, there are two sides to every story." But they would never talk to him. Roger remarried and his wife joined the Church. And they have a daughter. She's really nice. My granddaughters know her and like her. She's a very lovely person.

Do you consider her a part of your extended family?

Oh yes!

Well, my husband was a musician and my life was centered around him. I mean, when Roger left, the Relief Society President said, "I never knew a wife more devoted than you were." And I just focused on that. Roger didn't have the moral character to stand up to things. He'd rather let me and the kids all take the heat. Roger's really good friend was Tommy Turk, who was a wonderful trombone player. But Tommy was an alcoholic and Tommy's younger son babysat for us when Debi was a little girl...she was maybe four years old. I came home one day after he'd babysat and went into her room and the bedding was pulled out, and I had tucked everything in. So I said, "Debi, what happened to your bed?" She said "Oh, Tommy and I were laying down on it or in it." I pumped her a little bit and I don't think anything happened. But I told Roger, "He can't babysit anymore." Roger got angry at me for accusing Tommy's son...which I hadn't. And I said, "No, he's not going to babysit anymore." And Roger was mad at me because of his friendship with Tommy. I mean, that's just low character! But everybody liked Roger. He was a good-looking guy, he was funny, he had great jokes to tell, and was fun to be around! But he didn't have that kind of character.

Debi used to have temper tantrums. She was twelve years old and *still* having temper tantrums! Well, we were visiting my mother who said, "Renée, Roger's sister does the same thing. You need to do something about that." So we came home and a couple weeks later our best friend Ray Brown said, "Renée, you can't let Debi do that. No child should do to your home what she's doing." I said, "So Ray, what do I do?" He said, "You take away privileges." And I said, "Like what?" And he said, "What's her favorite thing?"

I said, "Donny Osmond." He said, "Then you take away her records or her record player." So I did. I took her record player away and within one, two, three hours - Roger gave it back to her. And I told him, "Roger, right or wrong - we need to be together, because it's hurting her." I said, "Look at your sister." And I mean, his sister almost had their father jailed. There was something at the home and she was there and Roger's brother drove by the house and the cops were putting their father in the [police] car. And he said, "What's going on here?" They said the father had threatened his daughter's life and her mother said that he did. And Roger's brother said, "Well, then you're going have to jail her, too, because she's also done the same thing." So they let him go. So I just said, "We're not going to do that."

By "temper tantrum" do you mean just screaming and yelling in the house?

Yes, until she got her way. So, you know, I think my mother was such a great disciplinarian, but Roger's mother wasn't. When they misbehaved, his mother would say, "Henry, you take care of this!" And he'd go down to the basement with whoever misbehaved and tell them to scream and then he'd take his belt off and hit it on the bed.

Just a big charade?

Yes! We didn't do that. We knew if mother said it was business - that was it!

Did your daughter just outgrow this?

Well, yes. Roger let me handle it, so I didn't let her do it. Debi's now a CPA and an Oracle consultant.

Sometimes it's tough parenting, isn't it?

Well, it is. But I was so glad that Ray told me what to do.

Let's just go back and talk about what led up to your divorce in 1978 and how that

affected your children and how you handled that. And I said, "Yes." She said, "My I didn't handle it well with my kids. *or children. He's having an affair with our babysitter."*

Well, that's honest! *was the convention, Roger said, "You made a phone call." Come to*

The divorce came about gradually. But it did come about when I became more *father told* independent in my thinking. We took a vacation during that time and we were in the car driving through Utah. Roger said, "So why do you think women need equal rights? Don't they have equal rights?" And then I told him, "No." He replied, "Well, what is there that's not equal in our marriage?" And I laid it out to him. I said, "You have your friends, you hang out all night and go over at Ray Brown's house. And I'm at home. I don't have the money or freedom that you have. You go out to dinner all the time - I don't do that. And I have all of these things that I have to do - there's nothing equal about that." And of course, he didn't see it that way at all.

You see But he was busy doing his thing. And I didn't know, but he had a girlfriend that he used to visit in California - that's who he married eventually. But there were things that led up to our divorce. My husband had a small business. He had an invention - the tuning *gauge*. There were three partners in the business. Roger was in partnership with two other men. One of his friends had recently divorced and I realized that he, along with his mother and sister, were working on getting custody of his children. One of the wives and I went to Salt Lake City to a convention with the tuning gauge, our products. Just before we left we were together with the other partner's wife. It was her brother who recently divorced and they were talking about his ex-wife being an unfit mother. So, I countered them. I mean, this woman was *not* an unfit mother and I countered them on it. Of course, his sister was angry that I would counter her on that. So the next day I telephoned the ex-wife who was

being attacked. She said, "Are you sitting down?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "My husband will never get custody of our children. He's having an affair with our babysitter." When I came home from the convention, Roger said, "You made a phone call." Come to find out, their son was listening in on the phone call. He told his father and the father told my husband. And when I got home, Roger told me that he knew I had called her and he left.

So he was angry.

He was angry that I had said anything.

He thought you were interfering?

Yes. Well, he called me a busy body. So that's when Roger left.

So, it became his moment to say...

To say goodbye. Yes, that became the moment.

You said it had been building up to that. Were you shocked? Did you kind of half expect it?

I was totally shocked. Yes, I didn't expect that. But we weren't really -- I mean there were a lot of indications that I just didn't pay attention to.

So what was your immediate reaction?

Well, he left. And in fact, my mother said, "You need to go on with your life and take care of what you need to do." At the time I had enrolled in a class at UNLV so I could substitute. And I knew that I needed to finish my education so that I could make a living.

You had attended the University of Utah from '53 to '56. You dropped out when you married, which was a typical reaction...once you're married schooling becomes secondary.

Right. And I'm sure it had to be Swainston. But she had seen me at school board meetings

When you had previously attended the University of Utah, were you pursuing a music degree? you and up working at that school with the Principall?

It was Music Education. The Church was in many ways good to me. And one of the

And how did you pay for your schooling? did work. Owen Roundy was a Mormon

I started with a small scholarship, but I always worked. I worked at the Vets Hospital at that time. She said, "Mrs. Rampion, you did an

You said that you earned your substitute teaching certification. This was initially for extra spending money - not to support yourself? contract.

My going back to UNLV began when I decided I wanted to earn a little extra money and substitute. I needed to take one class to substitute. So I did that in mid '70s. And Roger was good about helping me go to college and get my degree. He wanted me to do that.

He wanted you to be financially independent.

Yes. Regular classroom. What I knew was that the music teachers were not as secure in

And you just had a year left. regular teachers had a better foundation for working with

Well, it ended up it being two years because my first three years were at University of Utah. So the transition in later years required two years.

And then you finished up at UNLV in Education?

I got my degree in Education. I got a job. And I think within a year I went back for my Master's in Administration. According to the terms of my divorce, once I graduated from UNLV, I had to go to work right away. I mean I was on a real tight budget. Edna Hinman had a Principal call me in for my first interview. The Principal called me and said that Edna had recommended me. She told me that my file had been put in the "Do-Not-Hire"

file. And I'm sure it had to be Swainston. But she had seen me at school board meetings and told me. So, I called Edna and thanked her. I mean, I was desperate.

And did you end up working at that school with the Principal?

No, but least I began subbing. The Church was in many ways good to me. And one of the things was they knew at that time that I needed work. Owen Roundy was a Mormon Principal and I subbed at his school. I then subbed for a different teacher and the teacher I subbed for earlier saw me on the playground. She said, "Mrs. Rampton, you did an outstanding job with my class." And I said, "Well, will you tell the Principal because I need to get a contract." She did and he gave me a contract.

And where were you first teaching?

My first school was Vail Pittman and that was third grade. But I taught first grade almost the rest of my career.

Were you a music teacher?

No. Regular classroom. What I knew was that the music teachers were not as secure in their work as a regular and that regular teachers had a better foundation for working with children. The music teachers knew music, but they were not really well-trained in how to work with children.

So you then worked for a good number of years.

About twenty-five years. When I turned seventy, I retired.

Did you move around from school to school?

I was in four different schools.

What grade level did you teach?

Mainly first.

Well, you need a lot of energy and patience!

Oh, it was great! And I used a lot of music in the classroom.

Oh, I'm sure the children loved it at that age.

Yes. And that made my job easier.

And I take it you enjoyed teaching.

Oh, yes! And first grade is wonderful! I was afraid to do it because I knew how important it was. But my musical training was excellent for that because it has a lot to do with children hearing sounds and I was able to recognize that. And I incorporate a lot of music in the classroom and that's nice.

We've been touching on the ERA [Equal Right Amendment], so let's go back and talk about that. Most people who became involved with the ERA in Nevada hadn't really followed the national debate before it came out to the states. And you had said that you really didn't know what this was all about.

No.

One of the stories that you wrote up was about the trepidation that you felt on your first visit to the ERA headquarters on Third Street by Charleston. Let's go back to that moment.

I wasn't at all concerned about the Equal Rights Amendment until they asked me to be a part of that committee.

The Quest for Quality Government?

Yes. Then I had to find out what it was. And when I wouldn't be their gopher, then they asked my friend, Verlene Chiodini.

Did she end up joining Quest?

Oh no! She's been right with me on all of these things.

Was this formed by the Mormon Church?

This was formed by the Church. And they had that one token non-Mormon member on it.

You conjured up enough courage to go down to the ERA headquarters and actually meet these women. Take me back to that initial entree into the ERA activism.

Well, I didn't know anything about the ERA. It didn't mean anything to me. So I went down there and met them. Kate Butler and Dorothy Frehner were there. Their sole issue was ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Jack Jeffries had taken money for Nevadans for ERA. He pledged to support it and then voted against it. Even to this day, he looks at me like I'm one of those bad people that remember that. I mean, he was protecting his turf. The only thing you can do is keep Church and state separate. One of the first things that happened when I was at the ERA headquarters was that Laura Kelley said, "Your men don't respect you."

She didn't waste any time!

No! Anyway, I talked to her. I mean I liked them. The ERA women were intelligent and interesting and they just added a new dimension to my life.

So from this initial meeting did you then become active in the campaign for the ERA passage?

I don't know at what point I did. But I liked the women. And I think Verlene and I went. I remember we went to Boulder City and heard a debate between Lamond Mills and Cynthia Cunningham regarding the ERA.

You were very involved with music in the Church. So I'm assuming you had lots of social interaction with other women. How was the ERA group different for you?

I think they were just more global. They had broadened their experiences and they were interesting.

Were they accepting of you being a woman who belonged to the Mormon Church?

They were thrilled to have a Mormon walk into their doors. They knew that they were the ones that were their main opponents here in Las Vegas, anyway.

So, even though you were asked to sit on the Quest for Quality Government Committee, you never did.

No.

And Verlene refused to join the Quest committee, also, on the same grounds as you?

Yes. Same premises. They had a meeting in our Stake and asked all the women to come to a Woman's Stake Conference and learn about all of the important issues. When we were there, on, Jim Gibson was presiding. I took Cynthia Cunningham and Jean Ford. Verlene was there and I don't remember who else, but probably a couple of other ERA supporters. We sat right in front of Jim Gibson, I mean, where he was looking down at us. Then we went into the recreation hall and had another meeting and it was kind of like an open forum then. And people asked questions and they endorsed the John Birch Society at that meeting. By now I was for the Equal Rights Amendment. And I'd read a lot about, mainly about the politics that had created this. Well, during that '76 election, I worked with Charlie Waterman on his campaign. He was running at the same time as Jean Ford. He later handled my divorce.

For what office?

For state senate. Charlie was chair of the Democratic Party. Well, there were a number of things that happened. Citizens' Quest didn't identify who they were and they had

misrepresented candidates.

I remember Cynthia Cunningham complaining about that.

Exactly. So, as Chair of the Democratic Party, Charlie formed a committee to investigate what was going on.

Charlie was not Mormon?

No. The Quest people had asked me to be on their committee. They had also gone to Verlene and asked her too. I testified before that Democratic Party investigative committee that Quest was a Mormon Church organization and that became headlines.

Was that the Democratic Committee ethics probe?

Yes.

What happened after this investigation?

Well, once I testified, why, the Mormons were all mad at me. I got phone calls, "What are you doing?"

Were you still attending Church during this period?

This was during the transition. But, you know, it just got to be too much - going to Church and playing the organ and hearing them pray against the Equal Rights Amendment. Ted Wendell was the chorister and I was the organist. Before the election on the ERA, they prayed against it and I groaned. And he said, "Well, it's from the prophet." And I said, "Well, if I want that kind of prophecy, I'll join the John Birch Society and be four years ahead of you guys."

Well, you speak your mind, don't you?

Well, I viewed my job as Church organist as someone to set a mood. To make it a personal, wonderful experience. And I felt I was being a shill for something that was wrong. I knew

it was wrong because they lied to me and they said they didn't do it. Mormon people, active Mormons, to a person, will say that the Church was not involved in politics - nothing could be further than the truth! It was very difficult to leave the Church, but it was difficult to be there.

This was a painful experience for you. You loved the Church yet you kept seeing this mixing of politics in an area that should be politically free.

Yes.

I was curious if you had friends or members of the Church that were trying to calm you down.

Well, most people just shunned me. Once that happened I was a pariah or something.

You gave me a copy of the letter that you wrote to Barbara Smith, who headed up the Relief Society for the whole Church. In the letter you shared that you were uncomfortable with the mixing of politics with religion. Did she ever reply to your letter?

Never.

And you cc'd the letter to the Presidency?

Yes. David O. McKay.

Did you ever hear anything back from him?

I got a letter from his secretary denying that the Church had anything to do with it. And other people received those kind of letters, too. From what I've been told it's a standard practice with them

You wrote up some stories about the Church's Anti-ERA activities, the fireside chats that only gave one side of the issue. Were those at the ward or someone's home?



RENÉE MARCHANT 1953
Playing piano at South High School
Salt Lake City, Utah



STEPHEN & BEATRICE MARCHANT FAMILY

On the front porch of our home in Salt Lake City, Utah

Back: Dwight, Lois, LeGrande, Mama, Joan
Middle: Roger, Renée, Richard, George, Maurice, Byron, Marva
Front: Karen, Wanda, Elva
Daddy & Lucy are deceased



THE RAMPTON FAMILY 2013

Sheldon, Dale, Kenny
Renée and Debi



ROGER & RENÉE RAMPTON FAMILY 2013

Sal, Debi, Sheldon, Walda, Kenny, Dale, Heather, Steve
Cynthia, Erik, Renée, Rob, Amy
Aeralyn, Derin, Julian
Roger is deceased



With my best wishes,

Harry Reid

SENATOR HARRY REID AND RENÉE RAMPTON

Usually, it was at a home. But you're told at Church that they're having a fireside chat and this is the topic. And it's important to be there.

Encouraging members to go to educate themselves.

Their take on that is if it's at a home, then it's not official.

And so it's as good moral citizens that they're having these meetings?

Yes.

It's a fine line. Additionally, you write about the priesthood teenage boys and I'm assuming this terminology is young adolescent boys?

Yes. Well, when a boy gets to be twelve years old, then he becomes part of the Aaronic priesthood. There's the Aaronic priesthood and the Melchizedek. The younger ones, the Aaronic priesthood, passed political pamphlets that were endorsement recommendations made by the Anti-ERA Quest group.

And would they receive the pamphlets to distribute at the Sunday service?

Oh, yes. They were given at their meeting.

You stated that after you had been asked to join the Quest committee it didn't sit right with you. You called up Karen Hayes, who was an assemblywoman and also Mormon, and she said, "Well, the prophet says so."

Yes. They say that. Yes.

But you just couldn't quite turn off your thinking at that point.

No. No. No. I wasn't raised that way. I mean a lot of people are. I wasn't.

Well, I've said many times that whether or not you agree with the stance that the Mormon Church had during the ERA campaign, their political machine was very, very effective. They were able to mobilize membership so quickly. You had made notes in

your papers about the telephone trees before Question 5 on the referendum and the number of phone calls that were made in a handful of days to get out the vote.

Oh, yes.

You mentioned going back to get your certification for substitute teaching. You had an English class at UNLV with Herman van Betten.

That was for my Master's. And I needed a certain number of English hours. Herman van Betten in the English department was my advisor. He had also been maligned. He was on the school board and they [QUEST] had maligned him and he'd lost that election. And he wanted to find out about the endorsements. Anyway, I went to him, as my advisor, saying I would like to write a paper about the endorsements of the candidates. So I did it. I wrote the paper. I had endorsements from previous elections and from that election and grouped them into labor and business. And by using the ERA as a rallying point, business really improved their endorsements as opposed to labor and teachers. So I took all of the endorsements and just did a mathematical thing of counting who had endorsed whom. And it fell into categories of business and labor. Up to that point labor was winning. But once they brought in the so-called moral issues, then the Far Right was able to get their way and businesses were able to go against the unions and they were able to get a power base, which up until that time, they were talking about there wouldn't be a Republican Party.

Oh, really?

Yes, there was talk about that. And once they were able to get in to reach the people through their religion, then they were able to strengthen their party. And that's what we have today. That was the change. He had a lot of the endorsement materials and he gave those to me. And I just pulled them out and wrote a paper about it. It was published at

UNLV in *The Yell*. I think that was it. It was good! And, well, it was cute.

Interesting!

Then I got some phone calls. Well, there were a couple of critical calls. I think generally people don't want to confront.

Back in the 1970s your bishop was Mahlon Edwards. Was he the one who counseled you when you were going through your divorce?

Yes.

And was he also the bishop when you were getting involved in the ERA?

Mahlon Edwards became bishop, he asked me to be a counselor in the Relief Society, which I was until the Church got into the Equal Rights Amendment. And I stayed there for a couple years and then I just couldn't bear it anymore. By the time the election came, that's when I quit going to Church.

You were attending college, so you were busy.

Yes, I quit at that time, probably when fall semester started.

Was he the one who asked you to join Quest?

Yes.

All right. You have a note regarding his influence on your son Kenny.

Well, when Kenny was little, Mahlon as a bishop came into the Sunday school and talked to all the little children and he told them to listen to the Holy Spirit. You know, he told them you can call that the Holy Spirit or you can call it your conscience. But it had a big influence on Kenny and he has also listened to what his soul tells him. And it's taken him -- I mean, now he's playing in arguably the greatest jazz orchestra in the world. It's always been there. That really was an influence on him for Mahlon to tell him that.

Nice. No matter where his life path took him.

Yes. And he always listens to that.

Were you working as a substitute teacher while you were finishing up your degrees?

I'm trying to think when I started subbing. I'm sure I did some subbing then; but not much.

Well, you were on track for financial stability right away.

Yes.

And I would think that would be one of your first concerns. You had four children.

They were preteen through teenage years at that time.

Yes. Sheldon was away on a mission.

How did your children react and how did you handle that?

Well, it wasn't that bad. They had their own lives and did their own things. I asked Debi. I said, "How were you with the Church at that time?" She said she wasn't interested in the Church. She went to BYU in the summer for two different summers when she was a teenager and she hated it and she thought they were hypocrites. The one thing that she recalls about those summers is contracting mononucleosis while she was there. It was okay with them if she missed school, but she couldn't miss Church.

Did she end up leaving the Church?

Not officially; but yes.

What about your sons?

Sheldon went on the mission. He received a scholarship to Princeton. I contacted Church people who lived there when he moved there so that they'd meet him at the plane. So they immediately grabbed onto him and after a year they talked him into going on a mission. He said at the time, "I don't have a testimony." That's a big thing in Mormonism.

Explain what that means.

A testimony is a belief, saying, "I know that the Gospel is true." He said, "I don't have that." And they said, "Well, this is a good way to get it." So he went on a mission for eighteen months in Japan. When he came back, the ERA campaign had begun. I think he was back for two weeks when Sonia Johnson came and stayed with me and that was the end of it for him! And Dale was into the music. He was playing on the Strip with his dad making \$600, \$700 a week. So, he wasn't interested in the Church. And Kenny also did his own thing playing trumpet and going to school. Verlene Chiodini's son Vic and Kenny were best friends. So they were just doing their own thing.

Now, Dale ended up going into music?

Oh, yes. He's a professional percussionist.

And Kenny?

Trumpet player. Of course, Kenny now is with Wynton Marsalis in the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. He's playing *Sesame Street* and he's opened a new Broadway show in March, "Anything Goes."

Interesting.

Let's talk about your daughter Debi's first marriage. Right around when you and Roger were going through your divorce, your daughter was married. You have mentioned that her husband was abusive.

Her first marriage was to a guy who used drugs. He beat her up, putting her in the hospital. He came to the house after their divorce. She had excellent eyesight, like 15/20 and he virtually blinded her one eye. They sent her in an ambulance. And I went to the hospital right after it happened. I tried calling people and the only one who I was able to reach was

Myrna and she came right over to the hospital. Myrna and I saw that she was okay. My daughter didn't want to be in the hospital because she didn't want him to find her.

So, Debi was only married a year or so?

Well, Cynthia was a baby.

Was this before she was divorced, while she was still married?

After the divorce. He had paid his first \$200 of child support after a year. With that she was told by her attorney that she needed to let him see the kids now. She called the police and said that it wasn't safe. He came to the house. The police knew that he was coming, but they didn't come by.

So before she was attacked by him, she had already warned the police?

Yes. She had called them and they did nothing. He beat her up. They had a description of his car and they knew where he was. In fact, the car broke down and they did nothing. So, after everything was settled that night, I went to the police station to tell them - and they threw me out. I was there with the babysitter who was there when Debi was attacked and they wouldn't take a note from me. They wouldn't do anything. So, Myrna took me to the undersheriff and we told him what happened. And from that Myrna lobbied, she and Marvin Sedway. They lobbied for and passed the Domestic Violence Bill; the order for a 24-hour cooling-off period.

So when this happened with your daughter, was Myrna an assemblywoman?

I don't think she'd been elected yet. She was working with me at Senator Cannon's. But she did know the undersheriff, so we went.

Well, that had to be infuriating for you as a parent to know that your daughter had let the police know and voiced her concerns and done everything that you're supposed to do

and to no avail.

Yes.

The same period that you were working for Senator Howard Cannon's re-election. So, that had to be the late 1970s...early 1980s?

Yes. Myrna was elected right after that and she went up to the legislature and used that experience to write the bill. And Marvin Sedway was a good friend. I know he assisted her.

This was a domestic violence bill putting a cooling-off period in place?

Exactly!

Putting teeth into a restraining order.

Yes.

Is this still in the Nevada Statutes?

I think so. Myrna would know.

This was quite an unfortunate period in your daughter's life, but good legislation came out of it. Hopefully, protecting many other women in our state.

Oh, yes. The Domestic Shelter used to refer to her as their best graduate!

The silver lining.

Yes!

Later on you were an alternate to the Democratic [National] Convention in New York City.

When Carter lost the election. That was 1980. And at the convention, of course I'd gone through all of the other stuff now. So I'm at the convention on the outside and Ruby came to me and said, "Renee, will you be an alternate for me? I have to leave." So I said, "Sure.

How do you want me to vote?" She said, "You use your conscience, honey." So I went on the floor and Jon Collins, who was partner in the law firm with the former governor Grant Sawyer - Collins and Sawyer. Jon Collins was the majority whip of our group. And there came a vote on water and he said, "Renee, you're going to vote with us on this?" And I said, "Well, does it protect the environment?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Well, I need to know." Because it looked to me like it would be damaging to the environment. And he said, "Well, I can't find that out." I said, "You have a phone there. Telephone." He said, "I can't do that. Renee, we need your vote." So, when it came to the vote - I voted against it. He almost leaped for me. He was so furious!

I'll tell you another funny story. We were setting up for the convention and it was precinct meeting time, Ruby Duncan came to me and she said, "Renee, I was at my precinct meeting, and there were these women and I think they belong to your Church. Do you know if they do or not?" And I said, "Why do you think that, Ruby? Do we all look alike?"

Did she laugh?

Yes!

Caught her in her own words!

When were you were working on Senator Cannon's re-election campaign?

That would be 1980.

Was this as a volunteer?

No, I was paid staff. I did the targeting for him.

Meaning what?

You look at the population and see what districts to work the most and all that.

Was this around a six month or nine month commitment?

Well, it was the duration of the campaign. We won the primary. Jim Santini was a Congressman and he decided to run for the Senate. Harriet Trudell has a whole different take on this than I do. She said that Peter Hart from Washington D.C. called and said that Cannon couldn't win the election since the Abscam political bribery scandal was going on. So they had talked to Santini who agreed to run.

Interesting.

Well, Santini's wife was Mormon and he was Catholic. So he ran as a Mormon and a Catholic. He had the Far Right from the top endorsing him as a Democratic candidate. And I had lists of most of the politically active Mormons in Las Vegas. So, the Democrats knew I had that list, that's really one reason they hired me, so that he could work the Mormons. We were in the headquarters one day and they told me that I needed an assistant. So, I got Myrna, because she was working as a volunteer at headquarters.

Myrna Williams?

Yes. So she came and was my assistant. And we were there one day and this guy from Bunkerville, Grant Bowler, came in with a letter that he'd written. And it said that people needed to remember what Senator Cannon, who was Mormon, did for the Church.

Anyway, during the Vietnam War, they were not allowing the Mormon missionaries to be exempt from the draft. So, Ezra Taft Benson visited Senator Cannon in his office and said, "We need that exemption so we can send our boys on missions." Senator Cannon picked up the phone and telephoned LBJ and it was a done deal! The Mormons were then exempt from the draft. When that happened I said to Sheldon, "Wasn't that wonderful?" He said, "It was terrible! Do you realize that all of the Mormons are still living in the fifties? They never experienced Vietnam." When he said that, I realized that I had to learn all about

Vietnam, because I didn't know either.

Really interesting, wise comment from your son!

Yes. And I think that's one of the reasons that they're so behind on all that other stuff. I remember during Vietnam, this woman joined the Church with her sons. Then her son went off to Vietnam and I think she left the Church. She was so distraught that no one in the Church had any understanding of what her family was going through.

Well, it was a fascinating story! And I didn't know Senator Cannon was Mormon.

Oh yes. He's from St. George. And when I was working for Senator Cannon, one of the ERA ladies was running Zel Lowman's campaign. Anyway, Dean Schank, who was in the Church, worked for Zel Lowman, and Dean was having an open house to meet the candidates. I asked Pat, a neighbor of Dean Schank's, I said, "Can I bring my candidate?" And she said, "You wouldn't dare." So I called Pat McNutt, who was running. I called her and said, "There's an open house to meet the candidates at Dean Schank's house; is Zel Lowman invited?" And she said, "I don't know anything about it." And Dean Schank had asked Zel Lowman if he could be in charge of his campaign in our area.

And what office was Zel Lowman running for?

State Senate. And Dean was having an open house to meet the candidates with the Mormons, but he hadn't invited the very man whose campaign he had requested to run in this area.

That's quite a story.

Yes. It was outrageous! I mean, I was appalled at the dishonesty!

Well, it just seems to be a direct affront to the Church's teachings. So, I can understand why it would be confusing at the very least.

I went to the Mormon Mountain Meadows Massacre site with Sandy Jolley, Harriet Trudell, and Cindy Reid. Cindy is Rory's wife. Sandy asked me, "Well, how do you feel ecclesiastically about the Church?" I said, "I don't believe it." And she said, "Why not?" I said, "Well, we have a war in Iraq that wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for the Church. And thousands and thousands of people have died and it wouldn't have happened except for the political activities of the Church. I can't believe that God did that. I don't believe that was something from the Church of God." Did I tell you the story about Verlene and the Republicans at Harriet's house?

Why don't you go ahead and tell it again because I love the Harriet stories.

Harriet called and said, "We're getting ready for the Democratic convention, and we need to identify who the Mormons are because they're trying to take over the party. There are lots of them and we need to know who they are."

And is this because of the Mormon tactic of re-registering Republicans as Democrats for the primary?

Yes. They had held the precinct meetings and had their people coming to the convention. And at that time, there were more people who wanted to be delegates than there were slots to be delegates. So, the Democrats didn't want the Mormons to take over the Party; and they could have. They were within a handful of votes of taking over the Party, when it came right down to it. So the Party strategists wanted to know who the Democrats were and who were the Mormons. So I went to this meeting to look over the lists and help Harriet with that and I'd just recently met Harriet. I think I called Verlene and asked her about a couple of names. Then I called Harriet and said, "Harriet, I have a friend who can help with some of these names. Can I bring her?" And she said, "Sure." So Verlene and I

were going over these Democratic Party records. The lists were all in front of us. We'd find the names we'd recognize. "Yeah, this one is Mormon" and you know, going through all of them. And Harriet said, "Verlene, you could be a delegate." Verlene said, "No, I can't." Harriet said, "Why not?" And Verlene says, "I'm Republican." Well, Harriet literally fell backwards! [Laughter] And who else was there? Myram Borders was there. And Alice Cohan from National NOW was there. I mean, the room just fell apart when that happened. And you know, I didn't even think about it. Well, a month later then, we were in Boulder City when Cynthia Cunningham was debating with Lamond Mills at a public meeting about the ERA. Afterwards, we went to that Greek restaurant in Henderson and Harriet looked at Verlene and said, "Verlene, have you always been Republican?"

She wasn't going to stop until she registered her as a Democrat.

Oh, she became a Democrat! She's a good Democrat - she's active.

So, you were educating yourself about the issues by going to various meetings with Verlene.

And reading!

You've talked a lot about your good friend, Verlene Chiodini. Why don't you tell me a little bit about how you met Verlene?

I met Verlene at a maternity shop.

Oh, really?

We were both pregnant at the same time, she with Vic and me with Kenny. She was Mormon. So she came to Relief Society after the boys were born. She taught Relief Society when I was in the presidency and we got to be good friends. At one point when the ERA was going on, the Church had a big meeting to tell Church members about the ERA.

Jim Gibson was the LDS Regional Representative in Las Vegas for Clark County. Verlene and I took Jean Ford, Cynthia Cunningham, Renee Diamond and others. So, there was a group of us and we sat right in the front row and stared at Jim Gibson and made him very nervous.

Was this after Jean was already an assemblywoman?

I think she was a senator. First, they had the meeting in the chapel. Then we went into the recreation hall and they opened it up to questions. Some people there were saying everyone should join the John Birch Society. Verlene broke down into tears and we left at the end. She couldn't bear it. And then we just quit going to Church. I mean, there were just lots of things that they did that were repugnant.

Let's talk about Sonia Johnson for a few minutes. Sonia formed the Mormons for ERA and was really the national flashpoint for Mormons who thought that the ERA was justified. She also was excommunicated in December of 1978. How did you first meet her? I know she came to Las Vegas and stayed with you.

That's how I met her. She found out that I was a Mormon for ERA. And they gave her my name and she called me and she stayed here. We passed out literature at the Churches and leafletted the cars.

Do you remember what year she came?

It was the year of the election...

1977?

Yes. The Mormon Church is so controlled -- I never knew how to break into anything like that as such. They've got this thing that says when the prophet speaks the thinking has been done. So that doesn't give you much of a chance. Well, at that time, Sonia Johnson came to

town to be part of the PR effort to promote the Equal Rights Amendment. And Sheldon had just been home for maybe two weeks from his mission. Now when he went on the mission and he was there for eighteen months in Japan. But anyway, when he came back, within two weeks Sonia came here. And she stayed here at my house.

And where did she speak when she came to town?

I don't remember her speaking, what I remember is we leafleted churches. She had a lot of information. Brigham Young's wife who never had children, [Eliza] Snow, was a very well educated woman and she spoke about equal rights for women. She had all this literature about equal rights for women from the early years of the Church. When the women's suffrage thing happened, Utah sent a couple to Washington D.C. to see that women got the vote. But that's not really a stretch because when the women voted they did what their husbands wanted them to do. But I think it kind of made the church look good to be on the forefront of that.

Sure.

It was a full time thing. As I recall, the president of the Church was liberal. I'm not sure, but I think he was more forward thinking than they are nowadays. And Sheldon was so bright and she was such a challenge to him. I mean, they just really clicked, the two of them. When she was excommunicated, he was going to Princeton. So he went to her home and was there during the trial.

And that was in 1979.

Yes. And during the ERA campaign, we had a group of over twenty people that took a train from Las Vegas to Salt Lake and picketed the 1981 April Church Conference.

Was this an annual Church Conference?

Semi-Annual. They have Easter Conference and then they have October. And it's an All Church Conference. It's all the members of the Church. So we all got on the train and rode up there and had our signs and picketed the Temple Square. And Sheldon flew in from Princeton and he and two others were at the conference. They asked the body if they affirm the president of the Church, or sustain him. And those three said "No!"

Did you get any coverage for the picketing? Media coverage?

Oh, yes! And the police escorted us. And all of us were, "Boy, look at all the cops! They're really after us!" And Harriet [Trudell] said, "They're there for your *protection*."

Was Harriet part of the group that went up there?

Oh, yes.

So it wasn't just Mormon women that were going up?

Oh, it was ERA women that went there. We had little things that we'd say. You know... little chants. We walked around and round and round and then we went to dinner. We went to this one place, and some ex-Mormons were there, and they had some kind of an auction. And they were auctioning off pieces of Mormon garments. I thought it was really sickening because it just lacked in taste. You know, that's a sacred thing to people. They were doing things that were just distasteful to some of us, but there was a lot of anger there.

Did this group stay overnight up in Salt Lake City or did you get on the bus and head right back?

I don't remember if we stayed overnight or not. I think we took the train home that night. Stan Colton used to be an elected official and his mother was part of our group. She said she was going to go and then she said, "Oh, I can't. It's Stan's job." Diane Crites, who worked for the power company was one of the leaders. She went, but she wore a wig!

Oh, this must have been a fun group!

It was fun. We just had a great time. Beverly Carlino was there and then we met my sister, and of course, Byron. My sister, Marva had left the Church, because of what they did to Byron.

Byron was very outspoken about the admission of blacks. He was in favor of that and was excommunicated because of that?

Yes. They say that he was excommunicated for criticizing the Church or something like that. But, it's like my sister Elva says, any time you challenge authority in a way that is a threat to the Church's power...that's when they get you.

Let's talk about your brother Byron's excommunication from the Church. When did that happen?

That happened when Sheldon was on his mission. Byron was born on December 24, 1941. He was what they called a blue baby. He couldn't run very far or he'd turn purple. So he had to have a heart surgery when he was a young boy. When he got older and wanted to go on a mission they had to do another surgery because he had outgrown the first surgery. Both of them were innovative surgeries that had never been done before. But anyway, he came through the surgery and went on a mission to France. When he was in France, he converted a family who had a daughter from a previous marriage; a twelve year old daughter who was mulatto. And Byron was given the job to explain to the family that that the daughter would never be able to go to the best part of Heaven because she was part-black. So when Byron came home he researched it and got together with people who felt that that was not right. He was opposed to that.

Also, when he came home he married and he bought a home near my mother's - just

about a block away from her home. He got a job as a custodian of the Church and he became the Boy Scout leader. So he recruited all the kids he could. He recruited two little black boys that lived near his home, Ninth South. On the North side of Ninth South, that was kind of the line in my mind, and there were black people there. But on the South side there was only one black family - very nice people, well-educated. The mother was a nurse. But on the other side, then it was more of an impoverished area. But Byron recruited all the black kids. And he recruited these two little black boys and told their parents that he would see that they would not be hurt by the white kids.

Well, the Church then changed its policy about scouting and said that in order to move up the ranks in the Boy Scout program you had to have the priesthood, which blacks couldn't have. The NAACP heard about it and it became a big issue nationwide. In fact, one of my friends who was a Catholic here said, "What's this about your Church discriminating against blacks?" I didn't realize that he was talking about Byron's troop. So, I said, "Howard, mind your business. I don't criticize your Church, so leave mine alone." Then I found out it was about my brother.

So was Byron a flashpoint for the Church on this issue? Or was this happening across the country in various communities?

Well, Utah of course, was the center. And Byron was well-known and associated with all of the people who were leaders in the movement. There were a lot of other Mormons who were with him on it. But, of course, most of the people stay with the Church and follow whatever they say. Anyway, they protested. They made leaflets and they'd go to conference and protest the discrimination. At the same time the ERA issue was going on too. But Byron was protesting the Church during its conference and he had three pieces of

literature in his hand. Someone he knew was inside the Church grounds. Byron was on the sidewalk outside the Church gates.

Is this the Annual Church Conference?

Semi-Annual. And this woman asked him, "What have you got, Byron?" So, he went inside and handed her the literature. The Salt Lake City police arrested him and handcuffed him and put him in jail.

Really? On what grounds?

Trespassing.

I'm assuming he had already lost his job as custodian of the Church, when he started making an issue?

Oh, yes. And then he'd try to get jobs and they'd blackball him. He'd have a job for a few days and then his boss would say, "I'm sorry, you're doing good work, everything's fine, but I've been told I can't keep you." So he was not able to really get good work. But anyway, they arrested him and threw him in jail. He was there for seven days.

Did they have a restraining order out against him?

I don't know. But he insisted on a jury trial. So he then subpoenaed the President of the Church because that was his land – the property that he had trespassed on. The President didn't show up the first time, so they continued it. And the morning before the day of the trial, Byron got a phone call from Ed Firmage.

Who is that individual?

Ed Firmage is an attorney. He's a Mormon community activist. He was at the funeral the other day for Sister Rosemary, a Franciscan nun. He's been active with the protestors at the Test Site. Anyway, Ed called Byron and he said he had just met with one or two of the

Apostles and that the President of the Church had had a revelation and blacks could have the priesthood. The next day they were supposed to go to court.

Wow! And it was in the headlines. Ed called Byron before it was in the papers. In fact, when I read it in the newspaper that morning, I was going through my divorce. And I went to Charlie Waterman's office, who was my attorney. And I said, "Guess what? There has been a revelation that blacks can have the priesthood!" He said, "Just a minute." And he went back into his office and came back out and said, "I just called God and *She* said *She* didn't care!"

Good sense of humor. So this was 1978, correct

Yes.

When interviewing people from this era, I always thought it was so interesting that Senator Joe Neal was such a strong supporter of the ERA, standing up to the Mormons that were in the state legislature, despite their double standard that denied blacks priesthood. I admire that he could just hold his head up and really eloquently argue his points with them.

You bet!

So, long story short, Byron really made some radical changes.

Absolutely!

But he was nonetheless excommunicated.

Oh, yes.

I had asked you in an earlier interview if, once you became active in the ERA campaign, you received any kind of phone calls from people in the Church saying, "Renee, you

shouldn't be so outspoken out in the public." And you said that they really left you alone.

Yes...pretty much. When I was active, the Church had written a music book for teenagers with some songs written especially for teenagers. They asked me to be Stake Music Director, but I didn't feel like I could handle that. So Virginia Watts became Stake Music Director and I was the accompanist. And then I told her what to do, because I had a better musical background. She was a good personality, they all liked her. All over the Church they had programs of the teenagers performing this music. Well, I figured out that there were umpteen songs in this book, twenty songs, something like that. If each ward performed two songs, then it would ease our burden - just spread it out. So I put it together and organized it that way and I wrote the accompaniment for those who played flutes or other instruments. I plugged that in to the music, so that we had a lot of participation. And when we finally put it on we had two hundred young people performing and they had to break it into two nights to seat the audience. But it was pretty impressive. We had more teenagers performing from our Stake than they did in the whole valley. They then went to the convention center but we had by far, the most participation of all those young people. So Virginia and I were good friends. But once the ERA happened, she wouldn't even talk to me, wouldn't even say hello. We had formed a pretty good friendship there but the ERA was too threatening to her.

You were still working with her in the music?

No, I was through with that. By then I was attending UNLV getting ready for a teaching career.

At this time your children were teenaged to young adults, with Sheldon being the oldest.

What about what was their reaction to your activism?

They were fine. Sheldon always was. He's a reader and he knew stuff. When he was in high school, his computer teacher was a feminist. One day he went into the computer lab part of the classroom and locked all the doors and put a sign on the door. It was some funny note about the room being reserved for a male chauvinist pig.

Did he get a laugh from the teacher over that?

Oh, yes. He and she were great friends. Sheldon, Debi, and Kenny were okay with what I was doing. Dale, like his father, was opposed to it.

Dale is an extremely talented percussionist. His father was his mentor. And Roger had an invention - a tuning gauge for timpani. So up until that point when you played timpani you had to tune everything totally by ear. And when you would have to change the tones, they'd bend down and listen. He and a friend had figured out how to put a device so that it looked like a keyboard that showed the notes. They would set it up before a performance because they didn't have room for a lot of timpani, but they would have to make quick changes.

So the performers would come here from New York and the timpani would play all the notes that they wanted, because Roger had this tuning gauge, which he made into a business. Meanwhile, Dale became a percussionist like his dad and was working on the Strip making six, seven, eight hundred dollars a week while he was a high school student. Well, he got into the drugs and ended up hospitalized about two years. By this time Roger had left, but the two of us worked to try and help him out.

We were at the hospital waiting to go in for a hearing to see if they could move Dale into a different place or something. Roger and I were sitting outside and there was a cop

standing right by us. A woman walked by wearing pants and Roger said, "That's what's wrong with the world. Women dressing and acting like men." And I said, "That's precisely what's wrong with your son." Roger replied, "What do you mean?" I said, "Your disrespect for women." Roger said, "I respect women. I respect my wife." And because I'd been told this, I said, "When she has to beg you to buy a plastic laundry basket - is that respect? You have your son afraid of half of the population of the world. That's what this is about!" Any other time Roger would have run, but he was caught there and the cop was standing right over him. I nailed him!

And this was after your divorce?

Yes. And he was remarried.

So did he have any comment?

Well no, he was just furious! But it was probably the most honest, right to the heart words because Dale was a mess! And Dale was making so much money, we'd go to a restaurant and if the service wasn't perfect, he'd say, "That's why he has that kind of a job." You know, it wasn't just women he disrespected. I mean, he had all that money, so he ended up in the hospital. And by this time I was working for Senator Cannon, for his re-election. I'd go visit Dale at the hospital and it was tragic to see, I mean Dale's six foot three, big, strapping, good-looking guy. Well, he got hold of some PCP when he was eighteen. But he became a danger. He was threatening the doctors. I mean, he thought he had bugs crawling up his arms and it was just awful! So, when he was starting to get better I went to see him at the hospital and said, "Dale, do you need money?" He started to cry and said, "How did you know?" I said, "I just thought you probably did. I don't have much but, can I help you?" And then he told me he had been out of the hospital for a little while

and one of the orderlies had moved in with him and stolen all of his money.

When he eventually got out, he had a job to play at the Sahara. I loaned him a couple hundred dollars and with his first paycheck, he brought me the two hundred dollars. I said, "You don't need to pay me this now. You have other things you need to do." He said, "I want to pay it." And I said, "Well, why don't you come up to the house and we'll have some dinner." He said, "I'd like that." Then he said, "I'll stop by Dad's and pay him." I said, "What do you owe your Dad for?" His dad rented him the instruments to play the job. And Dale said, "I'll pay Dad for the instruments in front of Connie, then she'll know that he's not loaning them to me." You see, Roger played those games. He'd take the money and then say that he let Dale use it. Then he'd have the money and then Connie would be mad at Dale. So Dale said, "I'm going to pay him in front of her." I thought, "Dale, you're going to be okay!" It's taken Dale a long, long time. He's finally doing well! He's playing the telethon this weekend and he has his own home. But he had a hard time! So Dale finally left town and was a musical director on cruise ships for seven years. Then he decided he didn't want to do that. He wanted to be here in town. Anyway, he dealt for ten years on the Strip and now he's back to the music.

During the 1970s, our Nevada state legislature had important committees that were headed up by Mormon politicians: Jim Gibson headed up Finance, Mel Close headed up another one of the money committees, so did Floyd Lamb. It looks like a lot of the decisions were guided with this type of Mormon leadership. Was that common knowledge or just something that people wouldn't even think twice about during that period?

Well, it was common knowledge and I don't think most people thought much about it.

Sue Wagner wrote in her book, "Through the Glass Ceiling" about her time in the legislature as Republican but very Pro-ERA. She recalled being at Jim Gibson's funeral years later and having officials from the Mormon Church stating how he had received the call to, "take down the ERA." This was a directive coming from the higher echelons of Church Authority. And my understanding from those within the Mormon Church is that if you received a directive like this, it's not something to which you say, "No." You follow Church authority.

Exactly! Yes.

And that seemed to be a real mission for Jim Gibson - to take down the ERA.

Yes. He was the number one leader of the Church in the area. And it was Church callings for those people to defeat the ERA.

And in the final counts, as you well know, in each session, it would pass in the Assembly one year and not in the Senate, and then they would meet two years later, and it would pass in the Senate, not in the Assembly. It would flip-flop quite a bit, up to 1977 where you had the famous "Eight Who Lied" assemblymen. Sue [Wagner] alludes to this in her book as well. There was a lobbyist, Charlie Bell, who worked closely with Jim Gibson and others. When the ERA passed in the Senate [1977], it was quite shocking to Jim Gibson and others who were very anti-ERA. It then went back to the Assembly for a vote and there was some behind-the-scenes trading happening, which is the reason why those eight changed their vote. I've read that there were two pharmaceutical bills - a Laetrile bill and a Gerovital bill. So basically, those who wanted a pharmaceutical bill to pass had better kill the ERA bill in the Assembly.

I know that Laetrile and Gerovital were part of all that. Now, Lee Walker was a state

senator. He was a Mormon. He was committed to vote against the ERA, but he changed his mind. I think that's how it worked - he voted against it because he had previously committed. He's talked to me about this. And he said that when those things were being voted on, he literally saw them pick men up by their bodies and carry them into rooms to change their mind.

Legislators?

Yes! And it was so bad, he said "I got on the elevator. I had to go in the restroom and vomit."

And who would be the individuals picking up the politicians?

It had to be the legislators or men working with them who were opposed to the ERA. But Lee Walker left the Church. And he was like a high councilman. He was up there. But it was so corrupt.

Did you attend the National Women's Conference in 1977 in Houston?

No, I didn't go. I was just barely new to all of this. I'd never been to a convention like that. But I was at the state convention.

The one that was held in Las Vegas in June 1977?

Yes. And at that convention Dr. Jones came in and he was directing the Mormon women on what to do. And Myram Borders tells this the very best, because she saw what he was doing as they went in to vote, so she called Beverly Harrell. Do you know this story?

Go ahead and tell it anyway. It's a great story. Beverly Harrell, who was the Madam for the Cottontail Ranch - a brothel, stood at the registration table with her rose-colored glasses.

And kept him [Dr. Jones] occupied. And then gave him a gold card for her business. But,

at the conference, what was most interesting to me... I heard these poems and things people were saying, which struck home. I've told you the kinds of things that I had lived under as a woman. I had never addressed any of that. I thought I was by myself until then.

Prior to this [conference] Jackie Spilsbury had a family, a Mormon family. Her husband owned Quality Air Conditioning. But she had this big family of kids. When they got married, they weren't married in the Church and they had an open marriage. Then they got married in the Temple and she was pregnant. But she told her husband after the Temple marriage that she had had some kind of an affair, but it was over. Within three days, he hired an attorney, Keith Edwards. The Church excommunicated her, took away her kids, and threw her out of her home. In three days! And the attorney said, "Well, you should have done what you're *supposed* to do!"

What an incredible story!

Now I had been told that story. And now, here I am at the conference and there she is. She said, "I'm looking for President Gibson so I can get the list." She's at the Women's Conference looking for President Gibson, so she can get the list of what to do, so that she can do her penance, so that she can get back in their good graces.

And President Gibson is Jim Gibson?

Jim Gibson.

So you were seeing both sides to a coexisting world.

Yes. And her husband remarried. When she had the baby, her husband said, "It's not my baby!" And his mother said, "Look at the ears. They can't be anybody else's!"

So, you were attending the State Conference, but not with the group of Mormon women.

Nooo!

But you did see the groups of Mormon women attending?

Oh, yes. And you know, by then I was unhappy about all of the manipulation by the Church.

From what I've read, the Church instructed the Mormon women to attend this conference and get Mormon women in as delegates to go to the National Conference.

Exactly!

Taking over the conference.

Yes, and then they had a sub-conference in Houston that Karen Hayes attended. You've probably seen that transcript I did of Karen Hayes' speech.

After Houston, Karen Hayes, Noreen Ray and some of those that went to Houston, did fireside chats. Now, I went to them and they were in the Church in Relief Society rooms and I recorded it. I had a little tiny recording thing in my purse.

You were a rebel by then!

Well, I recorded it and she was a shit-stirrer! Now, did you read anything about the Utah women's conference?

I heard that they had basically taken it over.

My mother was there. They expected max five thousand people. Ezra Taft Benson sent a letter to every Mormon bishop telling them to have ten women from every ward attend that conference. So they were there en masse. They didn't have food for the people. You know, they just weren't prepared for it. The men had walkie-talkies and were telling the women what to do, and they voted down everything. And as it went on, my mother went to the podium and held up the Ezra Taft Benson's letter and said, "I want it made a matter of public record that you people are here not of your own volition but because your bishop

sent you, and that is in direct violation of the Church teachings and the United States Constitution of separation of church and state.” And they booed her.

Wow.

Now, Sheldon was on his mission. So I wrote to him and told him about it. He became upset and I don't know what went on in Japan, but his mission president wrote to me and told me not to write controversial things to my son while he was on his mission. I felt paralyzed and never wrote him again.

Yes, I've seen a lot of things that inferred the involvement of the Mormon Church at the state conferences. Jean Ford who was one of the people directing the State Conference here in 1977, received many letters from women who were irate about the “waste of taxpayer dollars for a conference that's undermining womanhood.” And after the National Conference Karen Hayes spoke at the Relief Society. She brought back things from the conference, because you had display tables open to anyone.

Yes, she made it look like it was a pornographic affair.

Right. It was all about lesbians and sex toys and just a lot of what seemed like scare tactics to people who come from a more conservative background.

Exactly! And Renee Diamond probably got some of that information from me when I recorded it.

Well, she attended one of the Relief Society talks with Jean Ford. So, perhaps you were the member that invited them.

Oh, yes.

After the 1977 Houston conference, the National Organization for Women organized an economic boycott on all the states that had not yet ratified the ERA, including Nevada.

Right.

Back in Nevada, the local chapter of NOW got a lot of media attention. Naomi Millisor was interviewed, who I believe was the president at the time. She said that she was going to boycott all the Mormon-owned grocery stores. As I followed the media coverage of this, two parallel stories emerged. On one side, business owners and governmental officials were just saying, "This boycott is just nonsense. We're not worried about it." On the other hand, newspaper headlines stated, "ERA Activists Costing the City Millions!" It was interesting - all the rhetoric.

Yes.

In the end, it was the head of the Convention Authority, Bob Schmuck, who said that the boycott had no impact on Nevada. However, Attorney General Robert List, brought forth a lawsuit against the National Organization for Women to protect the citizens of the State.

[Laughter] Yes. I remember when it happened and I remember a Mormon who was pro-ERA saying, "Yea, now they're getting it! Now they know that's the way to do it, to get the attention."

It seemed to garner quite a bit of attention.

Yes. I just remember that they knew how to spin it.

Maya Miller is someone who seemed to have an impact on so many women's lives across our state. And you made note of her as well. How did you meet Maya or how did you come to know of her?

I met Maya at the women's conference.

At the state conference in 1977 that Jean Ford coordinated?

Yes. I just met her. Because I was Mormon, I became famous among all those people. I mean, I was their token. So, I met Maya. She was just this nice, friendly older woman that seemed to know who I was or seemed to like me. She was kind of like a mother of the whole pack.

Just a marvelous woman. So you didn't know of her before you happened to meet her at this conference?

Well, I knew her name because she had run against Harry Reid.

She ran against Harry Reid in '74 for the U.S. Senate Democratic primary.

Yes. And my son worked on Harry Reid's campaign, but he said that she was the best candidate for qualifications and for what she believed. Later on in the early 1980s when Reagan took away the funding for domestic crisis shelters, I got a call from Jan Evans.

Was she an assemblywoman at the time?

No. She was a student at UNR. She was doing work on whatever degree she was working on in social work. And she said that Maya had told her to call me because they were losing their funding for the domestic crisis shelter and that I might be able to help them with the Mormons or something like that. I had already compiled a list of all of the politically active Mormons in this area. I had also just been made president of Women's Political Caucus for Southern Nevada. They were trying to get it going, but it never really did much. The history has been that NOW has been in Southern Nevada and Women's Political Caucus has been in Northern Nevada. At any rate, I had been made president of what they were trying to activate, the Women's Political Caucus. So, when she called me and I thought, "Well, I can have a meeting."

This is the early 1980s?

Yes. So I called a meeting of the Women's Political Caucus. And we had it down at the Charleston Heights Library. I invited the usual people who would have been called, but I also invited all of the Mormons that were on my list and many showed up. Estelle Murphy presented the need for a women's shelter and the fact that they needed money. Their plan was to put a dollar fee on wedding licenses and the meeting was going on really well. Then Marsha Doble stood up and said, "We know that we need this, but nothing's going to pass the Mormons - they're against *everything*." And the Mormons were sitting there, little did she know. Nonetheless, she said that, they stood up and defended themselves. And from there the pro-ERA women became acquainted with them and formed a coalition. They lobbied for funding and they put together the marriage license fee bill. And it was the only social legislation that passed that session of the legislature.

So, it turned out to be an interesting political alliance.

It was amazing! I mean that was really a good thing.

And this was the legislation that Sue Wagner was involved in with the licensing fee?

Yes. And it was the only social legislation that passed that year.

But very powerful.

Yes. And it would not have passed without their being there. But they hadn't been given their marching orders by Phyllis Schlafly. It caused a real division between the North and the South, particularly Janine Hansen Triggs.

So a division existed between the Mormons in the North and the South?

Yes. Well, the Far Right had controlled both the North and South within their own group and had called all the shots, but they did not agree on this one. They had not defined or discussed domestic crisis shelters.

But this was a separate issue that they were willing to support?

Yes. Now she and I are both on the board for the Clark County Retired Teachers.

And when you mentioned Estelle Murphy talking about this need, was she a social worker?

She was the director of Safe Nest. It was then called TADC- Temporary Assistance Against Domestic Crisis. And you headed up the Women's Political Caucus for a period.

Well, it's a great story about everyday citizens pulling together and addressing a need.

Yes, we worked together. I was on the board for a long time for the crisis shelter and I knew that they needed to have a coalition like that. So, I recommended that they get a Mormon, Charlie Zobell, and he's been on the shelter board. They've had Boy Scouts working and they've had some good stuff going.

That's a great story. So you became active, then, in women's organizations after your initial ERA activism.

Yes. you've operated.

It seems like it's kind of a large group of women who overlap in a lot of their organizations.

Yes. And I joined NOW. I was at one time state president of NOW. Saturday night?

Was that in the 1980s, also?

I'm sure it was. cup? Who are the regulars?

And did your friend Verlene Chiodini remain politically active in women's groups alongside you?

Well, she's been active. But she's worked with the teachers in the NEA – Nevada

Education Association. on you're playing?

Is she also a teacher?

Yes. Now she and I are both on the board for the Clark County Retired Teachers.

Obviously your passion is music. And you're very grounded in education, whether giving piano lessons when you still had young children at home then getting your education degree to become a schoolteacher. So music is really central to your life and several of your children. And you headed up the Women's Political Caucus for a period here. But you weren't a joiner, from what I can see, with all the various women's organizations that were out there.

No. I mean I've been active in the Democratic Party. I do what I think is important. But for me, issues are more important than joining particular organizations. For my own activity, I do what I want to do. It gives me more freedom.

Well, a lot of people are like that. They don't need to belong to the larger organization. They are driven by a specific issue that resonates with them. And it seems like that's the way you've operated.

Yes.

You've maintained friendships with a lot of these women over the years. So, we're fast-forwarding thirty-five or more years. You still play cards on Saturday night?

Yes.

Who's in the group? Who are the regulars?

Well, we always do it at Harriet's house. It's me and Dianne Guinn and Myrna Williams and Maryanne Gormansky and Dianne Sessions and then Jeanie Maust and her sister and whoever else wants to join us.

Do you talk politics when you're playing?

Oh, yes! And we turn on Bill Maher. If you're not a Democrat, you wouldn't enjoy this!

I'm sure everyone feels free to voice their opinions and I'm sure it's a lively night there.

I can only imagine.

Yes, we have a good time!

Well, that's great that you've kept that up over all these years.

Renée, thanks so much for sharing!

Thank you.

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