RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN SPINDEL

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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NAZARETH, PENNSYLVANIA
OCTOBER 3, 2019

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Karen Spindel, on October 3, 2019, in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, with Kate Rizzi. Thank you so much for doing this oral history interview.

Karen Spindel: I'm excited to do it.

KR: To begin, please tell me where and when you were born.

KS: I was born in Newark, New Jersey, on July 31, 1947.

KR: What do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side?

KS: My mother's mother was from Botosani, Romania, and my mother's father was from Lubar, Ukraine. I guess it was part of Russia at the time, but their background is Jewish, so I guess they were not fully integrated into life in either one of those countries. I don't actually know when they came here, but they met here. They came when they were young, and they met here and married in this country.

My grandfather had some health issue that caused him to be detained, I think, in England, but ultimately, he did immigrate to this country. So, his last name was Shachat and I guess that was also their name in the old country, but my grandmother's family name was Cuciureanu. When they came here, I guess at Ellis Island, if they couldn't spell your name, they changed it. I don't know if the Romanian alphabet is different or if my grandmother didn't speak English, I don't know, but all of a sudden, their name became Diamant. All these years, until way after my grandmother's death, we thought it was Diamond, because my grandmother thought it was Diamond. Then, recently, when one of her relatives went back to Romania to get some history, it turned out that it was actually Diamant. Then, when she married, she took my grandfather's name anyway.

They lived in Newark, New Jersey when they first came here. My grandparents had a wholesale candy business when I was born. They lived above the store. It was on Hawthorne Avenue in Newark, and my grandmother, I believe, kept the books and my grandfather did the deliveries. Every now and then, I'd get, as a little kid, to go on the route with him. We lived with them until I was, I guess, four.

My parents got married during the war, when my father was on leave from the Army, and then he moved in with my grandparents, my mother's youngest sister, and my mother when he was discharged. I don't know what year that was. I was born in '47, and we stayed there. Later, I realized we probably moved away when my mother was pregnant with my sister, and they needed more space. I was about, I guess, four when we moved, and then my sister was born. We moved to the Allwood section of Clifton.

My father's mother was from Latvia, and his father was from Austro-Hungary and they also were Jewish. They also met and married in this country. My father's mother spoke English, but I don't think she ever learned to read and write English. So, maybe, she must have been past school age when she arrived in this country.

Oh, my mother's mother was, I think, a seamstress for one of the big department stores, I think Bergdorf Goodman, in New York, and she made beautiful coats and hats for me when I was young. When she first came to the U.S., her family lived in New York, probably on the Lower East Side. It's one of those things where you really regret that you didn't talk about it more, but we didn't. So, I don't really know that much about any of my grandparents' histories.

My father's parents, when they came here, had a farm in Clifton. Well, first, they lived in Passaic, and my grandfather either owned or worked in a liquor store, but by the time I was born, they had a dairy farm on Allwood Road in Clifton, named Spindel's Dairy. It was a treat to go there as a very young child and watch them bottle the milk and see the cows, and feed the chickens, but in the early '50s, they sold the farm and moved to a two-family house in East Rutherford. So, I was still little when that happened.

KR: How close were you to your grandparents on each side?

KS: I was much closer to my mother's parents, having lived with them. My mother's sister, who passed away when she was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, also lived with them during that time. I was very close to those grandparents and that aunt. My other grandparents, it wasn't that I wasn't close, but it was so different because we would only visit them on Sunday nights. After we moved to Passaic and Clifton, we would visit my mother's parents on Saturday or Sunday for the entire day or they would come visit us, or sometimes I would spend the weekend. My father's parents, we would always visit for the *Ed Sullivan Show*. [laughter] We'd go there Sunday nights to watch *the Ed Sullivan Show*. I think my grandparents called him "Ed Solomon," but [we would] watch the *Ed Sullivan Show* and they'd always give us money for ice cream when we left. There was a Dairy Queen on the corner, so that was the Sunday night ritual. [Editor's Note: *The Ed Sullivan Show* was a variety show hosted by Ed Sullivan that aired on CBS from 1948 to 1971.]

KR: What was your mother's upbringing and education like?

KS: My mother went to school in Newark. It's interesting that my grandmother went into business with my grandfather. Maybe I didn't realize it back then, but she was in the candy store a good amount of the time. I'm talking about when my mother's married and I'm born, so I'm not sure about her younger years, but at that point, she worked in the store. She had somebody clean the house, which, apparently, was very unusual in those days. She was a businesswoman. She'd never go down to the store, that I remembered, in anything but high heels and her hair all pin-curled. It was weird, because it was a wholesale business, so customers didn't ever come in, but she was always dressed up.

So, my mother went to public school in Newark. She went to Weequahic High School, I guess a little before Philip Roth, but that was one of the pretty well known--maybe because of his books and everything--a fairly well-known school. She would have loved to go to college, I'm sure. Her younger sister did and became an accountant. But it was still the depression when mom graduated high school. So, I don't even think it was an option. She became a secretary for Prudential, which was supposedly like a really fantastic company to work for. Either when she

got married or when the guys [came home after World War II]--well, I guess secretary wouldn't have been a guy's job, so it wasn't that when the guys came home from the war, she was asked to leave, but it might have been that when you got married, you were asked to leave, or maybe when you got pregnant, you were asked to leave because the thinking was that the jobs should go to single women. The whole time I was growing up, until I was a senior in high school, she didn't go back to work. My father was a parts manager at a Chevy dealer, for most of my life. That was in Passaic. It had a lot of different owners, but it was a Chevy dealer [in] Passaic. [Editor's Note: Weequahic High School is a public high school in Newark, New Jersey. Philip Roth was an American author and alumnus of Weequahic High School.]

KR: What was your father's education and upbringing like in Clifton?

KS: Okay, so he actually attended--it's interesting, he went to kindergarten in a one-room schoolhouse. The next year, they built a new school, Clifton School 9. He was the first class in there, I think, first grade, and it's the same school my daughters went to. When the school had its seventy-fifth anniversary, my father was one of the honored guests at the school celebration, having been one of the first students. So, that was really, really sweet. The school borrowed a picture and did a slideshow. It was a picture of the eight kids in the graduating class--and I think it was interesting--there were four boys and four girls. If I remember correctly, the four boys were president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. [laughter]

My father was not a student. He was very, very mechanically inclined. He fixed televisions. He had his bag of television tubes, and whenever our TV, or a relative's TV broke (much more common in those days), he would grab his bag of TV tubes and fix it.. Anything that broke, he fixed. He was also a good car mechanic. He could do all of that. My mother would've loved to go to college to study literature and history and subjects like that, and dad was much more mechanical and liked that kind of work. So, he graduated high school, and that was it. My mother also, but she would've loved to go to college.

KR: What did your father do during World War II?

KS: He was in the Signal Corps. I have a lot of his World War II memorabilia, but I'm not sure if he was actually involved with the radios and stuff or whether he was part of the group that actually worked on the trucks in the Signal Corps. I'm not clear on that, but I have a letter from Clifton that he received after his discharge, welcoming him home and asking if there's anything the city could do to support him. So, it was interesting that even though I had grown up in Passaic, when I got married and had my kids, I moved back to Clifton, in the same school district, so that my kids actually did go to the same school that dad went to, which was a real hoot.

KR: Do you know, during World War II, if your father served overseas?

KS: Oh, he definitely did. He was in Europe.

KR: Okay.

KS: He was a corporal, and he was supposed to be promoted. I think I remember someone saying he was supposed to be promoted. What would he go to from corporal, sergeant maybe? Corporal is noncommissioned and sergeant, I'm not sure. Anyhow, he didn't get that promotion because somebody who already had kids, when he didn't at the time, got priority, because of the extra money or whatever, at least that's the story. He also almost won a date with Lauren Bacall in a GI raffle, when she was visiting the troops, but he was one number off. [laughter] I think he was probably happy he lost, I don't know. I don't see my father enjoying a date with Lauren Bacall, but who knows. [Editor's Note: In the U.S. Army, corporal is a low-ranking noncommissioned officer ranking above private first class and below sergeant. Lauren Bacall was an American actress known for her roles in films such as *To Have and Have Not*, *The Big Sleep* and *The Mirror Has Two Faces*.]

KR: How much did your father talk about his service in World War II to you when you were growing up?

KS: I know some people say they tried to talk about it and their parents didn't want to talk about it. I don't know if my father would've talked about it. My sister and I just never asked, unfortunately, we never asked. We do have pictures though. My mother went to visit him once in Atlanta before he shipped overseas. I don't think his unit actually saw combat. I don't know how close he was to combat. I have this three-page letter, which, for him, was like writing a book, a three-page letter that he had sent to my mother when he first got to France, about some of the different places they lived and things like that but nothing about combat.

I know my mom was annoyed that my father was drafted because my husband Greg actually did interviews with my parents in their later years because he was interested in capturing some family history. I am thankful he did that because it hadn't occurred to my sister or me to do something like that as my folks were aging. In Greg's interview, my mother complained because since my grandparents had a dairy farm (my father had a brother and a sister) and I guess one brother could be deferred to work on the farm, my grandparents chose my Uncle Lou, my father's older brother, as the one to stay behind. On the tape, you hear mom saying, "Yes, sure, Phil's parents sent him and kept Lou home," or something like that. [laughter] So, that's kind of interesting.

KR: I wanted to ask you about your mother's sister who you said went to school to be an accountant. Where did she go to college?

KS: I don't know. My mom was the eldest of three sisters, and she graduated in January 1939 just before turning seventeen. My aunt, who went to college, was younger than my mother, so she graduated past the depression, I guess maybe during the war. I don't know. Maybe it was easier for women to go to college. I'm just making this up now, but maybe because it was during the war and the men were away, they had more college spots they were willing to give women. I don't know. She didn't go away and live on a campus or anything like that. I know that.

My mother's youngest sister, Phyllis, was sick (though as a child I never realized this) and she died from colitis, which isn't something people die from nowadays, when she was only twenty-seven. This was my first and only encounter with loss for many years and I remember my

parents deciding that I was better off not attending her funeral. (I was extremely fortunate to have had both sets of grandparents walk down the aisle at my first wedding in 1969.) [Editor's Note: Colitis is a chronic digestive disease characterized by inflammation of the inner lining of the colon.]

KR: You mentioned how you and your mom and dad lived with your grandparents and Aunt Phyllis in Newark for your first four years. What memories do you have of that time period?

KS: It's hard to remember; I was little. But, during that time, as an only child and an only grandchild, with so many adults around, I was very spoiled--or so I've been told.

KR: Yes.

KS: What I remember, I remember just from hearing from them. I remember my mother would say, "Yes, you were a late walker because you learned to talk early. You just told everyone what you needed and you didn't have to get anything yourself." That's what she would say to me. I was so bald for so long after I was born, in many baby pictures I am wearing a hat. I think I remember something about having light treatments to make my hair grow.

I remember going on an occasional candy delivery--I guess I could have been four and remember going on a route with my grandfather. Yes, I guess I could've been four and had that memory. When we'd go to this one particular candy store that sold Costa's ice cream cups (like dixie cups but with chocolate on top), the owner would give me one. I remember that. [laughter] I also remember not particularly being interested in candy, because there was so much of it around. I remember going down there to my grandparents' store and they'd ask, "Do you want a piece of candy?" So, if I would take a candy, my grandfather--these were either penny candies or nickel candies--so he had the big cartons, so he would take a candy out and put a nickel in. That was how you did it. I guess when his customer got the box one candy short with the nickel, they understood that that meant that he had a grandchild. [laughter]

KR: I want to ask you about your upbringing. Your parents, when they first bought a house, moved to Clifton.

KS: They moved to Clifton. They rented a one-bedroom apartment in Richfield Village, which were garden apartments built in the Allwood Section, just postwar, and we moved into the second one built. It was on Richfield Terrace. It's funny, because Clifton Avenue in Clifton was extended at that time to connect to Allwood Road, and old timers still call that piece of it the Clifton Avenue Extension, although it was built like seventy years ago. [laughter] When we moved in there, the Clifton Avenue extension hadn't even been completed yet, I don't think, or maybe it was Richfield Terrace. I remember crossing boards and walking in dirt there. It was all construction. Then, a little supermarket went up across the street, a Food Fair, with Merchants' green stamps, which we collected and pasted into books that we turned in for gifts.

As a preschooler, my favorite TV show was *The Gene Autry Show* and I loved to pretend to be Gene Autry. I had a rocking horse named Champ (same name as Gene's TV horse)--oh, I'm not home--I was going to say it's right here, but my rocking horse is in my dining room in

Northampton. I would rock on the horse and pretend I was Gene. Of course, the cowboy outfit they got me had a skirt, but I wasn't deterred. I'd pretend my mother was my wife. I think I called her Mrs. Nautry because I didn't get Gene Autry's name quite right. I just liked playing cowboys and rocking on my horse is what I remember mostly. [Editor's Note: *The Gene Autry Show* was an American western show that aired on CBS in the 1950s and starred Gene Autry, an American actor and singer nicknamed the "Singing Cowboy."]

Then, I went one year to kindergarten in School 9, the same school my kids and father went to, and then we moved to Passaic. That's where my folks inherited the bottom half of a two-family house from one of my father's aunts, I believe it was, and we moved into our half. My father's sister inherited the upstairs, and then my parents, at some point, bought my aunt's share. Then my folks owned the whole house, and we kept the tenants upstairs, who had lived there for many, many years.

I went to elementary school in Passaic, to Number 11 School, also called Memorial School, which was a very interesting school because instead of a late bell in the morning and a dismissal bell in the afternoon, we had a student, standing on a massive marble staircase in the main hall, blow a bugle at the beginning and end of each school day. My sister tells me she remembers that there was also a replica of a coffin in the main hallway (the school was dedicated on May 15, 1924, in honor and memory of the citizens of Passaic who died in World War I.) That's a little creepy when you think about it. I think the bugler played "Reveille" in the morning and possibly "Retreat" at the end of the school day, and I think it was just when somebody important died that at the end of the day he would play "Taps." It was a beautiful school and probably still is. Memorial School sat on its own big block in a park-like setting. It had greenhouses, tennis courts, ball fields, and it was, when I started there, Kindergarten through nine. I only went there through eight, however, because then they converted the old high school to a middle school that I went to for ninth.

I remember there was a girls' door and a boys' door, and outside the girl's door everybody was jumping rope in their dresses and crinolines and outside the boy's door they were playing, I don't remember what it was called, "Johnny Rides a White Horse," or something like that and jumping on each other's backs. We were playing jump rope or Chinese jump rope, played with the rubber bands, or maybe hopscotch. May 1st was Petticoat Day, so that was the day the boys ran to the girls' door and tried to pull up our skirts. Of course, back then, we were all wearing slips and crinolines and all these ridiculous clothes that were a lot of ironing for our mothers [laughter] and completely not the best thing for playing in for little girls, I don't imagine.

When it was cold out, we had to wear leggings and all that, because we couldn't wear pants and our bare legs and knees would be freezing without them. So, it would be freezing out and we'd have leggings on. Then, we'd get to school, we'd have to take off our leggings and then put them on to go home for lunch and then off after lunch and on again at the end of the day. It was really annoying. It's funny, when I talk to women my age about being kids and I mention leggings, that seems to be the thing that [reminds the] kids who are adults now, who don't remember anything sexist about their childhood at all, when you say leggings, that's like the magic word and then they go, "Oh, yes, leggings, because we couldn't wear pants," and everybody gets crazed about it. Apparently, they were widely despised. They were hard to get off and put on, especially over

your shoes or if you had boots on [laughter] and they could contribute to making girls late for class.

I was on hall patrol when I was in Memorial School. I don't remember if it was because the girls were all on hall patrol and the boys were all out the streets. I don't know that for sure. I remember the boys got to be different kinds of monitors that I always wanted to be, but that's one of the things that other people don't remember that I seem to remember. So, I don't know if it's real or not, but I seem to remember that the boys got to wash the blackboard and the girls didn't, which was always something I really wanted to do. What else?

KR: What were activities, clubs, interests of yours, at that time, when you were at School 11 in grammar school?

KS: Oh, wow, a few years ago I found a diary that I kept for a very short time, and at that point, I was in a Girl Scout troop that was run by the synagogue. The scout's leaders were the mothers of two of my friends, I guess, and the meetings were at their houses. Our annual campout was a barbecue in their backyard, where they cooked on the grill. We got sewing badges and boring stuff like that. I was reading the diary, it was funny, because in the entry for Feb. 1, 1961 when I was thirteen and in eighth grade, I wrote, "Nothing much exciting happened today but tonight I went to the Girl Scouts and we saw a movie about bras and girdles." Apparently, it was one of those annoying things that our scout troop did. I guess they were getting us ready for breasts. After all, the scout motto is "Be Prepared."

KR: How long did you keep up with the Girl Scouts?

KS: I can't imagine it was very long, but I don't really remember. I was in a temple bowling group too. I liked that. That I enjoyed.

On a different topic--my musical instrument in elementary school--my mother said I had to either play the flute or the violin, because those were the only two girl instruments. But I was not that musical. Clarinet, I understand, is probably the easiest to learn. Flute and violin certainly are not. But given only those two choices, I picked violin, and that really didn't last long. [laughter] Yes, that was not a go. The music teacher said I held the bow like a baseball bat. My older daughter ended up playing the trombone, and the younger one played the sax. I didn't tell them what they had to pick.

KR: My daughter plays a horn also, the trumpet.

KS: Nice, a trumpet.

KR: Yes.

KS: Cool, yes. My sister plays piano. She majored in music. She's very musical. My parents bought a piano because she used to pick songs out on her toy xylophone with the little stick. She took off at piano. They gave me lessons at the same time, because the piano was there and my parents didn't want me to feel bad, but my sister was playing "Rhapsody in Blue" when I was

still playing "Lucy Lockett Lost Her Pocket," so I quit. [laughter] That wasn't my thing, but, certainly, the violin was really not my thing either. What else? [Editor's Note: "Rhapsody in Blue" is an orchestral jazz composition by George Gershwin. "Lucy Lockett" is a nursery rhyme.]

KR: What's your sister name, and when she was born?

KS: Dale. She was born in '51. She's four years younger than me. She was being named after an aunt, Dora, so my parents wanted a name starting with a "D" and my father liked Diane and my mother hated Diane. These are the crazy things you remember. My mother liked Deborah, but my father didn't like Deborah. I liked Dale Evans a lot. So, somehow, I don't think I picked it, but I think it was a compromise for my parents to find a name they both liked or didn't like. Her middle name is Tina. She's Dale Tina, and I'm Karen Sue. [Editor's Note: Dale Evans (1912-2001) was the third wife of cowboy star Roy Rogers and starred as a cowgirl in the Roy Roger's show. She was an American actress, singer and songwriter.]

KR: How about academics? Early on, when you were at School 11, what were your academic interests?

KS: I liked school. I think I liked everything in school. It was a real hoot to learn to read, and in first grade I would bring home my Dick and Jane books and all that. Then, I think in fifth grade we learned to use pens. We had ink wells in our desks that the teacher would fill with ink and we would dip our pens, which were wooden with just a metal nib at the end, into the ink wells. Pens had to be dipped relatively frequently because the ink ran out quickly. We also used blotters to soak up ink splotches that could result if there was too much ink in the nib. I didn't like music at all in the later grades because I was the kid who was told to move her lips. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Dick and Jane were characters in early reader books used in the American educational system during the mid-twentieth century.]

School 11 was a pretty good school. Then, what they did was they opened a junior high [Lincoln Junior High School] in the old high school building when I was in eighth grade. It was designed to take junior high school students from three of the city schools that were K-9, School 1, School 3 and School 11. However, the other two elementary schools went there for eighth and ninth, while Number 11 School students only went there for ninth. So, we came in for one year, for some bizarre reason, after everyone else had been there for a year, and I think pretty much everybody from School 11 would've said it was a pretty horrible year, to come in as outsiders for only one year.

I remember, of the kids who went to that school, we were coming from the poorer side of town. I didn't think much about it, except I remember one of my classmates from School 11 used to walk around the block and go in on the other door on the other side of the school, so the rich kids wouldn't know where he was coming from. [laughter] That was a rough year, just because of the single-year business, and there were crazy gym teachers in that school. They were nuts. They made us polish our sneakers until they cracked. The whole period was spent taking attendance and inspecting our blue one-piece gym rompers that had our last names stitched on the back and our polished-stiff sneakers and scrubbed shoelaces. We had about ten minutes for actual gym

class. Most of the period was spent getting yelled at during inspection. It was awful. High school was good.

In fifth grade, my aunt and uncle took my cousin and me on a train trip to Washington for a weekend, and I remember I came back and couldn't stop talking about it. I loved it. It was to Washington, D.C. I was in fifth grade. On that trip, I decided I wanted to go to college in Washington, and I also thought it might be nice to work on a train. My mother said, "Girls can't work on trains," so that put that to bed, which reminds me that when my cousin and I were little, growing up together, Joey and I would play ball with my father and my father would throw me a ball on a bounce. In the memoir I'm writing, that's like the opening sentence, "Daddy, throw me flies too," because he would throw balls to my cousin on a fly and then he'd bounce it to me. I was older, I was two years older than Joey, and I'd be, "Throw me a fly, Daddy. Throw me a fly." So, then, he finally would and I would miss it, but that's because we didn't practice. [laughter]

In high school, my senior year, I wanted to sign up for drafting. At the end of your junior year, people would come in from the different departments and you would sign up for your classes for the next year. Well, that's how they did it for any year; you'd sign up for your classes for the next year. My junior year, when I went into the line to sign up for drafting, they initially kind of told me they thought I was in the wrong line. When I said, "No, I'm signing up for drafting actually," I was allowed to sign up, but it wasn't usual and I was the only girl in the class. Yes, I did all right in that. I think I got "A's."

Then, in physics, I was one of three girls in my class. On my yearbook picture, my teacher, who was about four years older than we were, well, five years, I think (it was his first year out of college), wrote in my yearbook, "Your tests were dear to me." What a bizarre thing for a teacher to write. At the time, it seemed like a normal thing, but when I look back at it, he probably wouldn't have written that in any of the boys' yearbooks, even if they did get "A's." "Your tests were dear to me." It's bizarre, right?

KR: What does that mean?

KS: Well, I guess because I got "A's" and he liked seeing "A's," but "dear" was sort of a strange choice of words.

KR: How were you encouraged by teachers at school, by your parents, to be pursuing the sciences and the engineering when you were in high school?

KS: Okay, I was really all over the place. My grades were pretty much the same in everything. My SAT scores were good in everything, but true to what they say, "Boys get a higher score in math, and girls get a higher score in English," back then, that seemed to be pretty consistent. I was in the "600s" in both English and math, I think, but English was higher and I had a "700" on my English Achievement. I didn't know what I liked, so my parents took me for some vocational guidance tests and they couldn't tell from the tests either, because if you didn't know what you like, that's what shows up on the tests. So, the results were that I could really pretty much decide whatever I wanted, but they said if I wanted to go into engineering, I had an aptitude for that.

They listed some engineering colleges I could apply to, which turned out to not take women. One of them was Lehigh, which is like right here, I think, [in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania] and another one was Lafayette. I don't remember the others.

My father didn't think I should be an engineer, which was kind of ironic, since he was very mechanical. He never encouraged me growing up. Even when he'd work on the car and stuff, he never wanted to teach me. I don't have a brother, so I really have nothing to compare it to. I think he also didn't like to be bothered when he was working, and I kind of get that because when I'm doing something, I also don't like somebody hovering. I think maybe had I been a son, he would have taught me more than he taught me, which was really nothing, but I really can't say. He said, "Oh, Karen, you should be a teacher. You'll have your summers off. It's better." Maybe he was saying that because he wished he had his summers off, I don't know.

My mother, on the other hand, was the one who actually suggested, said the word, engineering. I didn't even know what engineers did in high school except that it was a major involving math and physics. I mean, we didn't really have any kind of career guidance for that. I don't know if the boys had better guidance, but we really didn't have any. Our career tracks were pretty much: don't go to college and be a secretary, or go to college and be a teacher or a nurse. Those were pretty much the choices.

So, my mother suggested engineering. Back-to-school night, senior year, my father, who never opened his mouth--he was so quiet, my father--said to my math teacher, "Tell Karen she should be a math teacher." My math teacher said to him, "I'm not going to tell her that, because I'm an engineer." [laughter] It was the weirdest thing. She said, "And I couldn't get an engineering job out of school." She was older at the time. She said, "But Karen will be able to, and she should go for it." I guess maybe he had said to her, "Karen wants to be an engineer. Tell her to be a teacher." Lucky that I happened to have the one math teacher who was an engineer, or maybe they were all secret engineers, the women math teachers! So, that was interesting.

I guess it was my senior year in high school when I was sitting with my aunt and uncle, the whole family, and talking about what colleges I liked and what I would major in. I said I wanted to go to school in Washington, D.C. And at the time, I was toying between engineering and being a Russia major, actually, because I was studying Russian in high school and I kind of liked it. (Boy, that would've been the worst choice; my aptitude is not in languages, I know now.) My uncle asked, "What are you thinking about being?" So, I said, "I think maybe I'll be an engineer," and he said, "If you become an engineer, I'll eat my hat." That was the defining moment. That was when I knew I had to become an engineer.

So, if I had been a boy, just based on what I liked, I probably would have majored in math. I liked math much better than I liked physics. I like the concreteness of math and the right answers. That probably would have been [my choice], or finance or something with numbers. Somehow though, once my uncle said that about eating his hat, engineer was it. I had applied to GW [George Washington University] as a Russian major, which was probably a good idea. I don't remember whether I did that because I thought they wouldn't accept me as an engineer; I'm not sure. That might have been in my head or it might have not.

Sure enough, I got accepted to GW. I wanted to go to school in Washington, so that was perfect. When I went for the interview and I said, "Please transfer me to the engineering school," I remember the person I was interviewing with said, "Wouldn't you rather major in math, because women majoring in engineering tend to be only looking for husbands?" I don't know, he said some crazy thing like that. So, I said, "No, I would like to be in engineering. Please transfer me into that school and send me the appropriate information packet," but instead I got a "Welcome to GW Columbian College (the liberal arts college) " packet. I don't know if they ever sent the engineering one, but I was transferred and somehow I did know that as an engineering student, I had to get to GW a week early. Do you want to go ahead with college? [Editor's Note: George Washington University is a private university located in Washington, D.C.]

KR: I want to delve in the George Washington years.

KS: Yes.

KR: Can we just go back to your childhood? I want to just ask you a few questions. Is that okay?

KS: Yes.

KR: Where did the thought come from that you wanted to be a Russian major?

KS: I took Russian my junior and senior years, and I had taken French. I had three years of French and two years of Russian. I really kind of liked Russian. If you're thinking about which years this was, this was 1964, Russian presented a lot of opportunities, if you spoke Russian, in interpreting or anything else, and it just seemed like a cool thing to do. I thought I enjoyed studying languages. I was the only person in the class, I think, who didn't take it as a gut course, because their background was Russian. Most of the kids in the class, the Russian kids, were actually Ukrainian and spoke a different dialect. We were learning Moscow Russian. So, they were really in it as an easy course and it wasn't easy for them, so I actually did better than they did. I really enjoyed it. It was fun. It's a very mathematical language, actually, because it has all these different declensions and weird rules that I don't remember now, but it was fun. It was fun for me.

Then, in college, I took Russian for my gut course. [laughter] I had only six credits I could take in liberal arts over four years. I needed 140 credits and 134 of them were determined by the engineering school curriculum; the other six I could pick. I took "Russian I" as a gut course at that point, and "Russian I" in college was like two years of Russian in high school. The written work was fun, and it was easy but the problem for me was the language lab, where we had to speak and we had to roll our "R's" and we had to understand conversations in college, which we hadn't done in high school. I really was happy at that point that I hadn't majored in Russian; that would not have been a good idea for me. I could do it on paper okay. I could read it. I could write it, but I wasn't able to speak it.

The other elective I took was a journalism course, because my boyfriend from Passaic, who later was my first husband, was majoring in journalism and I wanted to show him that I could ace

journalism too. [laughter] He couldn't take any engineering stuff, because he was terrible in math and science. So, that was just another little thing for me. I was never one to play dumb for a guy. In fact, I did just the opposite. You wanted to get back to high school, more high school stuff.

KR: Yes, I wanted to ask you about Passaic.

KS: Yes.

KR: What was your neighborhood like in Passaic, in terms of class and race and nationality and religion?

KS: Where I lived from first grade until my senior year of high school--we moved my senior year--but where we lived up until then, it was a very blue-collar, middle-class neighborhood and it was primarily white. There were two-family houses with tiny lawns in front, surrounded with hedges. We played stoop ball. We played hopscotch in the driveway. It was on a hill, so we kept losing the balls down the sewer, I remember that. My parents used that hill as an excuse for me not to learn how to ride a bike until I was, I don't know, fifteen or something. It was about four blocks from school, five blocks from school. We walked to school usually. My mother learned to drive when we lived in that house, but, for the most part, unless it was raining, we walked. A block up the hill was Clifton. I was not allowed to go into Clifton. I was not allowed to go to the Hundred Steps, which were several blocks away, which you'll ask me what are they and I'll say, "I don't know because I wasn't allowed to go there." [laughter] So, we were confined to a well-defined area, but, unlike today, we were out until dark running around the neighborhood and playing ball or jump rope or maybe roller skating with skates that fit over our shoes, had metal wheels and were tightened with a skate key. You didn't need to be driven everywhere that you were allowed to go because your friends lived nearby; wherever you were allowed to go, you were allowed to walk. [Editor's Note: Located at the end of Harrison Street in Passaic, the "100 Steps" contains 103 steps and leads up to the Latona-Griffin Park.]

My father was a manager of a parts department at a Chevy dealership. It was a blue-collar managerial job. My mother didn't have an outside job when my sister and I were young, but she was very involved with the sisterhood at Adas Israel. [Editor's Note: The sisterhood refers to the women's auxiliary organization of an Orthodox synagogue.] At some point, she was president for a couple of years. In retrospect, I realized that was a pretty important job. Mom organized many events and raised a lot of money for the synagogue. I guess I just didn't feel like that was a good place to volunteer, because I became, through the years, more and more and more estranged from that religion, Orthodox Judaism. I can see how people go along; I can see how easy it is to get people to do what you want them to do by telling them that it's what God wants.

Boys had bar mitzvahs and bar mitzvah lessons. I was an early Baby Boomer, and seven of the women that were active in the sisterhood, very active in the sisterhood, had daughters within one or two years of the same age as I was. They went to the rabbi and they said, "We want something for our daughters." The rabbi agreed, so we had what we called a bat mitzvah, but it really wasn't. It was on a Sunday. We didn't go up by the ark. We had English speeches to read, with some Hebrew, that the rabbi wrote for us. We didn't do prayers. It was a fake bat mitzvah.

KR: What was it called?

KS: A bat mitzvah.

KR: Okay.

KS: But it was a Sunday. It was a Sunday. It was nothing like a bar mitzvah, and it was the only one that that congregation appeared to have had because my sister, who was four years behind me, didn't have a bat mitzvah. It just was something that happened because of the seven daughters' mothers all being really being active. Not to say anything bad about the rabbi, I mean, we had a wonderful rabbi. I was good friends with his daughter. I went to their house on many occasions. He and his wife were wonderful people; it's just Orthodox Judaism itself that I have a problem with. I guess the fact that our rabbi was so nice and so moderate, compared to Orthodox Rabbis in Passaic today, and so compassionate was what made it tolerable for many years and made me challenge less, because how could you challenge somebody who's so smart and so kind and so nice and so loving? I think that made it hard to challenge, but after a while, there were too many things to ignore.

I think one of the first things that really got me upset was that in an attempt to keep us from not dropping out of Hebrew School after the boys' bar mitzvahs and the girls' fake bat mitzvah, Adas Israel created a Sunday morning program called the Tallit and Tefillin Club. I don't know if you know, the *tallit* is the prayer shawl and *tefillin* are two black leather boxes containing parchment scrolls inscribed with Torah verses that Orthodox Jewish men strap with leather straps-ons to their forehead and one to their arm when they say morning prayers. So, the boys would go and meet with the rabbi or meet with whomever was leading the class and they would learn about the *tallit* and how to wear the *tefillin* and say whatever the prayers were, and we would make breakfast in the synagogue kitchen. We would hard boil the eggs and slice the bagels, so when the boys came out, we could all eat together. I didn't really need to spend my Sunday mornings in synagogue cooking for boys, so that was like something I rebelled against.

I stayed Orthodox for so many years, oh, my God. It's very hard; I still deal with that. I still deal with that. In Clifton and in Passaic, it's gotten more and more and more to the right, more fanatic. So, it reached a point, but we're not anywhere near talking about that, so I don't want to go there yet or ever. I don't know if I want to talk about that so much.

KR: What was the synagogue that you went to when you were growing up?

KS: Adas Israel on Broadway in Passaic. It was an Orthodox synagogue then but with a more moderate rabbi. Now, it's totally different.. The wall between the women's and men's section has gotten higher and the congregation and rabbi so much more extreme.

KR: What struck you about the women's and men's section in the synagogue when you were growing up?

KS: The original synagogue had a balcony. Women were up in the balcony. So, the men were downstairs praying and participating in the service. We were upstairs. There were never enough books. We couldn't hear what was going on. Women of my mother's generation were kind of just talking among themselves because they really didn't feel part of the service anyway. While men were taught to read Hebrew, learn the required prayers, and read Torah in preparation for their bar mitzvahs, women, for the most part, were not similarly educated and could not read the Hebrew prayer books. My generation was different. Many of the girls in our congregation went to Hebrew School. I went to Hebrew School three days a week to study religion (customs and ceremonies), Jewish history and to read and write Hebrew. With everything else we needed to learn, there wasn't much time to learn vocabulary or even what the prayers we were saying meant. I was learning this stuff. I was just never going to be able to do anything with it, like fully participate in a service, read Torah, be called to the Bemah to say a Torah blessing, etcetera, so I didn't like that. Then, when they built the new synagogue, (construction began around 1955), the men and women were separated by a divider. That was already progress to me, that we sat separately but on the same floor, separated only by a divider. The men, the rabbi would be on their side, and they could hear. But it wasn't that different than the balcony. We didn't have enough books, and we had trouble hearing what was going on (partly because of all the women whispering and partly because it was initially prohibited to use a microphone on the Sabbath and holidays). Only married women had to cover their heads. Men were always supposed to cover their heads, but for women, it was a question of whether or not you were married. As I got older, that really didn't sit well with me, like, "What does being married have to do with it?"

At Passover, my grandmother and grandfather, when they were alive, would lead the seder. Seders with my mother's parents mostly are the ones I remember best. When it came time to serve the meal, the men would all sit at the table and the women would get up and walk into the kitchen and serve all the food and then after dinner clear the table. My cousin Joey would just sit at the table like the other men, and my mother would ask, "Oh, Karen, aren't you going to help?" So, I would take a *kippah* and put it on my head, and I'd say, "No, if you're wearing a *kippah*, you don't have to help," because the men were all wearing kippahs. We would fight about it all the time, all the time. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The *kippah* (Hebrew) or *yarmulke* (Yiddish) is a brimless cap worn at all times by Orthodox Jewish men and worn by men in non-Orthodox communities during prayer and while attending synagogue.]

There's a whole chapter in the memoir that I'm working on about Passover and what I see as the actual back story of it; the associated kitchen rituals, like cleaning out the cabinets and refrigerator and stove and oven and buying special food and using different pots and dishes and silverware, were used as a way to keep women out of the synagogue and to infuse household drudgery with religious meaning, making women feel that their religious duty was being accomplished by cooking and cleaning and all that, while the men were off doing whatever they were doing at the synagogue. Passover was overwhelming; you could start cleaning and shopping for Passover two, three months in advance, changing dishes and so much stuff. It was really a huge undertaking.

There's a ceremony, the night before Passover, where the man of the house searches for the chametz (food not allowed in the house during Passover) by taking a feather and sweeping up

this little pile of breadcrumbs over which he says a blessing and burns the following day, and that signifies that your house is now free of anything that's not suitable for Passover, you know, bread or anything. Where does that pile of crumbs come from? The woman who has been cleaning the house for weeks leaves it for the man to find. The woman does the cleaning and then the man says the blessing and gets credit for the *mitzvah*. [laughter] I mean, it's just weird. It's just weird stuff. So, the more you think about it the weirder it gets, but, now, in my own life, I'm having a real personal religious dilemma. I don't know, so we'll go into something different.

KR: What other customs or traditions do you remember were practiced by your family that were passed down by your grandparents?

KS: Well, the holidays, going to Rosh Hashana services and sitting, when I was a little kid, in the women's section, maybe mostly with my grandmother, but because I was a little kid, I could go down and sit with my grandfather and my father too sometimes. I would play with the fringes of their *tallit*. Those were happy memories, but, again, we were at services, and my mother was home getting the meal ready. A lot of the things that seemed okay at some point, in retrospect don't seem okay, but that doesn't mean they didn't feel okay at the time. Yom Kippur, we would go to services and fast. Chanukah, we did the candle lighting and the gifts every night and all that.

I remember though, my mother would decide what gifts I would like. My cousin, again, Joey had an electric train set that I would have done anything for, and I think my parents said, "Well, they're wealthier. We can't afford that," they said at some point. My mother, however, for either Chanukah or my birthday got me this huge doll carriage that expanded, so your doll could grow into it. I didn't have dolls. I didn't play with dolls. I didn't like dolls, but somehow, I think she thought maybe if she got me this doll carriage--I don't know if I was five, maybe five--she would convert me or something. I remember, we ended up using it to put my sister in, [laughter] because that's how big it was, for naps. I didn't want that carriage. So, mom would decide what was appropriate, I guess. Doll carriage, yes, trains, no. I look now at the baby pictures, and I was often dressed in frilly pink things.

KR: How about youth activities at your synagogue? What type of involvement did you have with youth activities, maybe summer camp?

KS: Well, there was the Girl Scouts and there was the bowling league and there was the Tallit and Tefillin Club. I talked about those. When I was very young, I went to day camp in the summer. My first year of camp, I attended Camp Merrytime, which was located on Route 46 East near the area that is now Willowbrook Mall. After that first year, I attended a day camp run by the Passaic YMWHA, the Jewish Y. I didn't really like day camp. I was the first kid picked up and the last kid dropped off. The bus wasn't air conditioned, and it would be so hot and the ride so long. The counselors would stop on the way home and go into a fast food place and get themselves sodas, and maybe a popular kid might get a sip but never me. By the time I got home, I remember I was so hot and so thirsty. I don't remember too much else. I just remember those bus rides.

Then, when I was nine or so, we joined a cabana club, and we went there in the summers instead. When we first joined, I went to day camp there from one to five everyday but Monday. We were split into girls' groups and boys' groups and probably had different activities, but I didn't even think about it back then. Then, when I was in high school, I was a CIT (counselor in training there) and then a counselor there through college. That was my only summer job. That's it.

KR: Your parents kept a kosher home.

KS: [Yes], and so did I for many years. So, they kept a kosher home, but when we ate out, we didn't keep kosher. We wouldn't eat pork or we wouldn't eat any kind of bacon and we wouldn't eat shellfish and we wouldn't mix milk and meat, but we would eat a hamburger or all-beef hotdog. When I got to college, I figured, "Well, now, I'm living in a dorm, that's like eating out. So, I'm going to keep kosher like I would in a restaurant--no shellfish or pork or milk with meat." My freshman year, that's what I did. My second year though, I became very close friends with a bunch of kids who all kept kosher, as it happens, and one of them was my best friend and roommate for the next three years. (I just saw her on September 20, 2019 at my fiftieth college reunion at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and it was so great to see her.) Since they all kept kosher, as best they could, which meant having a frozen fish square every night that the cafeteria wasn't already serving fish, I did that too, and I started keeping kosher again. I mean, it wasn't strictly kosher, because the kitchen wasn't kosher, but it was just these flounder fish squares that they had for us and it was the best we could do. We had the same meal just about every single night. [laughter]

KR: When you were growing up, what were political discussions like in your home?

KS: I remember my mother liked Adlai Stevenson and was so disappointed when Eisenhower won the election. I remember one particular local election, where my mother and father disagreed on one candidate or another. Other than that one disagreement, which I don't know what that was about, they were both Democrats. I don't know if they loved Kennedy, I don't know. I remember that my mother really liked Stevenson, but they definitely voted for Kennedy and every other Democrat after that. I'm pretty sure they hated Nixon. In fact, Nixon's 1969 inauguration was second semester of my senior year at GW. While the parade was taking place probably under a mile from my apartment at the Newport Apartments on M Street, NW, I was walking outside, when a rat ran by--a rare occurrence during my entire time in D.C. and certainly symbolic. [Editor's Note: Adlai Stevenson ran for the U.S. presidency on the Democratic ticket in the 1952 and 1956 elections, losing both times to Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower. Democrat John F. Kennedy defeated Republican candidate Richard Nixon in the presidential election of 1960. Nixon won the election of 1968 and then won reelection in 1972.]

There was some racism, I mean, not overt--well, of course, my sister had to deal with the little girl next door who kept telling her she killed Jesus. So, I guess that was overt. I remember, before I joined Beth Sholom, my parents would say that Reform synagogues were like church with their organs and everything. But some years later, my mother ended up actually going with me when her congregation became Ultra-Orthodox. She started actually going to services with me. Could we stop?

KR: Yes, sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording. What historical events from your childhood stick out in your mind, perhaps that shaped you in some way?

KS: Well, when I was in high school, Kennedy was assassinated, but, except for that it was horrible and sad and everything, I don't think it shaped me. When my aunt died, obviously, when I was young, that had a big, very sad effect. Yes, I'm sure I'll think of things later, but right now I can't think of any. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.]

KR: How about the Cold War?

KS: Oh, my gosh, I guess'62 was the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was a sophomore in high school and I remember I had had a cold, [laughter] Cold War, cold, and I'd been staying home from school, because I was sick. Then, when that missile crisis started, I didn't want to go to school and I think my mother didn't want me to go. I remember that I stayed home, which was probably the worst thing that could've happened, because as a result of that, I was sitting in front of the TV the entire day, and it was just so scary. It was such a relief when the Russians backed down. [Editor's Note: In October 1962, photographs taken by an American U2 spy plane revealed Soviet nuclear missile installations in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy responded by ordering a quarantine, or naval blockade, around Cuba to prevent more Soviet weapons from getting there. For thirteen days, the public feared the outbreak of nuclear war between the U.S. and Soviet Union. On October 24, Soviet ships destined for Cuba stopped short of the U.S. naval blockade. The Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba, in exchange for the U.S. not invading Cuba. Secretly, the U.S also agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey.]

We used to have the air raid drills. I don't think we got under our desks. We went out in the hall and sat by the lockers with our heads between our knees. I mean, these were scary things to grow up with, but I don't remember them having any lasting impression, other than being scared all the time that something's going to happen but not anything that directed my life in any particular way.

KR: You talked about your cousin Joey and noticing how he was treated and how you were treated. At that time, what did you perceive as the messages being sent to you as a young woman and what you could do in your life?

KS: The differences between Joey (two years younger than I am) and me made me angry, but the messages were not coming from him. The messages were, obviously, coming from mostly my parents and school. So, my father would throw Joey fly balls. He got to take woodshop in school, and I was taking cooking and sewing. I knew not just Joey but all the boys took that, and I would've liked to take woodshop and metal shop. I really didn't want to take cooking and sewing. My mother's answer to that would always be, "How come it's good enough for

everybody else but not for you? Why do you always have to make a commotion about everything?" So, that was her reaction. When I was in fifth grade and my aunt and uncle took Joey and me on vacation to D.C. by train and I came back and said, "I'd love to be a conductor on a train," when I was in fifth grade, she told me girls don't do that. Or, "You have to play the violin or the flute." These sexist messages were constant, but I think they were, in a large part, coming from home.

My sister says, she remembers, my mother always would sign her name, "Mrs. Philip Spindel." It was like, "You have a name." But she was so proud, I guess, to be married. We had all sorts of fights around my wedding over silly things too. Yet my mother was the one who suggested engineering first. She was the first person to say engineer. I wonder if she thought I would meet a husband, [laughter] although I don't think so. I don't know if Jewish mothers wanted their daughters to marry an engineer. I think I would've had to go to med school. [laughter]

This was another thing. My sister and I always had this feeling that if somebody wanted to go out with us, they weren't worth dating. [laughter] My mother didn't do a lot to build our self-esteem. She did things that, in her mind, were helping, but I think maybe overall hurt. I had an overbite, so I had braces. I never really finished, so they're still not straight, but I guess they're better than they were. Then, from braces, she moved on to nose job, and then she moved on to contact lenses. So, she had to like redesign me [laughter] to make me marriageable, I guess. So, I wonder, if I hadn't had all those things, would I be married and would I had been better off if I wasn't married? She just had this goal for us and the way that she thought we'd fulfill it. My sister rebelled. She had braces and contacts but she said, "I'm not having a nose job," but I just went along with whatever I was supposed to do.

I remember, when I was a senior in high school, we moved from the two-family house to a one-family house. I know my mother wanted a one-family house. I know that was a big deal to her always. But I think, what might have finally tipped the scales was that she went to a party on my father's side of the family, with some wealthy relatives, and one of them was complaining that their son was dating a woman, a girl, who lived in a two-family house. [laughter] Not long after, we moved. [laughter] You know, things like that.

KR: You were at George Washington University from '65 to '69. When you first got there in '65, what was your freshman year like?

KS: Well, I had never been away from home before. I thought I wanted to go away. I wonder now why I picked a school that I didn't know anyone else who was going to. I'd never been away. I was a shy kid. How come I had so much nerve, at that point, to do that? I don't get it. Driving to school, I think it kind of hit me. When we got to the Maryland House, on Route 95 we stopped for lunch--I don't even know if it's still there--and I just fell apart.

I had to be there a week early because the engineering students had placement exams, and the only other people that had to be there a week early were the pledges, because GW had a week of pledge parties for sororities and fraternities before classes started. I was in a room for four. One of my roommates wasn't pledging, so she didn't come early. Two of them were there, they were both pledging, and then I was there. I was the only person in the dorm (that housed over eight

hundred girls) who was there who wasn't pledging, so it got really lonely at night. For someone who had never been away from home, here I am, alone, in this giant building, not making friends because everybody else was talking about what sororities they'd been to and which they thought they might pledge. I was just sort of there.

During the day, I'd go and I'd take these placement exams. The guys were friendly, but it was weird because they were friendly like this, like, "If you need help, you can come to me." They never said, "Gee, can I come to you if I need help?" [laughter] It was like there was this assumption that I was going to need their help all the time. I didn't remember this, but I have old letters, so when I look back to the letters, I have a letter that I wrote home to my boyfriend, the one who I later married, my first husband, and I said to him, "There were some girls at placement testing, but I never saw them again," or something like that. I think they were in a night program working for the government and they didn't live on campus and I don't know what happened to them after the placement tests.

Besides math and physics, which made perfect sense, one of the placement tests I had to take was, I forgot the official name of it, but it was some sort of personality assessment test specifically "for boys," where they asked all different kinds of questions. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was bizarre, and I just took this test. Every now and then, I'd think, "Am I supposed to answer this question pretending I'm a boy?" If the question was, "Would you rather be out on a date with a girl or picking flowers?" was I supposed to be a boy who wanted to be on a date with a girl, or a girl? But I never thought to ask, "Why the hell am I taking this test?" I just did it. I just took it. Yes, that was weird. I wrote home about that a little bit.

Then, I wrote other really sexist things, like, "We have a curfew and so I'm not allowed [out] after eleven, but I don't mind because our dorm is really so much nicer than the boy's dorm." I wrote things like, "The boys have all this alcohol in their room and they're drinking all the time," in one letter. Then, in another, I'd write, "My roommate came home drunk. I think it's disgusting when girls drink." So, when I arrived at college, I was my worst un-feminist self I could have been.

Yet, in other ways, there I was in engineering school to make a point. I think what I realized through the years is that in college I wasn't so much about women's rights. I was more about Karen's rights, and I wanted to show that I could do anything I wanted to. Well, of course, if I did it, when you're a token, it brings the rest of the group along, but I think it was more about showing that I could do whatever I wanted and no one was going to stop me. I say in the memoir, "I would have been a token if anyone actually thought they needed a token, but back in those days, no one really cared." [laughter] I was just like this person out there who either got an extra lot of attention in the wrong way or no attention in the ways I would have liked it maybe.

I had curfews, and I needed permission to leave for the weekend and all these rules that we had. I wasn't invited to join Theta Tau, the engineering social fraternity, because it didn't take women. Then, Tau Beta Pi, which was the engineering honor society also didn't take women, but they gave women a women's badge, which meant, "You qualify for membership in every way, except you don't have a penis." That's basically what they were saying. So, then, as a women's badge holder, they objectified you by asking you to send in a picture and a short bio, and they'd put a

picture and bio of all new women's badge recipients in their magazine, *The Bent*. Actually, in my junior year, the earliest time an engineering student could be inducted, I was initially invited to join, maybe because our chapter was pretty new and they didn't realize that women were not eligible. So, I have the letter inviting me to join, but then the invitation was rescinded and I received a women's badge instead. But I was told that my parents could still come to the initiation dinner, although I wouldn't have to pay the initiation fee, because I wasn't being initiated and participating in the secret ceremony with everybody else. Instead, I would have this badge. [Editor's Note: Tau Beta Pi (TBP) is the oldest engineering honor society in the United States.]

So, in 1969, my senior year, TBP changed the rule, and anybody who had a women's badge was invited to join. Twenty-three of us are being recognized this month [on October 12, 2019] in Ohio at the annual TBP Convention. So, there are going to be twenty-three women engineers there, all over the age of seventy, who are in Tau Beta Pi. So, that's really cool, and they're actually paying for our hotel and our dinner and everything. We're even allowed one guest, so my daughter Rachel is accompanying me. So, there was that.

[Editor's Note: The following is a post-interview addendum that Karen added to the transcript: There was some conversation among us women engineers at the convention as to whether we should have attended or boycotted this attempt to honor us as too little too late. I shared that the reason I chose to attend wasn't for TBP but rather because I couldn't pass up the opportunity to meet twenty-two other women who had college and career experiences similar to my own. It was great. However, although the convention organizers did everything to make us welcome at the banquet where we were honored guests, such as having TBP members from our respective colleges escort us to our seats (to my delight I was escorted in by the female president of the George Washington University Tau Beta Pi Chapter), they did little to give us the opportunity to meet and mingle with each other. So, I contacted the organizer and ask her to forward an email from me to the other women asking if anyone would want to meet me for lunch, and there ended up being about a dozen of us having a meal together and spending the afternoon sharing our stories prior to the banquet. It was fantastic!]

When I attended GW, the engineering school magazine, *Mechelecіv*, had a woman majoring in liberal arts, generally, as a centerfold, not nude but sometimes in a bathing suit. Some months, it was a foldout, other times a two-page spread. The magazine also had a page of disgusting jokes that were all sexist and degrading to woman. The ads, when you look back at them now, you can see how they had the EOE (Equal Opportunity Employer) in letters that were so small you practically needed a magnifying glass to see them. The ad would be like a picture of a man or a picture of a shirt with a pocket protector, and the language was always male. So, putting a little, tiny EOE note was like, "Well, we're just going to do the minimum to comply with the law that we have to, but we're really not making an effort to change our message or hire women." Only one of the ads actively was pursuing women, and that was Westinghouse and not for their kitchen division either. They had a stupid ad about romance at the water cooler, [laughter] where these two engineers meet at the water cooler, and he, with her by his side, go on to face all sorts of engineering challenges. It was, in its own way, kind of sexist. [Editor's Note: The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a federal agency that enforces laws against workplace discrimination. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibits discrimination on the basis of

sex in the payment of wages or benefits. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion and national origin.]

It was my junior or senior year that I was on the Engineers' Week Committee at GW. During Engineers' Week, we set up exhibits and invited kids from local high schools to check out GW SEAS (School of Engineering and Applied Science). So, this guy Myron, we were friends, was the chairman of the committee. So, I have pictures and an article about the event from the engineering school magazine, where he and I are discussing something at the event, and the caption under the picture was, "Myron Schloss, this year's chairman of the Open House, directs traffic." It was clear that whoever took and captioned the picture had no idea that I was actually a student in the engineering school. There's also a picture of two guys looking at one of the exhibits. That picture is captioned, "Professor Doug Jones demonstrates a materials testing machine for two prospective students," while a similar picture of a group of girls looking at an exhibit has the disturbing caption, "Not everyone knew what was happening all the time." [laughter] It was just so sexist, so obviously sexist, but it was only years later, when I pulled these old magazines out, that I realized. The centerfolds bothered me from day one. The jokes, I probably laughed. I didn't pay attention to the ads, and I'm not sure whether I picked up on the captions on the pictures, but they were just so sexist.

Then, I ended up writing a letter to *Mechelecіv* because one class I took had another woman in it. I was a freshman, and Judy was a junior. We were in the same "Probability and Statistics" class, and she had written an article for *Mechelecіv* about what it feels like to be the only woman in the engineering school. Two years later, I wrote my own sexist version of that same article, but in Judy's article, she said something about being the only woman in her class, or rather in all of her classes. Now, this ticked me off because she and I had a class together. It's kind of remarkable to me now that she and I were the only women in this class, the only women, and we never talked to each other or even acknowledged each other. So, I think, looking back, there must have been a kind of competition for this "only woman at the table" status. Instead of competing with the guys, who were our real competition, I think we were somehow competing with each other. So, I wrote a snarky letter to the editor saying, "Well, if Judy would turn around now and then, she'd see she's not the only girl in the class." Then, the editor writes a pretty sexist reply to me, saying in part, "Well, if you need any help matriculating, just contact the editor." [laughter] I mean, it just went on and on, and I was really complicit in a whole lot of it.

My senior year, the student chapter of ASME (American Society of Mechanical Engineers) went to Bethlehem Steel, Sparrows Point, Maryland, and I'm sure you saw this on the web. It was second semester senior year. I was about two months from graduating. We get on the bus, and we were invited to bring friends. I didn't bring any friends, fortunately. I think some of the guys did. I don't even think everyone on the bus was an engineering student. I guess it was about a forty-minute ride. We get there.

A Bethlehem Steel guy, who was going to be our tour guide, boards. He tells me I can't get off the bus and begins to take the boys off. I said, "Why can't I go?" For me to speak up for myself, that was pretty huge. I said, "Why can't I get off the bus?" My advisor wasn't saying anything. The guide said, "The tour is dangerous." A couple of the guys said, "If it's dangerous, we don't really want to go either." So, he said, "Well, I'll give you all hard hats." So, I said, "Well, you

can give me a hard hat. What's the real reason?" Then, he said, "You're wearing a skirt." Well, I wasn't allowed not to wear a skirt. I mean, I wasn't even allowed to go to class or be on campus not in a skirt. He said, "We're going to be going up on catwalks." (He was concerned that the workers would be able see up my skirt.) So, I said, "Okay, I get that. So, I'll come back in pants another day." I knew I was never going to be able to come back, but if he would've said, "Okay," that would've been great, this would have been a nonstory, but he didn't. Instead, he said, "No, don't bother coming back. It doesn't matter what you wear. You can't take the tour." I guess maybe he thought I really would come back if he said, "Okay." I don't know. Then, he told me that I'd be happy to learn that the majority of Bethlehem Steel stockholders were women, and I replied that they wouldn't like it if they knew what was going on. Then, he got pissed, and he got all the guys off the bus and left me alone on the bus with an armed guard, who was summoned on the bus to sit in the seat next to me.

While this hasn't seemed right to me forever--and this was definitely a "click" moment; I mean, it was huge--just last night, knowing I'd be telling this story today, I was thinking that if that guard, instead of coming on the bus with me, had said, "You know, we're sorry, we can't allow women on the tours. We know it feels discriminatory, but we've had experiences where the guys injure themselves because they start paying attention to the women. We understand it's not fair, and we're working on changing it, but for now, could we just get you a cup of coffee in the cafeteria?" I would've probably still been really angry but I might have said, "Okay." I would've gone with the guard, and he still wouldn't have had to shoot me. I'm thinking about it; there were so many other ways they could've not let me on the tour than holding me hostage on the bus, with an armed guard in the seat next to me. I don't know why that hasn't occurred to me before, that they could've done it a different way.

So, he's sitting on the bus next to me, while the guys tour. He tells me he has a daughter, like somehow, I'm supposed to feel good that this person who does this for a living has a daughter. Then, my classmates came back, and I guess I got off the bus, because they were going to go have lunch and I probably needed the bathroom, but I shouldn't have gotten off. I should've refused to get off the bus at that point, but I did get off. My advisor never said a word about it. The students never said a word about it. Nobody talked about it.

Through the years--and it's a whole lot of years now; it's like I've been analyzing this for sixty years--actually, mostly since I started working on a memoir, I have been coming up with all different scenarios and asking people about it. It's interesting, in my writing group, where everyone is close to my age, they were all really enraged at my professor, not at Bethlehem Steel, but at my professor, that he should've turned the bus around. I said, "Not really." I was upset that he didn't say something comforting to me or say, "I'm going to write a letter of complaint," but I never really felt angry at him. I felt angry at Bethlehem Steel.

Yet people have had different reactions. I met one young feminist, when I was doing a gift wrapping fundraiser for Passaic County NOW in a Barnes and Noble, and one of my friends said, "Tell her about Bethlehem Steel." I don't know why, because all my friends know about it, because I yak about it all the time. Maybe the young woman said she was majoring in engineering; I don't know. But, on hearing the story, she had a whole different perspective. She said, "You know why I think your professor didn't say anything?" She said, "I think it would be

like if you were his young daughter and he took you to an amusement park. You got there and you were all excited. Then, once you were there, he found out you were too short for all the rides. He would feel terrible that he brought you there. He wouldn't be mad at the amusement park. He'd be blaming himself for bringing you." She said, "I bet he was annoyed at himself for not foreseeing that there would be a problem, and so he just had nothing to say."

Anyway, I spent some time trying to contact him, and in between trying to contact him on Classmates and four years or so later, when I actually did find him, I made up all kinds of stories that I've written down in the memoir, because I think it's interesting, depending on the age of the people and the time in which they grew up, the different scenarios people come up with for what was going on. When I finally talked to him, I emailed him, and he said, "Let's Skype." So, the first thing he said to me, when we Skyped, he said, "Are you calling about Bethlehem Steel?" I said, "Oh, my God, yes. How did you know? Do you really remember that day?" He goes, "No," he says, "I don't remember it at all, but I Googled you, because I was trying to figure out why you wanted to talk to me." [laughter] I said, "Oh, my God, I should've known. Why would you still be thinking about it?" We had a nice talk and his wife came on and we chatted. Just to put the Bethlehem saga to rest, he said, "You know," he said, "the only reason I could tell you I didn't do anything was I wasn't a *mensch* yet. I was a young guy. I wasn't a *mensch* yet." [Editor's Note: *Mensch* in Yiddish means a person of honor and integrity.] That's what he said. But it's not really true that he wasn't a *mensch* back then. That was how everybody behaved. So, I don't feel that that was true, but I thought that was an interesting response. We were in touch, and I sent him a copy of the GW chapter in my memoir and he and his wife read it. They mailed me--this was maybe six months ago--a beautiful and meaningful glass ceiling necklace. [laughter] So, I thought that was a really wonderful conclusion to that story.

Here I was, two months from graduating, and I couldn't get off the bus. Now, think about that. You just spent four years majoring in something that's supposed to be your career and you can't even take a tour. I mean, it doesn't make you feel like your job prospects are going to be too good. It was devastating. That was a real wake-up moment, and the fact that nobody mentioned it to me, nobody said a word, it was weird. I don't remember who I sat next to on that trip either, if I sat by myself, I don't remember.

KR: Did that wake-up call immediately propel you into activism?

KS: I think I thought I was an activist before that. Maybe I really wasn't, but I thought I was just by majoring in engineering. I just thought all these things were actually good things to do, but I realize now, a lot of them weren't. I felt like, at the time, that becoming an engineer was a real feminist statement. In retrospect, I'm not sure, but at the time, I thought it was. When you go into engineering because somebody says, "If you become an engineer, I'll eat my hat," that to me felt like proving a point. Whether I was proving it for women or just for me, I'm not sure now.

KR: What was the campus climate like at George Washington, in terms of activism?

KS: When I was there, you could walk right past the White House then. You could throw tennis balls on the lawn. You could walk right past [it]. When I was back for the reunion, they sent us,

the fifty-year reunion people, they sent us with students on a tour of the campus, and I said to one of the tour guides, "Oh, by the way, I want to go by the White House, even though you can't walk past it anymore." He said, "Oh, you can still walk past it," and then I realized to him walking past it meant walking past it from Lafayette Park, which wasn't the same as walking past it was for us.

The first weekend I'm in D.C., there's a march, and I don't know what they were marching about, but I figure that if it's a good cause, I'll join the march. At first, I thought they said they were marching for "Soviet jewelry," which sounded crazy to me, but it was actually a march in support of "Soviet Jewry," so it actually was a good march protesting the treatment of the Jews in the Soviet Union. So, that was my first march.

Then, I was at an anti-war rally on the Mall, and I was at "Resurrection City." (I think back now--I was there when King was assassinated, and you could see the smoke from the buildings burning.) SDS was active in the anti-war movement, and Resurrection City was a protest against racism and for economic equality, but there was nothing for women. No women's marches back then. [Editor's Note: Riots took place in over one hundred cities across America, including Washington, D.C., following the assassination of Martin Luther King., Jr. on April 4, 1968. Later that spring, thousands of people camped out on the National Mall in tents, and the six-week protest became known as "Resurrection City." Planning for the protest had begun the year before by King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as a part of the Poor People's Campaign to protest economic inequalities. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the national student organization with chapters on hundreds of college campuses, spurred anti-war activism against the Vietnam War.]

There was a telethon my junior year. This, I just shared with GW, as a memory, because they asked us, at my fiftieth reunion, to share an "only at GW moment." The Kennedys sponsored a Junior Village Telethon, and they had it in Lisner, the GW auditorium. They used students as volunteers, and my roommate, Myra, and I handed out sandwiches to the people working on the phone banks in the basement of the auditorium. Once the sandwiches were gone, we had nothing to do. [Editor's Note: Ethel and Robert Kennedy helped organize the Junior Village Telethon to benefit the home for dependent children run by the Welfare Department in Washington, D.C. The telethon occurred at Lisner Auditorium on February 17, 1968.]

So, we went up to the auditorium. One of Myra's friends was ushering and said, "Come on, you can sit in the back and watch the show." As we go to sit down, somebody comes from backstage and says, "Come sit in the front seats because when the camera shows the audience, we don't want the expensive seats not to be filled." This was great. So, we started to walk down, and then somebody came from backstage and said, "No, we need your help on stage."

On stage, there were the performers and the little celebrity phone bank with the eight phones or six phones at the back of the stage that you see when you watch a telethon on TV, where the famous people are taking phone calls. The next thing I know, I'm sitting on stage answering phones with the celebrities, with Huntley and Brinkley and Peaches and Herb. Bobby Morse and Lauren Bacall were there and all these people that were famous back then. I'm answering phones on stage, and after a while, somebody comes out and said, "Are you ready to be relieved?" I

said, "Yes," because it was stressful and noisy, because you're taking pledges and groups such as Jefferson Airplane are playing in front of you on stage. [Editor's Note: Chet Huntley and David Brinkley co-hosted the evening news program *The Huntley-Brinkley Report* on NBC from 1956 to 1970. Peaches and Herb is a vocalist duo. Jefferson Airplane was an American rock band. Robert "Bobby" Morse is an actor who has starred in movies, television series and Broadway productions.]

All of a sudden, somebody taps me on my shoulder to take my seat, and it was Bobby Kennedy. I mean, this was pretty cool. So, I get up and I go. They seat me with the Kennedy family down in the auditorium. I have a thank you note from Ethel Kennedy, for volunteering. That was really an amazing highlight. My roommate didn't get to answer phones, but she was backstage with the celebrities waiting to go on. She was backstage, I guess, with Kennedy and Lauren Bacall, and Bobby Morse was backstage, I think. So, that was quite a night. That was an "only at GW moment" for sure.

It was funny because when I got to class on Monday, one of my classmates said, "I was watching a telethon [on] Saturday night and there was somebody on stage who looked like you, but I didn't think it could be until I saw your watchband." (It was a wide, black, patent leather band.) "Why were you on stage?" Frankly, I said, "I have no idea why."

The night of the event, I get back to my room--junior women had a two o'clock curfew on Saturdays, so it must have been somewhere before two--and my phone in my room is ringing. (We had had a phone installed in our room because the dorm switchboard closed at night.). I answered the phone and it's my boyfriend, who I was going to later marry, and he says, "Where were you all night?" I said I was with the Kennedys, and he hung up on me. [laughter] I didn't care. Then, the next day he saw an article in the paper about the Junior Village Telethon at GW. So, I think he called me and apologized. [laughter] That was really a highlight. At the reunion a couple of weeks ago, that was the highlight I shared, and my low, lowlight, was Bethlehem Steel. So, those were the two memories I shared with them.

We had the curfews. We had dorm council, where we punished each other for curfew infractions. Why I would even participate in that, I don't know, but I was actually on dorm council for one semester, I see in my yearbook.

KR: Tell me more about the anti-Vietnam War activism that you partook in.

KS: I went to marches and things, but I was not really involved in the anti-war movement except as just a person who was against the war and if there was something happening, I was there. The engineering school was probably the least activist undergraduate school on campus, because when I look at the yearbook, I see all these things that were happening during my GW years that I didn't know anything about. [laughter] The engineering student body was different. It had, I think, more foreign students (many sent by the Shah from Iran) than most of the other schools at GW, more older students than the other schools, and probably many more commuters than the other schools. It was just a different kind of student body, I think. Also, engineers may have supported the war or been apolitical because that's the impression I have of engineers, that they're more conservative. I always felt that that was one thing that separated me from guy

engineers, that my politics was very different than theirs because I was in engineering for a very different reason than they were, although I do have a lot of those same nerdy characteristics of liking to work by myself and getting lost in numbers. I have that. I mean, I have that academic nerdiness, but, socially, I think I'm different.

KR: The period of 1965 to 1969, when you were in college, that also saw a real change in traditional norms. What stands out in your mind about changes in dorm rules, clothing wear and things like that that took place over your time in college?

KS: No, everything good took place over the summer after I graduated. My sister started at GW the September after I graduated. I went to visit her, her first year. She lived in the same dorm I'd lived in my first two years. It was still a girls' dorm, but there were guys sleeping on the floor in her room. I don't think there was a dress code anymore. I don't think there were curfews or sign-in sheets anymore. Some of the change might have happened my senior year, but we lived in an apartment that year, so I really don't know, but I don't think so because I know, for sure, that the dress code for women hadn't changed. I mean, I was still required to wear dresses to class until the day I graduated. For some reason, even though according to the school rules in a GW booklet I have, maybe from my first year, my roomies and I wouldn't have been allowed to leave the dorm, we were allowed to live off campus for our senior year, so maybe that was the beginning of the greater change to come. It still bugs me that the criteria girls had to meet in order to live off campus, as written in that booklet, were much more restrictive than those for the boys. The girls rules were as follows:

> All unmarried women students under twenty-two years of age … are required to live in the University residence halls or at home with their parents. Upon written approval of their parents and the permission of the Dean of Women, freshman women may live with immediate relatives and upper class women may live with contemporaries *of their parents* [italics mine]. Under *no* circumstances may an unmarried woman student under 22 years of age taking a full academic program live in an apartment with her contemporaries.

On the other hand, the boy's rules were short and sweet and pertained to freshmen only and thanks to the "exceptional case" exclusion below, even freshmen could be exempt:

> All unmarried freshmen men under twenty-one years of age … are required to live in the University residence halls, or at home with their parents. In exceptional cases permission to live elsewhere may be given a student by the Dean of Men.

A lot of change happened the summer of 1969 just after I graduated in June. That's when a lot of the all-male schools began admitting women, particularly engineering schools. While MIT brags that they always admitted women, my neighbor, an MIT graduate who's a few years older than I am who lives downstairs from me, graduated there, and he said, "Yes, they prided themselves on that fact, but housing for female students was exceptionally limited." So, it wasn't like women were really equal. They accepted some women. You were eligible to apply if you were a woman, but your chance of being admitted with housing was pretty limited, I think.

I had originally applied to Douglass, GW, and Temple. I wanted to go to GW in Washington, but my parents wanted me to go to Douglass because it was a state school. It was cheaper. I ended up getting full-tuition scholarships my last two years at GW though. So, that helped, but there was still the housing to pay for. But I think college back then was like three thousand dollars a year, including room and board. I mean, it was so different. So, I was accepted at Douglass. But because Douglass had a housing shortage at the time, and I lived within their "commuting radius," I was going to have to commute for some amount of time until they had dorm space and I wasn't going to do that. That made my parents forget Douglass. Otherwise, I would have had to go to Douglass and take my engineering courses at Rutgers.

KR: Yes.

KS: The GPA, grade point average, for dean's list was higher at Douglass than at Rutgers. So, I would have had a different standard for making dean's list than all of the guys in my classes, which also didn't seem exactly fair. I didn't go there, so it really didn't matter, but I remember thinking, "It's not a good idea." Yes, my parents would've really liked me to go there had housing been immediately available.

KR: Was it between going to Douglass and GW? Were those your two final choices?

KS: I had applied to Temple, Rutgers and GW. My choice was I wanted to go to an engineering school in Washington. I wasn't going to go to Georgetown, because I didn't want a Jesuit school. I wasn't going to go to Howard. It was a black school. Gallaudet was a deaf school. American University, I don't think had engineering. I think that was about it for the D.C. schools. So, GW was my choice. My mother and father would've liked Rutgers, because it was less money. I applied to Temple because my cousin went there and liked it. My parents knew nothing about colleges. They were no help in telling me where to apply. GW was my choice, and Rutgers and Temple were the ones they told me to apply to. I applied to three schools; that was it, I think. GW was my first choice, always. If I would've had a dorm room at Douglass, there might have been a little fight.

Then, my sister ended up going to GW the semester after I graduated. I had two roommates, Linda and Myra, my senior year. Linda's sister also started GW the next semester, and my roommate, Myra, my best friend in college, didn't have a sister or brother, but her cousin started in September too. We all really loved being in Washington, and I think we kind of passed that onto our college-age family members, who all ended up there too.

KR: Did you say before that your sister was a music major?

KS: Yes, my sister has a master's degree in library science that she got from Rutgers in 1977. At GW, she majored in musicology, graduating in 1973, and then in 1975 she got a master's in music history and theory, also at Rutgers. She's the director of the Springfield, New Jersey library now.

KR: Are there any other stories from your time at GW that you would like to share?

KS: Oh, my golly, I can't think of any right now. Oh, well, graduation came and I had this wedding scheduled four days later. June 12, 1969, I was getting married. There was no Internet, there was no email, there was no nothing. I just walked away, didn't get a single address, a single phone number from any of my classmates that I had been friends with in engineering school. I didn't say goodbye to anybody; that was it, I just moved on. I have a letter, actually, inviting me to apply for the master's engineering program at GW. It's stuck in my yearbook or something. I never considered it. I was getting married and moving back to New Jersey, where my husband's new job was waiting.

KR: While you were at GW, what was your boyfriend and fiancé doing at that time?

KS: Before answering that, did I mention that Danny and I went to high school together? I didn't like him, but my mom and best friend Linda, who we would double with, suggested that going with someone I didn't like was better than not going at all, and that Linda and I would have fun no matter what, so I accepted. The day after the prom we all went to the New York World's Fair and had a great time there too. I don't remember what changed my feelings toward, Danny but after that he and I began dating.

When I was at GW, Danny was at Syracuse majoring in journalism. During summers, he worked at the local Passaic paper and so he had a job lined up after graduation. Of course, I was going to be able to get a job anywhere and he had this job, so we were going to move back to Passaic. He went right to work, when we got married, and I didn't look for a job right away. I don't know if I was afraid.

There was so many issues around planning the wedding. So, I was really happy that we were getting married four days after graduation, because my mother was really excited about planning the wedding and I didn't have to be involved much because I was away at school. I actually have a letter--I don't know what I wrote to her, but I was apparently trying to get out of shopping for a gown because she wrote back, ""Dale absolutely refuses to shop for a gown for you. You'll have to do your own trying on…" So, I must have been so disinterested that I said, "Can Dale just get [the dress]?" [laughter] I didn't have anything to do with any of the preparations, except when it came to the invitation.

My mother shows me the invitation--I had to be home on a break --and she shows me a proof copy of the invitation and it starts with, "Mr. and Mrs. Philip Spindel and Dr. and Mrs. Ezra Schlossberg" and I didn't complain about that because I already knew that's what she wanted to call herself. But then, it said, "… Announce the marriage of their children, Karen to Daniel," and that "to" really set me off. I said, "No, I'm not marrying him if he's not marrying me. You have to put, 'The marriage of Karen *and* Daniel,'" and Mom goes, "No, that's not proper etiquette." I said, "Okay, well, then if you insist on the word "to" you'll have to put, 'Karen to Daniel and Daniel to Karen.' Otherwise, I'm not getting married." This was like a huge thing. My invitation says "and." We fought over the word "and" instead of "to" because "to" is the way it was in the sample books, and so in my mother's eyes, that's how it was supposed to be.

Then, on my thank you cards--you win some, you lose some--I didn't fight hard enough and my thank you cards said, "Mrs. Dan Schlossberg" on them. Back then, I didn't realize I didn't have

to change my last name. I wasn't thrilled about it, but I didn't think I had a choice. But to have my name as Mrs. Dan made me really crazy. My husband didn't own me, and even if I had to change my last name, I had a first name of my own. But my mother wore me down by telling me that if we didn't do what was proper, people would think we were gauche, and to my mother (who honestly always wanted what she thought was best for me)--there was nothing worse. Every decision she made was first and foremost based on what other people would think.

At the wedding, we handed out *kippahs* to the guests, and forty-one years later, when I was cleaning out my parents' house in 2010, after my mother passed away, I found one of the kippahs from my wedding. Inside, my mother had had printed "The marriage of Daniel Schlossberg and Karen Schlossberg," rather than Karen Spindel. Not only was this a real breach of etiquette, but it made ours look like a marriage of siblings. If I had been paying attention to wedding details in the four days between graduation and the wedding, those kippahs would not have been given out. Even finding the kippah over forty years later, after my mom was gone, I felt angry. See, I'm getting angry now. How did she do that? Why did she change my name before I was even married? She just was so excited that her daughter, whom she probably never thought was going to get married, but who also had braces, a nose job, contact lenses, and now lived in a one-family house, was, because of all her hard work, marrying a Jewish doctor's son, in spite of the miserable person I was. [laughter]

Danny and I fought like crazy. We never should've gotten married. I mean, when we were away at school, it was one thing, but we'd be home, we'd be fighting. I think the last thing in the world mom ever would've wanted was to call the marriage off. I mean, we have letters from his parents, when we first got engaged, saying, "We're happy for you and Karen. Our only concern is we think you're a little young." His parents' letter actually made sense. My mother was just all like, "Let's plan a wedding."

So, Mom put "and" on the invitation. We got married. I tried to hang on to my first name, even though I changed my last name, and later I changed it back too. When we were still married, I changed it back. It was funny. I changed it back, but I was afraid, I didn't want his parents to know I changed it back. I changed it back in secret. [laughter] I changed it back at work. I changed it back on everything, but I didn't want his parents to know. When my sister's marriage announcement was in the paper--back then, they used to put who your bridesmaids were, what everyone wore, what kind of flowers the bride carried, all this bullshit in the announcement; they probably still do it--I said to her, "Well, don't use my last name." So, it just says her maid of honor is Karen. Maybe she put "my sister Karen" or something, because I said, "Don't put Spindel. I don't want Danny's parents to see I changed my name back." Danny was okay with it, besides having no say in the matter, but I doubt his mother would have been.

I was hard to get along with and Danny was really sexist in his own way, but I have to say, neither one of my husbands had any problem with the fact that I was an engineer or that I was making more money than them or any of that. (Greg, my second husband, is an engineer too, and our salaries were pretty close, but they would jump around.) As a matter of fact, Danny was proud of that kind of stuff. I remember, one day, his aunt was visiting, and he says to his aunt, "Guess what, Karen just got a raise." His aunt says, "Don't worry, Danny, I'm sure you'll get one soon." [laughter] He was actually really happy for me, and that was his aunt's reaction, "Don't

worry, you'll get one soon." His mother used to tell me how I shouldn't work. I'd go to work and he'd get home--do you want to talk about work yet?

KR: Yes.

KS: Okay.

KR: Let's talk about your career.

KS: I'm working at Robins Engineers and Constructors (RE&C), a division of Hewitt Robins that was located at 711 Union Boulevard in Totowa. My job was selecting mechanical and drive components for overland conveyors. I get pregnant; I'm eight months pregnant, say, or seven-and-a half-months pregnant. There's going to be a layoff, and somebody in my department is going to get laid off. It's not going to be me, I don't think, but I knew I was going to be leaving in a couple of months, so, I said, "I'll go," and I voluntarily left. I didn't apply for unemployment. I didn't apply for maternity leave. I didn't apply for anything, because, back then, I thought, "Well, this is your decision, so you don't deserve any of these things." Who does that? Nobody at work said, "Well, you know, since you're leaving, you're eligible for whichever one." No. So, I left. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1891 as a firm that designed belt conveyers, Hewitt Robins is no longer located in NJ and currently only designs, manufactures and supplies vibrating and crushing equipment for mining, quarrying, recycling, foundry, steel and bulk material sectors.]

I stayed home. I tutored. I had somebody from the RCA school come in--maybe this was after Samantha was born, maybe before--for tutoring in differential equations. For an hour of tutoring, I might spend five hours of prep, but I didn't care. I just needed something to do, instead of sitting in the house watching TV all day. Then, when Samantha was six months old (eight months after I'd left my job), I found out RE&C was once again in hiring mode, so I called and asked for my job back. Because daycare was virtually non-existent, I was lucky enough to find Mary. But more about that later.

Where was I going with this? Oh, I know. Backing up to when I first got married (prior to getting the job at RE&C), I didn't work. It took me a long time to get up the nerve to look for a job. I didn't work. I didn't do much of anything.

KR: What was the timeframe for not working?

KS: Well, I got the job at RE&C in January 1970. We come back from college. Four days later, we have our wedding on Thursday June 12, 1969. We move into this sublet apartment, and I'm already pretty pissed off. I had to change my name and all this stuff, and I'm pretty resentful. Now, he's working; I'm not. I made chili, I don't know, for supper or something, I just remember this one time, and he said something about, "Can I take the leftovers for lunch?" I just remember taking a brown paper sandwich bag and just dumping the chili from the pot into the bag and saying, "Here." [laughter] I think I was resentful that he had a job. I guess I was, on some level, really nervous at this point, about going out to work. I don't know if it was because of Bethlehem Steel, but something was keeping me, or maybe because the draft was looming and

there was the lottery, where they picked the birthdays and stuff, and rather than taking a chance on being drafted, Danny, like most other guys we knew, scrambled to get into the National Guard or Reserves. [Editor's Note: On December 1, 1969, the U.S. Selective Service held the Vietnam draft lottery, which was broadcast live on television and radio. The lottery selected birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970 during the Vietnam War.]

KR: The lottery.

KS: The lottery, yes, the lottery. In my mind, I knew that if Danny got into the NG or Reserves when he went for basic training, the *Herald News*, where he worked, was going to be required to hold his job for him, but if I were working and I was going to go with him, no employer would have to hold my job for me; and I wasn't about to stay around. Then, I said, "Let's look into the Air Force, where we can both join." But we found out that if Danny joined the Air Force, because his vision was good, he would probably be a pilot, which he did not at all want to do. When I learned that women inductees had courses in appropriate makeup and hair and were limited as to what jobs they could hold, that was so creepy and sexist that I said, "Yes, I'm not doing this." So, I still had in my mind though that if Danny went someplace for basic training, I would move with him. I think that was probably what really kept me back from looking for a job.

When Danny found a spot in a radio and broadcasting unit and ended up joining the National Guard (either right before or after the lottery), I still wasn't working. He was going for his basic training to Louisiana, so I was going to go with him. We were going to have no income (except what he got from the Army, whatever that was), but none of this seemed to bother me or him. His parents were fairly wealthy. I hated taking money from his parents--they bought us a new car for our wedding--I hated that stuff, but, somehow, I knew he had some money in his account, Danny did, and I wasn't worried about his money as much as I was annoyed at the thought of "keeping the home fires burning" while my husband is being taught to kill. We both drove down to Leesville, Louisiana, in either November or early December 1969. So, Danny moves into a barracks for basic and he's being all taken care of, but I'm kind of just like out there, with nowhere to live and knowing that, "I'm not going to get an engineering job here in this town." The only job I was going to be able to get was as a hotel maid and I didn't even want to clean my own apartment, so, with tail between my legs, I ended up coming back home.

Then, once I got home, I said, "Okay, you're home. You're going to get a job." That's what happened, and I got the job at RE&C when he was at training; I think that's what happened. So, I went to an employment agency, and I filled out an application. The first thing the guy asked me is, "Don't you type?" (I must have left the "words per minute" question blank.) I said, "No. Do all engineers have to type?" He goes, "You want a job as an engineer?" I mean, it's on my resume that I just graduated with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering. I said, "Well, yes, because that's what I know how to do." He said, "Oh, well, then, I don't know." He said, "Maybe," he says, "I place a lot of male engineers, so I'll just ask less money for you and we'll see what happens." So, I just said, "Okay." Then, I went on some interviews. I got the job and I started working. (I don't remember how many interviews I'd had before RE&C, but I remember

at least two, I think Worthington Pump and Foster Wheeler.) I also don't remember whether I found those interviews on my own or whether the agency sent me.

When I was working on my memoir, maybe two or three years ago, I contacted my first boss at RE&C, and I asked , "Did you pay me less?" He said, "I was new, too. I was naïve, I honestly can't tell you." He said, "If you were, I wasn't aware of it."

Now, I take this job. I'm working as an engineer at the conveyor company. I'm working there and I see the phone list, the internal phone list, and I see all the men are Mr. So-and-So, Mr. So-and-So, Mr. So-and-So, and all the women have their first and last names. Look, there was no Ms. then. (This was January 1970 and *Ms.* Magazine and the word Ms. weren't a thing until Spring of 1972.) So, really, Mrs. wasn't great anyway, but I didn't want to be listed with my first name if all the other engineers were listed as Mr. So, I said to the secretary, "Why do you have all the women with their first name? Shouldn't everybody or nobody have a title?" She goes, "I don't see a problem with it. I like it this way." So, I said, "Okay, well, you keep it that way then, but I want a title like the other engineers. Give me a title." So, I was a bitch. I was a bitch.

But as time passed, I became friends with the women, and close friends with a few of them. We went to lunch together, and I attended a couple of their weddings. Years after I started working there, or I don't know if it was really years, but sometime after I'd worked there a while, the receptionist said to me, "If you felt like nobody was your friend when you got here," she said, "I have to tell you that you were absolutely right. When the women found out a woman engineer had been hired, everybody decided not to like you before you ever showed up." But they all changed. They changed. It's interesting because I'm thinking, "The women are cold-shouldering me." The men, on the other hand, just weren't promoting me.

So, I became friends with the women; everything's nice. I'm friends with the men I work with as well. We're working on this conveyor program, and I find a mistake in the program. It's a good thing I found the mistake because we were designing a downhill conveyor that if we had designed it according to that program and somebody was standing at the bottom of the conveyor, they would've been buried in coal or the motor would have exploded. So, the reason I discovered it was, computers were new, programming was still relegated to computer operators and programmers. These were the days of punched cards and mainframes. When I was in college, we only had one computer class; Fortran 4. So, we're using this program, and I'm hand calculating, just to make sure my hand calculations agree with the program. Usually, they did, but then in this one particular case, they didn't. It was pretty courageous of me to tell them they had a mistake because they had spent a fortune on the program, but I felt obligated. I had to do it.

So, they realized they're going to have to redesign the program. They set up an internal committee. They bring in outside programmers. I'm not on the committee. Okay, you feel bad, you feel like somehow you aren't good enough. I was a little pissed, I guess. Then, all of a sudden, somebody leaves, and my co-worker Mark is promoted.

He's moved into the empty office. We're all talking about, I remember it, the guys on the floor, we were saying, "Did Mark just pick up and move into that office?" because there was no

announcement. We said, "Boy, does he have balls. The office is empty, and he just moves in and promotes himself," and that was the scuttlebutt. Years later, when I talked to Mark (he was another person I tracked down when researching for my memoir), he said, "No, actually, I was promoted, but they didn't want to send out an announcement because they knew that nobody would be happy, and I said to them, 'Why are you promoting me? Karen has seniority. Champak Shah has seniority.'" Basically, Mark told me that they said, "We don't want to promote a woman or an Indian." He was the only white guy. That's what he tells me now. I don't know for sure, but it's probably true. [laughter] Yes, so that was that.

Because of the memoir I've been working on for years and years, I've reached out to ex-coworkers, ex-bosses and ex-professors, and memoir aside, catching up with these contacts has proved to be enjoyable and enriching to my life.

Back to RE&C, the interesting thing is, even though I didn't get promoted, I think everybody had respect for my competency. I think I was really trusted. Look, I found this error in the program and everything. They had a sister company in Passaic. So, they were Robins Engineers and Constructors in Totowa but Hewitt Robins was in Passaic. One of the guys, Fred, who worked in Passaic, when they had an opening, he recommended that they hire me. I lived right around the corner from that place, so I was all over that idea. Usually, there's some good and some bad to consider when changing jobs, but this was all good--Passaic had better hours, they were around the corner from my house, it was more money, it was a promotion, so everything was good about this. So, I take the job, and I find out, afterward, from Fred, that when I was hired they were transitioning presidents. The outgoing president absolutely said, no, he would not have a woman in that position, as the mine conveyor project engineer, but the new president said, "Well, I'm hiring her anyway," and so he hired me. I did walk into sort of a hostile environment with a pissed-off ex-president. [laughter]

So, a lot of weird things happened at that company. They would decide they're going to paint the walls, and they'd have only the women vote on the color. The head of the shop would come back drunk after lunch and get on the intercom and make animal noises on the intercom. It was a crazy, wild place. They would sell scrap metal and use the company money to hire strippers for afterhours parties. The way they kept the women out of this was they were engineer-only parties, except once I came, this created a problem. So, they became engineer-except-Karen parties, and nobody was supposed to tell me about them. But my friend Fred, who was the one who had suggested I get hired, said to me, "I've got to tell you what's going on here." He tells me about it.

So, I call a secret meeting of all the women in the bathroom, and I say, "You know, the guys are using company funds to have parties and hire strippers. We're not invited." For me, it wasn't that I wanted to see a stripper, but when my employee and my boss are at events together and I'm not there, it doesn't help. So, the women are all in the bathroom, and they go, "Well, we don't want a stripper. We don't want to see a stripper anyway." I said, "But it's not about that." But then a good friend of mine, Doris, thinks she's doing a nice thing, so she runs out and she goes straight to the president of the company (I'm not sure--maybe she was his secretary) and she says, "Pat, the women are all upset because we found out," whatever she said. I don't know what she said. But she comes back into the bathroom, and she said, "Good news, we're all getting

tickets for a fashion show." Everyone but me was delighted by this news. [laughter] Know when to hold, know when to fold, you know. So, I said, "Okay, all right, whatever," and I just left and I gave up.

In my memoir, I'm initially talking about how not only were the women promised a fashion show, but they never actually got the tickets. Now, in my mind, I started thinking, more recently it hit me, that maybe they did, but it was just like the stripper party. It was, "Don't tell Karen." [laughter] So, they might have all gone to a fashion show; I don't know. That, I'll never know. So, they were just perfectly happy getting these fashion show tickets. They didn't have a care about networking or co-workers.

For Secretary's Day, the men would get all the secretaries flowers, a bottle of wine or whatever, and then one year one ended up on my desk. I said, "Well, I don't want this." [They responded], "Well, we didn't know what to do about you, so we thought you would like it." I said, "But it's Secretaries Day. I'm not a secretary." Of course, the women might be offended by that, but it was not my intention to offend the women. It was just for me to be treated like what I was.

One time, my boss invited me out to a dinner. I said, "Why are we out to dinner?" It was very professional. He said, "We're going to do these one-on-one dinners, because we want to see what people are unhappy about. Morale is bad." I don't really remember the reason. We had this dinner, and we talked. That was that. Then, no one else ever had a dinner. I think maybe it was more about sounding me out. Maybe they were worried that I was going to do something about their stripper parties. I mean, I don't know. I don't know what the hidden agenda was to that dinner.

Then, they would have layoffs. I would hear in the purchasing department, the men purchasing agents had secretaries, and the women purchasing agents did their own typing. So, of course, when there was a layoff, it was better for them to keep the women, so I think the men would get harder hit by the layoff.

KR: How about pay and promotion?

KS: At that place? I transferred there in March 1975, which was designated International Women's Year by the United Nations. [Editor's Note: The United Nations designated 1975-1985 as the Decade for Women and 1975 as International Women's Year.] There was a conference. It was either at Princeton or Rutgers, I don't remember. Some members of my NOW (National Organization for Women) Chapter attended. We went for a weekend, and one of the workshops was "Anger: The Forbidden Feeling in Women." They had us play-act being angry. We learned about how when men are angry, they express anger, but women internalize their anger and it comes out as sadness or disappointment. We're taught not to be angry, and how when you're angry and you talk to someone, how important eye contact is and all these skills. When I got back, I went to my boss and said, "I would like a raise." He said, "I don't think we have money for that," and I said, "Well, then make me an appointment with Pat." Pat was the president who, at Fred's recommendation, had hired me. I remember going in and feeling a hundred percent confident sitting with Pat and just looking at him, and he kept turning his head. [laughter] I think that the eye contact was a little much for him, and I walked out with a raise. So, I don't know if I

was being underpaid to begin with. I was the project manager of mine conveyors and there was a project manager of urethane, but I don't know how profitable urethane was or what that project manager was paid. I know the mine conveyor business was not particularly profitable.

I had this draftsman, Joe, who worked for me. Ralph was my immediate boss. So, they would be at these stripper parties together. He [the draftsman] I don't think really liked working for a woman. I remember him muttering, like I would tell him to do something, and he'd be saying under his breath, "I don't have to listen to her because she's a woman and she's Jewish." [laughter] Bizarre stuff.

It's annual review time. Ralph calls me into his cubicle, and he says, "What do you think about Joe?" I said, "Well, his work is beautiful, but he's very, very slow." I don't want to let my personal dislike for the guy affect his review, so I didn't mention his insubordination. I said, "But he's very slow, so I think a small raise but not more than that." Ralph says, "You don't think he deserves a raise. No raise. We're not giving him a raise." He [says], "You tell him." So, I go, and I say, "Well, Joe, I have to tell you that you're not going to get a raise this time around." Joe, thinking it's my decision, goes to Ralph and says, "Ralph, the bitch didn't give me a raise." So, Ralph gives him a small raise. [laughter] I don't know if he said the "bitch." He might have said Karen. That was the kind of stuff I dealt with in that job. It's what happens when a subordinate attends stripper parties with your boss that exclude you.

But in spite of it all, Ralph was great. I remember attending his fortieth birthday party. [laughter] This was just the way it was. Ralph was great. He asked for and valued my opinions as a mechanical engineer. I don't feel like Ralph ever discriminated against me, except maybe when I had to ask Pat for a raise, but I think everybody there was unhappy about their salary. I don't know whether it was a sex thing or not. In fact, when I was recruited for a job at AT&T, Ralph saw it as a good opportunity for me and encouraged me to take it. There were other crazy things. There was other weird stuff that happened there. Boy, what was it? Yes, if you want to stop it for a second.

KR: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording.

KS: One time, we had a conveyor out in the field, and there was some problem with the conveyor. A guy calls from the job site who has never spoken to me before. When I answer the phone with "Hello, Karen Spindel speaking," he asks, "Is Mr. Spindel there?" I figure he hears my voice, and I reply, "This is Karen Spindel. How can I help you?" He tells me he's having a problem with their conveyor, and I go into this monologue about how to solve the problem. I don't know, it could've been ten minutes, but I told him what he needed to do to resolve the problem. At the end of this whole thing, he says to me, "How much longer am I going to have to wait for Mr. Spindel to come to the phone?" Yes, I guess at the sound of a female voice, he assumed I was a secretary and decided, rather than listening to me, he would just doing something else while he waited.

Then, there was another time, when somebody called from out in mine country. They said they needed somebody to come and troubleshoot a conveyor, but the project engineer at the mine said, "But don't send Karen, because the United Mine Workers' contract is up, and they like to go hunting. So, any excuse, they're going to walk, and if you send Karen, the United Mine Workers are going to use her as a reason to go on strike." [laughter] Of course, they didn't send me. That was really interesting, because, on one hand, that's a lot of power that my presence could cause a United Mine Workers strike, but, on the other hand, I didn't get to go. [laughter] So, I was pretty powerless after all. It was a really weird feeling, that just me showing up there could actually do that. [laughter] There were all those mine superstitions about women in the mines, which probably just served as an excuse to keep us out.

Then, sometimes I would go down the mines with my co-workers to check out a conveyor. I remember one time, we walk up to the gates, so it's Ralph and Dan and me. The guard at the gate says, "You can't go in there" specifically to me, and my boss says, "Why not? We're on the job." Then, he goes, "Oh, okay." The guard had assumed I was like somebody's wife tagging along or something. It was stuff like that all the time.

I loved going down the mine. I loved putting on the jumpsuit and the hard hat with the light and the belt with the power pack. I loved it. When I had all that on, nobody knew I was female.

KR: Where were the mines?

KS: I went to two coal mines that I can specifically remember. One was in Gary, West Virginia, and one was Lynch, Kentucky. Years later, I was reading the newspaper and I saw a tiny article about how they turned the lights off in Gary and the city shut down. These were real US Steel company towns. When the steel companies went out, the mines went out. In the 1970s, when we were driving through coal country, you'd see these people who lived in dilapidated houses built along the side of the mountain wearing big diamonds and driving big cars. Those were booming years for the mines, but then by the 1980s things changed completely. So, this little article talked about how US Steel shut down the mines in Gary, nobody had jobs, and the company store closed. It was very sad. [Editor's Note: Gary is a city located along the Tug Fork River in McDowell County, West Virginia, United States. It was named for Elbert Henry Gary, one of the founders of US Steel. In 1917, U.S. Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, founded Lynch, Kentucky as a company-owned coal town. The town was named after the "Father of Mine Safety" and the first president of US Coal and Coke, Thomas Lynch, from Pennsylvania.]

KR: What was it like going down in the mine?

KS: For me, that was a real kick. I loved having all that stuff on and nobody knowing I was female. I loved it. I just loved it. This was low-seam coal, so you had to duck-walk. You had to keep your head down when you walked, because of the really low seam. I loved it. To me, that was a highlight of the job.

Before I worked at Hewitt-Robins in Passaic, when I worked at RE&C in Totowa, I visited Harrison Power Station in Haywood, West Virginia. Hewitt Robins in Passaic, where I was the project manager, manufactured mine conveyors. In Totowa, we designed overland conveyors usually for moving coal through power stations. It was either coal, or sometimes the conveyors carried woodchips or salt. Designing coal conveyors was not a green job, I have to admit that now, but it is what it is. At a power plant site visit, we'd be looking at conveyors all day. The conveyor junction would be in buildings but the conveyors were long, mostly following the contours of the earth. By the end of the day, all I wanted to do was get back to the job site trailer to use the bathroom, while the guys were just peeing whenever they needed to outside out of my sight. That was a hoot, too. I just really enjoyed going to the job sites.

KR: There was really an aspect of travel to your work.

KS: Let's see, those jobs, it was not a big factor. (When I worked for AT&T, it was much more travel.) One time, we were meeting a potential customer, or maybe he was a mine engineer, but we were meeting him and his wife for dinner. It was out, I guess, somewhere near Johnstown, Pennsylvania. I'd always wear jeans. I was probably wearing jeans, or maybe I was wearing slacks and a sweater or tailored blouse, I don't know, but my co-workers and I were dressed casually, and the guy and his wife show up and she's in a gown. One of the reasons I think we didn't do that great in the mine conveyor business was most of our competition was actually located in mining country, and we were, as far as they were concerned, we were outsiders--the New Yorkers. So, they thought, for New Yorkers, they needed to dress up. She was so dressed up; it was so funny. I think we met at a hotel restaurant and we certainly didn't feel like people she needed to impress.

When I would go out for lunch with the guys, usually on Fridays, we'd go to this local bar, and that's where I learned to drink Jack Daniel's, so that when we met with the mine people, I'd be able to have a few. So, I used to call those lunches my on-the-job training. [laughter] So, I got pretty good at that.

It was interesting, because my family has ties to Carbondale, Pennsylvania, which was a real old coal town. My mother's cousin was the mayor and the only doctor in Carbondale. I remember visiting him once, probably in the 1960s as a teenager and their phonebook was about as thick as a comic book. They talked about how there were underground fires burning there for years. We went back there, Greg and I, maybe four years ago. They're trying to reinvent Carbondale as an arts town. It was really nice, and it had the only five-star hotel I'd ever stayed in. It was amazing. So, that kind of made me feel happy, but the downside was that it started to look like every place else. There were fast food restaurants and all that, and my memory of it was like of nothing being there. [Editor's Note: During the 1940s, a coal mine fire began near Carbondale, Pennsylvania, a major center in the anthracite coal industry, and spread near the town, endangering inhabitants in the 1950s. The underground fires continued to burn for several decades.]

As I mentioned earlier, my daughter Samantha was born when I worked at RE&C. There was no daycare. When she was six months old, I saw that RE&C was advertising, they were ramping up again, so I called and I asked to come back. They hired me back, but they hired me as a job

shopper, which meant I didn't get benefits but I got a higher salary, which was good, because I had to pay for daycare. There were no childcare tax credits or anything like that back then, and since I had health insurance through my husband's job--and since the doctors I went to were colleagues of Danny's father and didn't charge me anyway--I was grateful for the higher salary. So, I went back as a job shopper, making two hundred dollars per week, which, for a twenty-four-year-old back then, was a decent wage. (To put it in perspective, when I was hired initially I was making 170 dollars/week, and my husband, working as a reporter, was making around 135 dollars/week.)

I'm kind of repeating myself here, but when I went back to work, I hired Mary, who had just graduated a nurse's aide class. It was amazing. I didn't know what I was going to do for childcare, but I knew I had to get back to work because I was going crazy at home. I called this agency and Mary had just signed up the day before, so if I had called the day before, I would not have been able to hire her. She was nineteen, and she was worried about finding a job. I was twenty-four, and I was worried about finding childcare. I hired her on the spot. Mary called herself a governess and she wore a white uniform to work every day with a name badge pinned on it. I guess that was how they taught her to be professional looking. She was very young. She was also gorgeous, and her choice had been to either be a model or be a nurse's aide and she chose nurse's aide. People said to me, "How could you hire her? How could you have her in your house? She's drop-dead gorgeous." It never occurred to me. [laughter] I didn't care. It didn't matter. Yes, so, she was really good.

When Samantha got married, she came to Samantha's wedding, and when Mary got married, we went to hers. We're not in touch anymore, but, I mean, for a long time we were. She took great care of Samantha. Once I transferred to Hewitt Robins in Passaic, she sometimes walked Samantha over to Hewitt Robins at lunchtime to meet me. The company CEO, Pat, was impressed by her and told me he was also looking for daycare because his wife was going back to work. When I had to let Mary go because Samantha was starting first grade, Pat hired her and I was glad to have made the placement for her. Mary was like family. I was the co-signer on her car loan. When I think back to it now, I probably paid Mary 100 dollars/week (half my salary), so after taxes, and with no child care credits, she would have been netting more money than me. I only got two weeks' vacation back then; I was still a new employee, so when Sam turned three, Mary was the one who took her to nursery school and it was a rare occasion that I would show up at school, and Samantha would be happy to see me and tell the other kids, "Oh, my mother's here," and the kids would go, "No, she's not. Your mother's a nurse. That's not your mother." [laughter] And Samantha would get really upset. [laughter]

Sam came home from nursery school one day, and she said, "Ma, you know that doctor bag you gave me, well, I can't be a doctor." This little kid in nursery school told her she couldn't be a doctor, that she had to be a nurse and he wanted to take the doctor bag from her. "Who're you going to listen to, a little three-year-old jerk in your nursery school class or your mother?" I asked, trying my best to calm her down. [laughter]

Once Sam was in public school, I tried to find afterschool care. The Girls Club in Clifton--well, later, they combined and became the Boys & Girls Club, but, at that time, there was a separate Girls Club--they were offering childcare, except I couldn't have it, because I earned too much

money. So, they only wanted to provide childcare for people who couldn't afford it. There was no childcare otherwise. I said, "Well, make a sliding scale, and I'll pay you the top of the scale." But I was told that people had to be below a certain income level to qualify, which seemed crazy since no other reliable options existed. It seemed unfair that I should have to quit the job I have that pays me well and get a job that pays me shit so I can have childcare. But, basically, yes, that's what I would have had to do. [Editor's Note: Boys & Girls Clubs of America is a non-profit organization that provides services to children and their families.]

At that time, Danny and I were separated or divorced, so I was a single mother. I was really happy. I was one of the few single mothers who really didn't have any financial problems, but that meant I couldn't have childcare. I mean, it was like kind of weird.

The elementary school would call me if Samantha got in trouble. They wouldn't bother fathers and it had nothing to do with who the custodial parent was or anything like that. One day, I got a call. Samantha got in trouble at school. This was when I was working at Western Electric in Newark. The school called, and they said, "Get to school immediately." I said, "What happened?" "We can't tell you. Get to school." I took a bus to work. If you could imagine what that does, hearing, "We can't tell you." My heart was pounding in my chest. If I had been in a car, I wouldn't have been a very good driver getting to the school, but as it was, I had to wait for a bus. I get to the school, and they tell me Sam had a fight with some kid and threw a piece of fruit in the cafeteria or something. I didn't condone her behavior, but I thought their behavior as adults, calling me and refusing to tell me what was wrong as a way to get me to rush right to school, was worse. I remember I wrote to the Board of Education afterwards. I got apologies, blah, blah, blah, but they would always just call the mother; and rather than treating us like allies in doing what was best for our kids, they treated us like adversaries. Even though Danny was working closer and he had a car, I was the one who was expected to drop everything to get there for something they and I could have easily dealt with together more slowly and with much less panic.

One time, Mary was sick. In all the years she worked for us, I think she took one sick day, and that was it. Mary called me at work and said, "I need to go home early. I'm really not well." I called Danny at work to ask him to go home. He said, "I'll call my mother, or why don't you call my [mother]?" All I remember was, I was talking to his mother and she said, "I can come, but I'll have to leave early. I have an appointment, so you'll still have to come home a little early. I said, "Well, I don't get out until five-fifteen and my bus doesn't get me back home until six, and the way the buses run, I'd probably have to leave very soon. But Danny only works until four and he could be home in fifteen minutes, so he'll only have to leave a half an hour early. So, I'm going to call him and he'll come home." She said to me, "Don't call Danny--his job is important." [laughter] I was earning significantly more than him, but his job was important.

Yet these were the in-laws who, some years later, actually offered to put me through law school. I didn't go. I didn't take that offer, but, I mean, his mother would just say hurtful things at times, but his parents could be so great at others. I mean, on her ninetieth birthday, Danny and I were a long time divorced, but I was still in touch with, his mother. I was at her, I think it was, ninetieth birthday party, and I admired the necklace she was wearing, and she took it off on the spot and

gave it to me. I mean, they were so good and so generous to me and Samantha, but his mother just had this blind spot where her son was concerned. It was really weird.

Back to when Danny and I were married--we're at his parents' house one day and Danny takes his shoe off, and his toe is sticking out of his sock. Well, if I would've taken my shoe off, my toe probably would've been sticking out too. His mother looks at me and she says, "Look at this sock. Why don't you darn his sock?" I said, "He's got two choices. He can throw it out, or he can darn it. I'm not darning his sock." I mean, she'd say things like that constantly. It was just weird, the relationship that she and I had. Once I gave her a night gown as a present. She gave it back, and said, "You should keep it. I know you like it since you're the one who picked it out." Another time she gave me a purse commenting that, "Now you can throw out the *shmata* [rag] you're using." [laughter] Things like that, it was really funny, but yet they were really good to us.

What were some of the other childcare stories? So, Danny was not a very good father. He was a bad father when Samantha was young. Mary would come in the morning. He would drive me to the bus, and he would go to work. So, I'd get to work. He'd get to work. I had a forty-hour week, and I think maybe he had a thirty-five. He would be out earlier than me and have a much quicker trip home. At that time, I think he'd left his job as NJ Sports Editor for Associated Press and he was working in East Orange at Motor Club of America writing travel features, I think. He could be home before five. I didn't get out until five-fifteen, and I wouldn't be home until six. Anyhow, Mary would leave when he got home, so he had to watch Sam for about an hour or hour and a half, something like that until I got home. One day, I came home and Sam was in the bathroom, locked in the bathroom--well, not locked, but she was a baby, she couldn't open the door--she was in the bathroom with the door closed, sitting on the floor crying, because she made in her pants, when he was with her. She was hysterical and I freaked out when I got home and I said, "You can't do this. You cannot put the child crying in the bathroom because you don't want to change her pants." It was insane.

I called his parents and I asked them to come over. I don't know why I did that. That would never be my thing to do nowadays. That would not be my approach, but, for some reason, I did that. So, Danny was angry I called them and said, "Well, I'm going out." He left before his parents arrived. I said, "You know, he closed Samantha into the bathroom today." His mother's answer was, "Well, then you should quit your job." [laughter] "If Danny can't be trusted with Samantha, then if you were a good mother, you would quit your job." I said, "Well, I think the answer would be for him to be responsible." I mean, that was not the support I was looking for, obviously, but I guess it didn't happen again and I continued working. He came home, and I guess that blew over.

I did a lot of things that made me very hard to be married to because I was pissed off by the entire concept of marriage and the pervasive sexism surrounding it. I was also berserk about him being in the National Guard, I was having some kind of--I don't know if it was an OCD episode or a breakdown or what--but I was doing bizarre things that would have made me very hard to live with. But he also did bizarre things. He would be sitting there reading the paper when I got home from work and ask me what I was making for dinner. Then, when Samantha was three or four and he wanted breakfast, he'd say, "Tell your mother to make breakfast and don't stop

asking until she does it." I don't know whether if one of us was different, if things would've been different, but I doubt it. We were both who we were. When Samantha was about five, we separated but then had to wait two years for our no fault divorce. When we separated and later divorced, all I wanted from Danny was to pay for half of Sam's childcare and half of her summer camp. Other than that, I didn't want anything from him.

When we went for the divorce, he had a lawyer. I didn't have a lawyer. His father had a lawyer, who was a friend who represented him. We decided what we wanted beforehand. Danny picked me up at work on the day of the divorce and we went to court together. We sat together. (I don't think his lawyer approved, but we did anyway.) The judge, who happened to be a woman, asked me what I wanted for child support. I said, "I don't want to get any money. As long as he pays for half the camp and he pays for half the daycare, I'm perfectly capable." The judge says, "Well, we can't have that. We have to worry about what's best for the child. We'll leave that open, and at any point, you can come back and ask for child support." I said, "Well, okay, but you won't see me again, but fine." She asked me did I want my name back, and I said, "I already have my name back." She was a progressive divorce judge for those days. After the divorce, Danny and I walked out of the court together and ran through the parking lot singing "Free Again," a Barbra Streisand song. [laughter] I think it was pretty mutual. Once we were divorced, we could become friends again, and on occasion, we'd double date with new partners who found that we enjoyed each other's company so much that they couldn't understand why we had divorced.

To change the subject, one day, Sam and I were going to New York with my mother, when Samantha was maybe six or seven years old. The beginning of this story is on the interview with the Veteran Feminists of America but the show ended before I got to the end. We get on the bus, and my mother sees this man she knows, who happens to just be the husband of one of her friends, but Samantha doesn't know who he is. My mother talks to him briefly. Then, she comes, sits down, and Samantha said to her, "Grandma, does that man work for you?" That made me so proud, because I bet, out of ten thousand little kids, the other 9,999 would have said, "Grandma, do you work for him?" That's when I really felt like I was doing a good job of raising a feminist, because that was a really good question. [laughter]

What other things with Sam? She played softball. The girls' games were always at four o'clock. The boys' games were at six, so the fathers could come. I complained about that to the league in writing. My ex-husband was a coach, but they said I didn't have any say because I didn't go to the meetings. I thought the girls and boys should rotate time slots. It didn't seem fair that to see Sam play, I had to leave work early. The reply I received said, "We've talked about this issue before and it's already been decided," and they would not entertain rotating time slots. They declined to provide the reason.

When Sam played, I would leave work early. I don't know if it was special treatment because I was female, or maybe I was just gutsier because I just felt like I was outside of it anyway, so I really didn't need to play to the white male thing, I don't know. When she would have games, I would just say, "I'm leaving early today." I would walk out. I think maybe if men did it, they would have gotten away with it too, but they didn't do it. My whole life, I never asked; I said, "I have to leave early" and it was never a problem. Sometimes, I wonder if that was like, "Oh,

well, she's a mother," if it was special treatment, or if it was just something that anybody could have had if they would have asked for it.

When I worked for Hewitt Robins, there wasn't any affirmative action issue at that point. They didn't care; they could discriminate if they wanted to. I mean, I guess the laws had been passed, but they were a small company, nobody was looking. It was different when I went to Western Electric, and they had like the biggest women's discrimination lawsuit of all time or something. They were out there just beating the bushes for women engineers. I was recruited by them in 1978. [Editor's Note: For much of its history, Western Electric was a part of AT&T, the telecommunication corporation that in the mid-twentieth century was the largest employer in America. Over the course of the late twentieth century, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) pursued multiple employment discrimination cases against AT&T and Western Electric. Pursuant to an EEOC action against AT&T in 1970, AT&T signed a consent decree agreeing to eliminate discriminatory recruiting, hiring and promotion practices towards women and minorities. *Kyriazi v. Western Electric* (1981) was a class-action lawsuit that alleged a pattern of sex discrimination by Western Electric against women employees at its Kearny, New Jersey facility. The court ruled that Western Electric systematically denied women employment opportunities and ordered monetary payment to the plaintiffs, in addition to the institution of a four-year affirmative action program at Western Electric. The Kyriazi case also established the precedent that individual employers and co-workers can be held liable for sexual harassment.]

The way I see it is, almost every job I've had, I've either had in spite of or because of my gender. It's never like you just have a job because you're good and because you deserve it and because of the interview. It's either, "Well, you're a woman, but we'll take you anyway," or it's, "We need you because you're a female." Gender always really played into it, I feel.

The Bell System companies like Western Electric, before the lawsuits, would have two job classifications for the same job with two different titles, and the women's title would be paid less, even though they were doing essentially the same thing. By the time I came, Western Electric was in a lot of trouble with the government, and they were hiring recruiters to find women engineers. They recruited me. I tell people, when I went for that interview, I could have spat on the interviewer's desk and they would've hired me. I really didn't want to be hired because a company needed to fill a quota. I wanted to be hired because I was great at what I did and had great recommendations. That's why I wanted to be hired.

That didn't really feel good to be an affirmative action hire. Until then, essentially, every white man hired was hired because they were a white man, but nobody looked at it that way. As soon as you're hired because you're a woman, you're hired because you're a woman. There's that famous article, an "O" in the world of "X's" and the author talks about how it feels to be a token woman in the workplace, and it's true. Everything you do, you're representing your whole sex. Besides that, you and everyone else knows you got the job because you're a woman. They don't know how qualified you are or how worthy or smart; all they know is you're female. It's so bizarre, because in the past, white men were only hired because they were white men. All those years, they were there because they were white men, but when I get the job because I'm female, it feels a whole different way. It wasn't the best thing. Even those affirmative action years weren't the best.

The job I was recruited for was as a planning engineer in the Engineering Cost Reduction Department. My job was to evaluate cost-saving proposals submitted by other engineers in the building and to secure funding for those that I determined were feasible and had a good rate of return. My work location was Gateway Two on McCarter Highway in Newark.

Every year, they'd call you into a room, and they'd put up the charts. In case you were feeling like one of group, they would say, "Well, here's the number of women and minorities we hired and promoted. Here's how we're meeting our goals." So, all the guys could think, "Yes, well, that's why I didn't get that promotion." I don't think any of it was good. I also think, and other people seemed to think the same thing too---though it probably wouldn't have been true with women engineers, because you weren't going to get an engineering degree to be a bad engineer--you just weren't--but that they would, in some of the women and minority promotions, they would pick people that they knew would fail, just so they could show that it was a ridiculous thing to have to do, because you'd see somebody get promoted and you'd think, "Yes, why her?" I think that seemed to work for them a while, to promote unqualified people. So, there's a whole lot to question around that process.

Now, those Western Electric years were creepy in their own way. Every job requisition posted, for other than a low-level job (those jobs were already filled almost entirely by women and minorities), had, "This job, underutilized in women and minorities" printed on the bottom. Even that phraseology strikes me as weird, "Underutilized in women and minorities," like we're the prepositional phrase or something. There could have been a better way to say that, perhaps, "Women and minorities finally given preference." which is really what it meant.

At divestiture, Western Electric was dissolved as a separate subsidiary, though the Western Electric brand name continued to be used, and I automatically became an employees of AT&T Technologies-Network Systems. Furthermore, the Northeast Region, of which I was a part, was being merged with Eastern Region, located in Cockeysville (since renamed Hunt Valley), Maryland, and the members of my department had to find new positions in what had been the Bell System and we scattered. [Editor's Note: Divestiture refers to the breakup of AT&T following the antitrust suit *United States v. AT&T*.]

But before we scattered, I ended up with some very good friends in my department at Western. In fact, I'm meeting them for lunch in Newark tomorrow. Divestiture was January 1,1984. It's been thirty-five years since we worked together and I still get together with that group of people every now and then for lunch. It used to be once a year. Now that we're retired, I'm coming in from Massachusetts every couple of months, and a group of us, those who are still alive--we were the young ones back then--still get together. I don't remember why I just digressed there, and I don't know what I was saying before that.

KR: You were talking about Western Electric.

KS: We enjoyed each other's company. Oh, yes--this one guy, Hank, who transferred into the department when I was already there, one day, after we'd become friends, he confided to me, "You know, when I transferred into this department, I was apprehensive, because I'd never been

in a department with a woman before." The idea that he was worried about transferring into a department that was all men, except for me, was just so weird to me. I thought I was the only one who might feel uncomfortable in certain situations. It was funny to hear him say that he was uncomfortable just by having me in the department. It was just weird. It was a kind of an interesting thing for me to mull over.

Our former department secretary, Denise, is the one who arranges these lunches now and keeps us together still, after thirty-five years. She used to tell me how she would go out--she was a lot younger than me, she just turned sixty but she was much younger than us, because when I was thirty, she was, what, eighteen--she said she would go out and tell the guys she met that she was an engineer, because she thought that was cool. I said, "Aw, Denise, that's the last thing you want to say unless you want to get rid of the guy." [laughter] We're still friends. She, subsequently, got her bachelor's degree and became a project manager and got transferred to IBM and she's retired now.

After divestiture, I accepted an assistant manager position across the river, in New York, with what had become AT&T Communications of NY. The office was at 22 Cortlandt Street, across from the World Trade Center. I enjoyed doing cost studies and rate making and designing a marketing database, but I also soon realized that the move from Planning Engineer to SG-5 had been a half-step downgrade and so I had the idea that I needed to get back into engineering. Although the Northeast Region that my department had been part of was gone, the Network Systems Engineering functional planners were still in Gateway. So, I moved back into the functional planning organization, and, for first time, I worked for a woman. Gail was not an engineer, but she was a great supervisor who respected her employees and let us do our jobs. Working for Gail was really great. I felt appreciated for my ability and intelligence, not for satisfying an affirmative action goal. There were only four of us in Gail's department, responsible for Quality Process Management (QPM) for all of Network Systems Engineering. It was a good time in my AT&T career.

Greg and I, after dating for ten years, got married in September 1987 when I was still at the other job in New York. I was newly pregnant when I transferred back to New Jersey in early 1988. Then, several weeks before my due date, on doctor's orders, I went on leave. This time, I had no problem applying for the benefits due me and, once Rachel was born, I took my additional six weeks of disability and collected my full salary, thanks to AT&T's great employee benefits. When I went back, it was annual review time. I remember Gail saying that she really couldn't do too much for me in terms of a salary boost, since the time between when I started and when I went on leave had been short but that she recognized the great job I had done in so short a time. It was true that I didn't put in enough hours to deserve a raise and I was appreciative of her recognition.

While working for Gail, I had discovered that employees in the four regional locations that remained after divestiture (Maryland, Missouri, Chicago and Atlanta) were spending large chunks of time correcting errors made by the ordering systems, and, with Gail's support and enthusiasm, I created a new position for myself identifying these problems and getting them fixed. It was a job in which I knew I could make a difference. Unfortunately, at the beginning of 1989, Gail transferred to a new position at a different AT&T location, and by the end of 1989,

the other three members of my department left the company and our corporate quality organization was disbanded. I was assigned to a new manager who had no idea what my job was and perhaps no idea that I reported to him. It was becoming increasingly apparent that AT&T was in chaos. Jobs existed for the benefit of the employees rather than the other way around, and functions were eliminated for no reason other than that the people performing them took early retirement. AT&T was falling apart. Those of us that were there could see that this company that had been around for about, what was it, like ninety-eight years or something, wasn't going to make it much longer. By 2005, AT&T was gone. They sold their name to what had been Southwest Bell, but the original AT&T that we worked for didn't last long in a deregulated environment. They did crazy, stupid things. [Editor's Note: In 2005, Southwestern Bell, or SBC Communications, Inc., bought its former parent company, the AT&T Corporation, and took over the AT&T branding, calling itself AT&T and using the iconic logo and stock-trading symbol.]

We come back after divestiture. We read the rules and the consent decree and everything, and it clearly says that the telephone companies, the local phone companies, retain the exclusive use of the Bell symbol and name. The next day, AT&T, with fanfare, announces the name of their new consumer division--American Bell. They print up all new letterhead. We're all looking around like, "Did anybody in high places read the part about not using the Bell?" I mean, we're all like, "What the fuck?" I mean, it's like, "These people are getting paid these big bucks." Of course, a couple days later, they realize they can't use Bell, and all of the new stationary goes in the garbage. It was bizarre, it was bizarre. So, things are kind of getting weird after that. You could tell this was a company running amuck.

At one point, they came up with a perfect attendance program for hourly workers that if you had perfect attendance, get ready, you could get fifty dollars or take a day off *without* pay. (Or you could take a sick day and not have perfect attendance and get paid for it.) The hourly people, who had perfect attendance, could take a day off without pay. So, one of the guys in the warehouse said, "Some great deal. You know, I can pee on the warehouse floor and get two days off without pay." [laughter] It was like the craziest thing. You said, "Who are these people and why are they running this company?" I mean, crazy things.

One time, they did a survey, and it came back that people didn't think there was good communications with management, that they needed an open-door policy. They actually took down the door to the hall where the managers offices were. The door disappeared. That was the open-door policy. Another time, they eliminated a salary grade, and this whole group of people who had been SG-5s were now SG-4s or whatever it was. They do this satisfaction survey, and it shows up that the people in that particular grade were unhappier about everything than everybody else and they're like, "And we can't figure out why." They couldn't get that being downgraded is going to make you unhappy about everything. They couldn't comprehend that.

Once Gail left and our department disbanded, it was obvious to me that no one in my organization really knew or cared what I was doing. One year, it comes review time, and I don't get called in for my review. I tell the person I worked for that I haven't had a review and he tells me I don't work for him. As it turned out, nobody, not even the person I reported to, knew who I reported to. [laughter] It turned out that I'd been transferred on paper seven times during that year to people who didn't know I reported to them. So, I just sat there and did projects for a year

and wrote letters, and nobody knew I worked for them. That was a company really run amuck. It was unbelievable, just unbelievable.

At another point, during those years, I had this co-worker, Gary, who shared an office with me in Newark, and an immediate boss, Ken, who liked drinking and going out. Ken was located with the rest of our department in Chicago, and he particularly liked meeting with Gary because when Gary traveled to Chicago to see Ken, Gary could voucher their dinner and drinks and Ken could sign off. It came review time. I was really working hard for Ken, but he had no clue what I was doing because he was in Chicago. He had no idea. When it came to review time, he apparently gave Gary a nice raise but overlooked me, and so I sent an email to his boss, also in Chicago, and complained. Then, his boss, Bob, flies to Newark to talk to me and ends up telling me that somebody has to be average. Everybody can't get bonuses. I said, "Well, that might be true, except that person isn't me."

As I said before, Gail had transferred to another AT&T location. I was sitting at my desk, and I was writing resignation emails to this boss out in Chicago. It was totally non-productive, however, because I wasn't sending them and I wasn't resigning. I ended up contacting Gail and telling her what had transpired. I don't remember what I said to her, and I don't know who she called or what she said, but two days later, Gary and I were suddenly transferred out of that Ken's department and transferred to a manager located in Newark. I was overjoyed. Gary wasn't. That was, to me, the best and only example I'd ever had at AT&T of an old-girl network in action. She knew exactly what was going on, and I think I know who she called. I can almost hear this conversation. I can make it up in my head, and I was out of there, working for someone else who was located in the building with me.

I remember asking one of my bosses for a promotion to senior engineer. His answer was that I was not a subject-matter expert in anything, but in the meantime, I really was. He just didn't know it, because the people I supported were in other regions and my bosses didn't know what I was doing most of the time.

Now going back to the late 1970s or early 1980s, before divestiture, and shortly after I was hired, one of the people I'm having lunch with Friday, Stan, joined Western Electric right out of college. It was unusual for Western to hire people from other jobs (unless, like me, you were an affirmative action hire). They wanted to get you right out of school and indoctrinate you into the Bell System culture, because the Bell System actually did have a culture of its own, and people who started there right out of college worked there forever. (Scott Adams, the creator of *Dilbert*, worked for Pacific Telephone, and his characters and comic strip ring true (no pun intended) for anyone who ever worked in the Bell System.)

Anyhow, Stan joined the company straight from college as a "buck" engineer. Then, after a probationary year, he became a planning engineer like me. So, it used to be that when you were hired, you came in at the bottom of the salary curve and you worked your way up, and when I got hired, I also came in at the bottom of the salary curve, but without a probationary period because of my previous work history.

Anyhow, I guess to be competitive with other big companies recruiting engineering graduates, Western Electric decided they were going to automatically raise the salaries of probationary engineers to the mid-point on the salary curve after probation. Now, all of a sudden, Stan, with no prior outside engineering experience gets roughly a twenty-five percent raise and is earning a significant amount more than I am, although I joined the company with eight years of engineering experience.

Of course, Stan was ecstatic when he got the news, and although we generally did not discuss salaries with each other, he shared the good news. Since most of the others in the department were "old timers," they were happy for Stan. I said, "Whoa, Stan, you're kidding me. That's not fair!" And Stan agreed. I went to the EPR, the Engineering Personnel Representative (who ironically years later became my last manager at AT&T and the one who finally got me promoted), and I said, "You know, this thing you just did with engineering salaries is really screwing the people, like me, that came in with experience," though I can't imagine that there were more than one or two of us affected, probably just anyone else like me recruited to meet a female hiring quota--although, the following year, I ended up handing in Greg's resume and he also got hired, but at this point it wasn't a lot of people. The engineering representative says to me, "I'm sure that's not right. We wouldn't do that." But when he looked up my personnel file, he saw I was right. That was one thing about that company, it had zillions of management levels, but within a couple of days of bringing the salary issue to the right person's attention, my salary was raised. It was like a twenty, twenty-five percent increase. I mean, it was big. So, channels existed and the company was responsive if, in fact, you were alert enough to call them out on things. I guess they were pretty concerned about that, maybe even more so because I was female, and I could've been the only one that was impacted, because they didn't usually hire people with experience.

Here's another example of upper management responsiveness, this time at the end of my career when the company was already falling apart. When AT&T offered an early retirement package in the mid-1990s because they needed to downsize, and they were offering either to pay your relocation expenses or expenses to retrain for a different job up to ten thousand dollars, I wrote a letter to the CEO, because I was always writing letters to people. It was just what I did. I didn't always expect answers. Even though I hadn't even decided if I wanted to leave the company, I wrote a letter to Bob Allen, the CEO of AT&T (who was later bought out of his contract for more money than most people see in a lifetime). I wrote that some of us don't want to move and we're too old to retrain, but we'd like to start a small business, so how about ten thousand dollars for that? I was speechless when I got a call from Bob Allen's secretary saying, "Yes, Mr. Allen agrees with you. We're going to make that a part of the plan." They reissued the package description, adding an offer of ten thousand dollars to start a business. I took it. I tried starting a feminist referral service, the Feminist Network; ultimately, it didn't work. But no matter, in that respect, it was amazing how much impact one employee could have on corporate policy! You could get right to the top. That was pretty cool.

In the meantime, at the same time, you could work for seven people in one year, who didn't know you worked for them. [laughter] You could play Mine Sweep for months on end in your cubicle. Then, you could have a boss who doesn't give you a raise, because he likes drinking with your co-worker. Rumor had it that one executive got fired for vouchering his daughter's

wedding reception and I think another figured out a way to get a free addition to his house. He, too, got fired. But if a lower-level person did something a little bad, they might get promoted to another department. It was really weird. You could get awarded for malfeasance or doing a bad job, because, if there was another job opening you wanted, your boss was really quick to let you go. When I worked at Hewitt Robins, I used to think. "Boy, craziness like this could only happen in a small company." Then, when I went to AT&T, I realized, "The bigger the company, the bigger the crazy." It was amazing.

In '78, I started at Western Electric, and divestiture was midnight on New Year's, 1984. So, that was six years after I was hired. By then, I'd felt like I worked there forever, but then I put in another thirteen years. I had promised myself that I wouldn't leave AT&T without first receiving what I saw as a well-deserved and long overdue promotion, so the year before I left, I put together a binder containing exhaustive documentation of accomplishments, many of which I achieved for the external organizations I supported without the direct knowledge of my supervisors (some who didn't even know I reported to them). At that point, I was reporting to Bob (who had been the Engineering Personnel Representative who had gotten me the salary adjustment years before). He had a daughter in management at AT&T and so was sensitive and sympathetic to the workplace discrimination women faced. He took the accomplishment binder I'd prepared and fought for my promotion, and at long last, after eighteen years with the company, I was promoted. Unfortunately, since I resigned shortly after, the salary increase accompanying the promotion had little effect on the amount of my deferred pension.

I planned to stay until I became eligible for a non-deferred pension, but then when the voluntary buyout was offered, rumors, even though they were giving people voluntary buyout packages, the rumors were that AT&T was going to keep increasing the years required for retirement eligibility. Well, I guess that makes sense; in a way, it makes sense. They were going to make the years to retirement longer, not because they wanted people to work longer, but because they wanted people to leave, rather than hanging on for an increasingly distant goal. So, at that point, I figured, "Yes, if I could be pension eligible in a year, maybe I'd stay, but if they're really going to raise it, and since Bob Allen changed the plan at my request, I'm going to get out." Although when I left for work that morning, I still hadn't made up my mind, at lunchtime on the last day to accept the offer, I handed in my resignation. Those of us who left the company as part of that buyout never got to say our goodbyes or taste our farewell cake at goodbye parties scheduled for the afternoon of our last day because of a snow storm that resulted in us being sent home early! (The rumor about retirement turned out to not be true.)

Greg started at Western Electric a year after me, and by the time he left Lucent (an AT&T spinoff) a couple years later, they were offering everybody over fifty with twenty years of service immediate full pension without penalty. It was such a good deal for him and a bad one for me since I wasn't pension eligible until I was sixty-five. It turned out my decision was a costly one.

It was funny how Greg got hired. About a year after I started at Western Electric, I handed Greg's resume in to Human Resources, and to both our surprise, he was called for an interview. At the time, I really wasn't thinking about it, and a job had opened up in a department next to mine and I had said I was interested in that job. He and I were just dating at this point. We had

met at Hewitt Robins. We started dating at Hewitt Robins, and then he went to Singer and I went to AT&T. Then, Singer was closing or laying off or whatever, so I handed in his resume, and the next thing I know, he's sitting in my boss's office interviewing for my job, because they think I'm going to the other department, since they're going to give me the transfer I wanted. When I saw Greg being interviewed by my boss, I said to myself, "Oh, this isn't good. I don't want him coming in with all my friends and being there." So, I rescinded my transfer request, and he got the job in the next department. That was really weird. As a matter of fact, after he finished with his interview, I went into my boss's office and I said, "You know …" What was his name? Ben. I said, "You know, Ben, that guy you just interviewed, I actually know him and he would be much better off in that other department, so I'll stay here." [laughter] I didn't tell him that we were dating or any of that.

Here are a few additional insights about AT&T's relationship with women, I'd like to share. AT&T tried to look like a champion for women. When a woman at one of the manufacturing locations started a group called Women of AT&T, the company loved the idea and threw money at the organization for an annual conference, golf-style shirts, and encouraged establishment of local chapters. I started a local chapter at Gateway in Newark and attended the first annual conference in Chicago at my organization's expense. (I only attended one conference because I left the company before the second conference was held.) When our chapter planned Taking Our Daughters To Work Day celebrations, we, too, were given freedom to do whatever we chose and as much money as we needed to do it.

Sometime after divestiture, upper management found a nifty way to fix their utilization numbers by merging IT (information technology) and engineering. Because there were significant numbers of women in IT, when the engineers and programmers were lumped together and reclassified as members of the technical staff, it made the shortage of women engineers harder to notice.

Even those men who supposedly championed women in the technical workforce didn't get it on any but a superficial level. Here's an example. Every year before the merger of engineering with IT, the company would host a series of events for Engineers Week (which is the week of George Washington's birthday), but once the two groups merged, AT&T included the IT employees in the celebration, meaning that for the first time there were more than one or two women included. The speaker at the first combined gathering was less than memorable, except for one part of his talk I'll never forget. He told us how, from hearing his wife talk about her career, he understood how much harder it is for women to get ahead. But he then told us that, judging from his wife, even if women have to work twice as hard as men, it's okay because we're easily up to the challenge. This speaker apparently thought that patronizing and flattering the women programmers and engineer (me) in his audience would compensate for the admitted discrimination we faced. (Imagine telling a minority male that he'll have to work twice as hard to get ahead, but it's okay.)

Now, let me get back to motherhood, Rachel was born in 1988. I decided all the things I didn't have time to do with Samantha, because of only having two weeks' vacation, I was going to do with her and we were much more active in feminist things. Actually, my NOW Chapter had been slipping in membership all those years. Shortly after Rachel was born, we had a big

chapter reconvening and a big celebration to bring more people in. When I first joined NOW, it was after Samantha was born. I think there was something about having a baby that made me feel the need to really get back to NOW. So, we had this party. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) is an organization devoted to achieving full equality for women through education and litigation. Karen Spindel participated as a member and organizer in the Passaic County Chapter of NOW.]

Rachel and I would write a lot of the letters, when she was little. We wrote to Fruit of the Loom to ask them why they only had Power Ranger underpants for boys and only Lamb Chop underpants for girls [laughter], because that's what the commercial said. They wrote back and told us, no, in fact, they really did have Power Ranger underpants for girls. I guess they just didn't think they should advertise them. They sent us a pack, which was nice, but they also sent us Lamb Chop panties, because they wanted to make sure we understood that Rachel needed to have Lamb Chop underpants too. Of course, the Power Ranger underpants for boys were in really bright colors and the girls' were pastel.

Then, we'd go to Nathan's Famous, and Rachel sees that all the little Frankster characters are boys except for a tennis player and a cheerleader. So, we had to write to Nathan's. She was little. We'd write it together and we'd tell Nathan's that they needed some more girl characters. Then, we got a reply from Nathan's saying they were reevaluating their Frankster line. I don't know if they ever did or not. [Editor's Note: Franksters were figurines released by Nathan's Famous.]

We also wrote to McDonald's about their kid's meals. We'd go up in the car, if you were at the drive-thru and order a kid's meal, and they'd go, "Boy or girl?" They still do it.

KR: They still do it.

KS: I'd say, "No, you tell us what the toys are, we'll tell you what you want." That would work in the car, but it was different at the counter. One time Rachel went up to the counter, and they handed her this white doll. She looks at me and she says, "I want the other toy." So, the woman gives her the black doll. So, I said, "No, she doesn't want the black doll or the white doll. She wants the other toy." So, the counter worker says, "Oh you mean the boys' toy." So, I said, "Well, if you give it to Rachel, Rachel's a girl, so then it'll be a girls' toy. She wants the other toy." But they never got it. So, we wrote a letter to the corporate headquarters, and they totally didn't get it either. They totally didn't get it, because basically what they said is, "No, of course, a girl can have the boys' toy." [laughter] I mean, they didn't get that it's not a boys' toy and not a girls' toy. It's a doll and it's a car or it's whatever it is and that they should stop making the choices for the kids. That went right over their head.

Of course, there was also Toys "R" Us, back in the day, with the girls' toys and the boys' toys, so we'd send a letter. Sometimes, I wrote as me, but sometimes I wrote on behalf of the NOW chapter on our letterhead. Toys "R" Us eventually did change. I think they were sued. Ultimately, they did change it. In my letter, I requested, "Instead of telling your customers who should shop in which aisle, why don't you tell them what's in the aisle? Then, our kids can decide if they want to go in that aisle, so put dolls and cars, and identifiers like that." Ultimately,

they did that. That was a big victory, whether it was part of the lawsuit or what. I mean, we knew letter didn't do it, but it changed. Have you been in a Toys "R" Us lately? Well, they're out of business now.

KR: Yes.

KS: Right. Before they went out of business, I went to the Toys "R" Us on Route 3 in Totowa and they still called the aisles "dolls" and "cars," but the doll signs were in pink and the car signs were in blue. They figured out a new way to still tell people who should shop where.

Even things that we thought were fixed, everything is just backsliding and/or backfiring. I don't think we accomplished anything much. I just read an article about Me Too, that the Me Too Movement, while maybe it's ended sexual harassment, men are reluctant to hire women again, because they don't want to deal with the problems, which was second wave stuff. It's happening all over again. It's like Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, when she wrote *Backlash*. This is backlash, again. [Editor's Note: Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (1991) argues that the media distorts news about women, in effect creating a backlash against women.]

KR: Let's go back.

KS: Yes.

KR: How did you first get involved in the Passaic County NOW Chapter?

KS: I got out of college. We lived for a couple of months, my husband and I, in Passaic. I'm thinking it through. Then, we moved to Irvington. We lived in Irvington for two years. Then, we moved to Passaic again. I don't even know if I knew there was a National Organization for Women (NOW). Well, yes, I guess I did, because there was that big women's march in 1970, the one with the slogan, "Don't iron while the strike is hot." I knew it was going on, and I thought about going. I didn't go, and to this day, I think, "Why didn't I go?" More than Woodstock, I think about, "Why didn't I go to that march?" but I didn't. Then, I found out somehow, maybe in the paper, that there was a NOW Chapter about half a mile away from my home, and I couldn't get there fast enough. [Editor's Note: The Woodstock music festival occurred from August 15-18, 1969 on a dairy farm in Bethel, New York. On August 26, 1970, NOW activists organized the "Women's Strike for Equality" on the fiftieth anniversary of women's suffrage. Approximately fifty thousand women marched in New York City, and another 100,000 people participated in demonstrations across the nation. "Don't iron while the strike is hot" was one of the slogans of the rally.]

I joined, I went, I really loved it. It was like I waited for that one hour a week, and it was a place, at that point, where you could effect change. I had tried to get a library card at the Passaic Public Library. Who thinks that's going to be a problem? The library application had spots for "title," "first name," "last name," etcetera, but then under "first name," it says, "Married women use husband's first name." So, I went in, and I said, "I'm not going to do that. I'm going to give you my first name." The library director said I wasn't going to get a library card.

I went back to the NOW meeting, and we marched on Passaic Library and demanded that we should be able to get library cards with our own first names. I mean, the only requirement to having a library card is proving that you live in a city. You don't have to have an income, nothing. We got every crazy answer about why he couldn't do that from the library director who, of course, while all librarians were women, the director was, of course, a man, because that's how you rose to the top. If you were a man, and you went into a traditionally female profession, you just zipped right to the top, unlike a woman who went into a male profession and just stayed at the bottom.

Anyway, so, he said, they couldn't do that because, "What if they used your first name and what if your husband's mother had the same name?" I mean, crazy things; if your husband's mother had the same name as you, they wouldn't be able to differentiate between you and your husband's mother, but if your husband had the same name as his father, they could because then he would be a junior. I mean, this guy went on with this crazy stuff. We just weren't going to leave. I think it came to closing time and he finally just wanted to go home, so he gave in. [laughter] I got my library card but not without a fight, not without a big fight.

When Danny and I married and I called the phone company to get a phone (they were rented from the local phone company--New Jersey Bell--back then) and to establish service, they asked me if my husband had had phone service before. My husband hadn't, but I said that I had had a phone at GW. The agent again asked me, "Has your husband had phone service?" and I reiterated, "No, but I have." So, they said, "We don't care about you. You're your husband's responsibility now and you were father's responsibility then, so what you had doesn't matter." Because Danny hadn't had prior service, we had to put down a deposit. I remember saying, "Never mind, I don't want a phone," and I just hung up on them. I think somebody else, probably Danny, called back and agreed to the deposit because I refused to talk to them with that crazy rule. Just more and more things like that would pile on. Anyhow, I'm jumping all over, because we were talking about the Passaic County Chapter of NOW. Oh, well, but stuff like this was why I got involved. So, the library card action was one of the early actions our NOW Chapter did.

It was interesting because NOW was pretty new, so we would have consciousness-raising weekends at the state level. It was interesting how different levels of--I mean, we all, obviously, considered ourselves feminists, but we all had different awareness and we were attuned to different things, I think, and some people, much more than others. I remember, actually, not at a consciousness-raising but at one of our NOW meetings, when one of the women found out that I was an engineer, she said, "Well, I don't think women should be engineers, because my husband is an engineer, and as soon as women get into a field, it's going to bring down the salaries." Well, I don't think that's happened with enough women becoming engineers to this day to bring down the salaries. [laughter] One of our members was having an affair with the chapter president's husband. It was a lot of stuff. In my memoir, I refer to us as a *Peyton Place* chapter of NOW, because there was all this crazy stuff going on, but we were finding our way. [Editor's Note: Grace Metalious wrote the 1956 novel *Peyton Place*, which was made into a film and a

day-time soap opera airing on ABC in the 1960s. The book and adaptations explore the scandalous, salacious goings-on in a New England town.]

I remember, at a NOW-NJ weekend consciousness-raising meeting I attended, we had this huge discussion because people, obviously, didn't like being called "my girl," like when your male boss says, "Oh, I'll give it to my girl" (when referring to his secretary). We were debating whether it was just the "girl" that was offensive or also the "my." Women were saying, "No, it's the 'my,' it's the 'my' too. It's about possession." So, I said, "But, if I say I'm going to my doctor, my doctor doesn't care." I said, "I don't think it's the 'my.'" So, we would actually discuss how important the "my" was versus the "girl," and we were all going through this. Those consciousness-raising sessions, it's amazing how many people still need those today. I mean, we didn't really accomplish enough.

KR: For the record, can you just explain what a consciousness-raising meeting was? Who organized it?

KS: This one was organized by NOW-New Jersey, I believe, and I went with women from our Passaic County Chapter, though there must have been other participants as well. I don't remember where it was, but I remember that I was having an asthma attack. It was an overnight event and I had to sit in a chair all night because I was coughing. I have no idea what city we were in, what building we were in. I remember Skip Drumm, who's still active in NOW, New Jersey NOW, I think, maybe she was facilitating. It was just bringing women together to help us actually raise our consciousness about sexism, because a lot of people, a lot of women weren't aware--and it's sad to say that a lot of women still aren't. I mean, when you think fifty-three percent of white women voted for Donald Trump, oh, my God, shoot me now. We talked about different issues, about whether it was flattering to be whistled at when you walked past a construction site, stuff like that, and just the different perspectives, and allowing women to maybe, to an extent, vent about some of it. It was a long time ago.

The sadness is, as I'm working on my memoir, I'm writing about things, I'm realizing that they're not much different today. They're really not much different. The feminists are still there, and a lot of us are old. There are young feminists now, but there's still this huge majority of women, like there was then, who are totally clueless.

For me, I live in Northampton, Massachusetts now, and that's part of the reason why. When my daughter was at Smith and I was up there visiting, I said, "Wow, this (a feminist utopia) really exists." The sign on the municipal parking garage says, "Welcome to Northampton, where the coffee is strong and so are the women, and the first hour in this garage is always free." [laughter] We have a rainbow crosswalk downtown. I tell my friends from New Jersey, my NOW friends from New Jersey, "You have to come visit me. It's like living in a NOW Chapter." [laughter] So, it's just amazing. Smith College is there, and the book *Feminists Who Changed America*, FWCA, is archived there. Actually, the Morris County NOW TV show, New Directions for Women, is archived there at Smith, too. I was so proud to be included in those couple of things that were in that Sophia Smith Collection. [Editor's Note: The Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History at Smith College Libraries is a repository of manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, periodicals and other primary sources related to women's history. *Feminists Who*

Changed America, edited by Barbara Love, documents the experiences of activists and leaders who participated in the second wave feminist movement. Karen Spindel's profile is featured in the work. Barbara Love is on the board of the Veteran Feminists of America, and her oral history resides in the Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, in the Sophia Smith Collection. The Morris County TV shows refer to "New Directions for Women," an interview program, conducted by Morris County NOW and housed in the Sophia Smith Collection.]

As I said before, my youngest daughter and I wrote a lot of letters. She would go to a Clifton event or there'd be a grab bag or something, and the teacher would say, "Bring a three-dollar gift for the Christmas grab bag that's good for anyone." So, a gift would show up, and it would say, "For a boy." One such gift was shaped like a football, so Rachel kind of knew what it was. It was a Nerf football, not a surprise. Rachel wants that one, and to the teacher's credit, this time--because it wasn't always that way--the teacher said, "It says for boy, but you want it, Rachel?" She said, "Yes." She let Rachel have it. Other years, teachers probably would've taken it away and told her she couldn't have that one, sometimes separating the gifts into a girls' box and a boys' box.

In Clifton, the Boys & Girls Club is a great organization. They'd have great children's events and everything, but then it would be sad. You'd leave and they'd hand the girls a doll and they'd hand the boys a set of plastic golf clubs or something. I knew Rachel always wanted the other toy. We would always be returning these things. They weren't worth a lot, but I'd say to her, "You don't have to have that." We [were] constantly returning these gendered gifts that people decided she should have.

I was often writing to the Board of Education. In kindergarten, the kids in Rachel's class had to color in a worksheet. It was "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater." Think about the words. "Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater. Had a wife and couldn't keep her. Put her in a pumpkin shell and there he kept her very well." The kids had to draw a pumpkin shell with Peter's wife in it [laughter] in kindergarten. I was always complaining. They hated me; I know they did.

At Rachel's Junior Honor Society induction at Christopher Columbus Middle School in Clifton, they had five pre-written speeches (from the NJHS handbook) and they picked, I think, three girls and two boys to read them. They all used only male nouns and pronouns. Rachel told me that, although she knew about the speeches beforehand and she knew I would be angry, she didn't tell me because she didn't want to upset me beforehand. After the program, I called the Junior National Honor Society and I said, "Your guide is terrible. Why is it so sexist?" They said, "Well, I think that we changed that in the ‘40s." [laughter] So, I think Clifton was using a book from God knows when. So, I also called the NJHS advisor at the school and asked why she hadn't changed the male nouns and pronouns in the speeches read by girls. She told me that she considered it, but they just didn't have time. (How many years does it take?) Then, I talked to the superintendent of schools, Dr. Rice, about it and offered to buy the school a new guide, but he said he'd take care of it. I don't know if they ever did or didn't. At some point, you do what you can, but there's so much of this.

Now, let's backup to the superintendent of schools. The Clifton Board of Ed started a community relations committee, and so they invited community members to join. It was

sometime during the 1990s when Clifton was becoming very ethnically, religiously and racially diverse, having previously been a very white Christian community, often either disparagingly or lovingly--depending who you talked to--referred to as lily white Clifton. When I attended Kindergarten there in 1952-'53, I think I was the only Jew in my elementary school, but it was becoming very diverse by the time Rachel got there. It was really nice. I mean, Clifton High School had some incredible number of first languages spoken, something like maybe eighty first languages by the parents of the kids in the high school. It was really amazing. They started this community relations thing and I thought that was good, but I also felt they were insensitive, totally insensitive, to gender issues and sex issues and all that. So, we said that NOW wanted a seat on that committee too in hopes of spreading some of this new diversity awareness to gender issues. Oh, my God, it was like [a negative reaction].

Taking our Daughters to Work Day was coming, so the superintendent promises, at one of our monthly meetings, that participating at a parents' workplace would not count as a student absence. TODTWD was usually the week that Clifton schools were on break, but this year it was coming and it wasn't falling on a break day. So, the superintendent said this year, he would send an email to all the Clifton public schools, telling principals to let the kids go and not mark them absent. However, when I notify Rachel's elementary school principal that she's going to be out, he says, "Well, you know, that's an unexcused absence." I said, "No, didn't you get the email from the superintendent?" He hadn't. The superintendent never sent it. He just lied at the meeting, and there were never minutes from these meetings. There weren't allowed to be minutes. They wouldn't distribute minutes. So, I called my press contact (I think he was a reporter at the *Bergen Record*), and he did a story about the broken promise. He also wanted to attend and cover the next meeting. However, when he called the superintendent's office and said he would like to come to the next meeting, he was told that if he showed up, they were going to cancel the meeting. There was all of this "good" stuff.

At another meeting, I mentioned something about how it was pretty common practice around the high school for kids, when they don't like something a kid's doing, to call them gay, and how that's not a good idea. You don't have kids say, "Oh, you're so gay" to each other. So, the president of the Board of Education defended the practice saying said, "No, that's okay because the kids don't mean anything by it."

My younger daughter took extracurricular wrestling at the high school when she was a kid. She was the only girl. We'd hear the wrestling coach tell one of the boys, "You're wrestling like a girl." So, I brought that up as well, and the president of the Board of Education, a woman by the way, this time says, "Well, I'm a gym teacher and that's perfectly okay, because everybody knows that boys are naturally stronger and better at sports than girls." So, I talked about these issues at a NOW meeting and heard complaints about sexism in the schools from other Clifton NOW members as well.

I told the superintendent, "There's a lot of gender bias in the high school. We're hearing it from the kids. Passaic County NOW is volunteering to create a survey for distribution in Clifton High School." He said that if we prepared a survey, the high school would distribute it. When he told us to prepare a survey, though we didn't know it at the time, that was his way of saying, "We're going to put this on you, because you're probably not going to do it and that will put the issue to

bed," except we (two other NOW members and I) actually prepared a survey. We put a lot of time into it. When we presented it to him, he was unhappy we actually did it and refused to distribute it, saying outside surveys were prohibited in the schools, which, because of outside surveys my daughter would bring home from school, I knew not to be true. Another lie, and total disrespect for our time. He would give people exercises to do to get them to go away, and if we did them, he'd refuse to follow through.

Well, by the time Rachel, who is seventeen-and-a-half years younger than Samantha, was in Clifton Little League, some things had changed. I think some girls' games may have been at night. The girls weren't playing softball in shorts anymore. They were wearing long pants, so that did change. That was the one thing. One day, at a Little League event, I met a woman who asked me, "You know why Clifton has a girls' softball league? When I was young, I wanted to play baseball and they decided it was better to start a whole girls' league, rather than let me play on a boys' team." She said, "That's why they did it, not because they wanted to do anything for girls."

Then, Rachel's friend, her best friend, Alex, was a boy and he was playing baseball, so she wanted to be with him. They had been together in T-ball and I am strongly opposed to purposefully separating kids by sex at a young age. We tried to sign her up for baseball to be on his team, and the person doing the sign-ups said, "No, she has to sign up for softball." By then, I don't think we had a leg to stand on, because Clifton did offer comparable programs for boys and girls, but my husband or I, one of us, said to them, "Okay, well, we'll have our lawyer call you," and Rachel was in baseball immediately. [laughter]

Rachel and Alex's team was sponsored by Givaudan, then located on Delawanna Avenue in Clifton. They were like the Bad News Bears. The boys on the team and the parents had no problem with Rachel being on the team. They were the shittiest team, not just her, all of them. When the other teams would play them, you'd hear the other team's parents in the stands whispering, "Oh, they're playing the team with the girl," but not in a bad way, it was just like a novelty. Well, they were so bad that I don't think they won a game. I don't think they won a game.

Then, the league decided that they weren't going to base the championship on standings. It was just going to be that all the teams were going to play for the championship. Somehow, I don't know what happened, they won the first game. They ended up winning the championship, because each of the other teams saved their good pitchers for their other games, and when they played Givaudan, our players were facing pitchers who couldn't pitch and they walked a lot so we kept winning. [laughter] It was great. This team that never won a game during the season won the league championship. I wrote a letter to the editor of the weekly paper. They titled it something like "Bad News Bears Comes to Clifton," the idea being that if this happened in a movie, this story, nobody would've believed it because it was too ridiculous. We couldn't believe it either, but they were actually the champions. It was amazing. It was great. [Editor's Note: *The Bad News Bears* is a 1976 comedy film about a youth baseball team, the Bears, comprised of the worst players in the league, that start to win games after a young woman joins the team as the pitcher.]

Givaudan was in Clifton's Southern Division. If you were in Clifton and you had to come up with a flag for Southern Division, what do you think you would pick? [laughter] Somehow, they thought a Confederate flag would be a good idea. There was always something sexist or racist in play. During the years that Greg was coaching, he was going to the meetings. I think I asked him to ask about the choice of flag, and their answer was, "We've had this conversation before," just like they did with the other one about, "We're going to play early. We've had this conversation before." They did it with the flag. "We've had this conversation before, and we're not changing it." If it wasn't something, it was something else.

Now back to the superintendent, when he finally retired after forty-three years in the Clifton School System, and a reporter ask him what the highlights of his career were, his choice of one of his proudest moments was that in the early 1990s when local demographics changed dramatically in Clifton and some Arab boys didn't "take orders" from women, including teachers, he had female staff trained to relate to the kids. Instead of teaching the kids that you don't disrespect women, his best accomplishment was teaching the women teachers how to be okay with the kids disrespecting them. He didn't say it that way. He said it in a different way that, on the surface, sounded maybe okay, but when you pealed back the layers, that sure sounds like what he was saying. That his proud moment, was teaching women teachers that it was okay to be disrespected. Had these same students declined to take orders from their male teachers I feel pretty certain the response would not have been cultural tolerance and training for the men.

KR: Can we take a quick break?

KS: Yes, yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on. You were talking about major issues that you addressed, both with your daughters and through letter writing and campaigning, and then also issues you addressed as a member of Passaic County NOW. I wanted to ask you a few more questions to follow up on the major issues. What do you remember about the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment in the mid-1970s? [Editor's Note: Alice Paul introduced the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1923. In 1972, Congress passed the ERA as a constitutional amendment guaranteeing equal rights regardless of sex. The first of three sections stated, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The next step was for three-fourths of the fifty states, or thirty-eight states, to ratify the ERA by March 1979. By mid-1973, twenty-eight states ratified the amendment. In 1978, Congress extended the deadline to 1982, and the ERA fell three states short of the thirty-eight states necessary to achieve ratification by that deadline. No amendment prior to the twentieth century had a time limit set on the ratification process. In the 1990s, ERA proponents began the "three-state strategy," advocating that existing ratifications remain legally viable and that Congress has the power to adjust or repeal the previous time limit on the ERA and determine whether state ratifications subsequent to 1982 are valid. Five states have rescinded ratification. Nevada and Illinois ratified the ERA in 2017 and 2018, respectively, with Virginia ratifying the amendment in 2020 in disputed legislative actions.]

KS: I'm trying to separate the ERA and the ERA extension from the New Jersey ERA in my mind. The National ERA was ratified by New Jersey, but the state ERA was defeated. [Editor's Note: New Jersey ratified the ERA on April 17, 1972.]

KR: Yes.

KS: There wasn't much one could do to push for ratification of the National ERA, unless you were willing to go to an unratified state. The president of our NOW chapter back then, Rita O'Connor, did go to Illinois and rang doorbells there. It unfortunately didn't make a difference. [Editor's Note: During the ratification phase of the Equal Rights Amendment, Illinois did not ratify the ERA before the 1982 deadline. In 2018, Illinois became the thirty-seventh state to ratify the ERA. Given the controversy over the extension of the ratification process, the ERA has not been ratified to date.]

When the NJ ERA vote was coming up, another chapter member, Linda Mauro, and I set up speaking engagements. People were surprised to hear that the word "toilet" was nowhere in the amendment. [laughter] We'd be asked, "What's this about the toilets? What's this about bathrooms?" The two issues that caused the most opposition to the ERA seemed to be, thanks to Phyllis Schlafly and her crew, public bathrooms and the draft, but the draft was not an issue in the state amendment because the draft is federal. So, I guess in New Jersey, it was all about bathrooms. People were just all crazed about men and women sharing bathrooms. It's interesting, because in and around Northampton now, some of the bathrooms will just say, "Urinals," "No Urinals." Wherever you want to go, you can go. It just says, "Urinals" and "No Urinals." [Editor's Note: Phyllis Schlafly was a lawyer and conservative author who led the campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment, arguing that the amendment would rob women of gender-specific benefits, such as separate restrooms for women and men and exemption from the draft.]

KR: Yes, sure, I will pause it.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on. You were talking about Phyllis Schlafly.

KS: We would speak about the ERA, and people would ask all these questions. When it was defeated in New Jersey, I couldn't believe it, but, you know, New Jersey had also voted against women's suffrage, so I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. I remember when marriage equality came up, and there was a discussion, much more recently, the largest gay rights organization in New Jersey, the one in Montclair, Garden State Equality, specifically didn't want it on the ballot because it's apparently never good to let New Jerseyans vote. [laughter] It's never a good thing. [Editor's Note: In 1915, New Jersey voters rejected women's suffrage in a referendum. On November 4, 1975, voters in New Jersey went to the polls to decide on the legislatively-referred constitutional amendment to bar discrimination on the basis of sex. The state equal rights amendment was defeated, with 868,061 voting against the ballot initiative and 828,290 voting in favor. When discussion of legalizing marriage equality arose in the New Jersey Legislature in 2012, then Governor Chris Christie threatened to veto such a measure and

let the issue be decided by voters through a referendum, which never occurred. Christie did, in fact, veto New Jersey's marriage equality law, but the N.J. Superior Court ruled in *Garden State Equality v. Dow* (2013) that the state must recognize same-sex marriages.]

It's interesting because all these years later, I looked at something that said that New Jersey's Constitution has a guarantee of equality for sex. I actually called the state. I made some calls. I might have called Rutgers; I don't remember. I called the state libraries. I called a few places, and I asked, "Can you tell me since when New Jersey has equal rights in its constitution, since voters voted down the amendment in the 1975? How come they have it now?"

Basically, they referred me to a clause that was added to the New Jersey Constitution in 1947 (the year I was born), that gives men and women equal rights. So, I've been questioning why we voted for a state ERA in 1975. Why did we give the voters the chance to vote it down when it was already there? I can't get an answer. Do you have an answer for that? [Editor's Note: In the 1940s, the League of Women Voters led the campaign for a new constitution in New Jersey. At that point, the state constitution dated back to 1844. Between June and September 1947, a convention of delegates from each county met at Rutgers University to draft the Constitution of New Jersey 1947. Of the eighty-one delegates at the constitutional convention, eight were women. The constitution does not contain an explicit equal rights clause for women, but the word "person" not "man" is used in the text and there is a clause that applies to sex. Article X, Section 4 states, "Wherever in this Constitution the term ‘person', ‘persons', ‘people' or any personal pronoun is used, the same shall be taken to include both sexes." The clause is widely considered to be a guarantee of equal rights to women. (See "Our History" by Fernanda Perrone, Luis Franco and Michele Gisbert on the website of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey and also "Third Time is the Charm for New Jersey's State Constitution" by Jodi Miller, from *Constitutionally New Jersey*.)]

KR: Actually, I researched the same thing and came up with the exact same thing.

KS: Yes, it's kind of like weird, right? All of a sudden, they decided it's there. You never got a concrete answer.

KR: No.

KS: Yes. Well, anyway, so we went and we spoke at a few places about that, the proposed NJ ERA, and, not that it matters, the people we talked to, some of them did seem to go away with their minds changed. Obviously, not enough.

That Houston convention and Schlafly running her counter-convention down the road, that was like the turning point for everything. That was the beginning of the end, I think. I have an acquaintance in Northampton who actually worked on the Houston Conference when she was very young.. She had an important part in organizing it, I believe. Boy, it's hard to relive a lot of this stuff. [Editor's Note: Following the United Nations-sponsored International Women's Year in 1975, President Gerald Ford signed legislation to establish the National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, which planned state and regional conferences and a national conference. From November 18 to 21, 1977, the National Women's Conference took

place in Houston. The conference focused on various issues, including the Equal Rights Amendment, reproductive rights, child care, sexual orientation, employment discrimination and nuclear disarmament. At the same time, Phyllis Schlafly and conservative groups organized a counter-convention in Houston, promoting a pro-family, pro-life agenda, in opposition to the women's rights movement and proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment.]

So, another thing, there's a book called *Brain Sex*: *The Real Difference Between Men and Women* by Anne Moir and David Jessel. This book is all about how men's and women's brains are different, and in the book, there's a test on page fifty of the paperback copy printed in September 1992 that supposedly proves that men's and women's brains are different. The quiz consists of ten multiple choice questions, for which the test taker needs to select as their answer either A, B or C. In the scoring explanation on page fifty-two, we read how women's scores range between 50 and 100, and men score between 0 and 60. But what the authors "forget" to mention is that they found it necessary and acceptable to fudge their results by giving men ten points for every "A" answer, while women get fifteen. I wrote to the publishing company and the authors but never heard back. You can go on Amazon and see my review of that book. [laughter] I don't know how you could actually get something so obviously phony past publishing companies and editors, and everybody's fine with it.

I'll talk about the birthday party fiasco. Rachel was maybe five or six, and she was getting invited to the parties of the girls in her class. Her best friend, as you already know, was Alex.. He was better friends with this particular girl than Rachel was, but Rachel got invited to the party and Alex didn't. This prompted me to write a letter to the editor, because everything prompted me to write a letter.

I don't know how I had the time. I must've written something like ten letters a day, a lot of letters. I still find myself doing that. I want to write a letter about something, and I'll say, "No, you're not going to do it. You're supposed to be working on your memoir. Don't write this letter." It must be an OCD thing or something, but until I write the letter, I cannot move forward. So, I hurry up, I dash off a crazy letter--I mean, those older letters were much more thought out. I wasn't working on a memoir, but now they're completely, sloppy crazy--and I just send it. Once it's gone, I can regain my focus and get back to work.

This was a letter to the editor of the local paper, the *Herald News*, in 1995 when Rachel was seven. Basically, it just said, "Please let your children create their own guest lists for their birthday parties, because it hurts friends' feelings when they're excluded and you might be surprised to find out that your kid has friends of both sexes." I didn't think I was saying anything controversial in this letter; however, I was obnoxiously self-righteous, mentioned Passaic County NOW, and used preachy phrases like "community consciousness-raising" and "you're teaching your kids sex discrimination" when I should've just said, "Let kids invite who they want."

Immediately after this letter gets published in the *Herald News*, the *Star-Ledger* picks it up for a feature story and interviews a psychologist, whom, I think, was from Rutgers. Years ago, I read the *Star Ledger* article, and I thought, "Oh, my God, this is really bad." I read it back again years later, when I'm working on the memoir, and realized that although his tone was snarky, the psychologist actually, in the letter, is agreeing with me. Part of what the psychologist actually

said was that he allows his kids to create their own guests lists, and when they were little, they often invited boys and girls, although by the time they were older, they tended to gravitate to friends of the same sex, though the choice was always theirs. This article drew controversy more than anything else I've ever written. At the time, I also got a call from CNN to the Passaic County phone, which was in my home. They wanted to know when we were going to picket a birthday party, so they could send cameras and do a story for TV. I found out years later that *Fortune* magazine also ridiculed me in an article, which I didn't know about until I Googled myself and it came up. A radio station called inviting me to call in to answer questions about my stance on birthday parties from their listeners. People started mailing me articles, clipped from other newspapers, a particularly memorable one obsessed with the number of lesbians in NOW, which, somehow, they thought was relevant to this. I mean, it was just crazy how all this shit started coming in because of a letter to a local newspaper, and then the *Star Ledger* picking it up, I guess, didn't help, because then it just was all over the place. Radio station call-ins, I refused to do, and I told CNN, "We don't picket birthday parties." So, it was just like a huge craziness.

Then, one day, I was meeting with the president of NOW-New Jersey, Bear Atwood at the time, and we were talking about something different, when she said to me, "You know, you got them pretty riled up at the NOW office in Washington with that birthday party thing." The fact that National NOW somehow was seeing these crazy propaganda distortion articles, while they may have never seen my original letter, and that NOW was somehow upset because I wrote the original letter, that was like the final straw. I just felt, "Boy, you'd better just keep your mouth shut." I really felt like I had done a bad thing somehow, but looking back, I didn't do anything wrong. It was just people were totally crazy. When you just say certain things, they go crazy. Basically, I said, "I'm just requesting that kids be allowed to make their own party guest lists." That was basically it. However, while my request was reasonable, my tone and mention of NOW were the problems.

KR: Yes. Were there repercussions for you?

KS: Well, apparently, they weren't happy with me in NOW in Washington and I felt bad about. But no one except Bear talked to me about it, and she laughed, because she thought the whole thing was pretty crazy too.

KR: Sure.

KS: The fact that CNN would call our chapter phone to ask me when we're going to picket the next birthday party, people think I'm making that up, but I'm not making that up. Then, John Stossel did a show about the differences in boys and girls. It was a three-page letter that he got from me, because he said such crazy things. He said something about, "The feminists want to take down the girls' toys/boys' toys signs in the toy store aisles and just put things willy-nilly, so nobody's going to know where anything is." He twisted everything and just said such horrible, stupid things he was painful to watch. He even praised the horrible *Brain Sex* book I mentioned earlier. [Editor's Note: John Stossel is Libertarian pundit, television personality and author.]

KR: What else stands out, in your mind, from your time at the Passaic County NOW?

KS: We did a really great fundraiser. We had Fred Small come and sing, and it was a very successful fundraiser. It was a great concert. I think that was one of the best non-protest things that we did. I think I already told you, we got the city to institute a sensitivity training to gender issues, because of Deb's experience with the plumbing inspector. [Editor's Note: Fred Small is an American singer-songwriter, Unitarian minister and climate advocate.]

It was weird, so years and years and years later, I was walking down the street. I was near Clifton City Hall. It was raining. Somebody from FIOS Channel One stopped me, because they were interviewing people about what we thought about a recent sexual harassment lawsuit against the city. I declined to be interviewed. If I remember it right, a public works supervisor had snapped a picture looking up a subordinate's skirt and was using it as the wall paper on his work computer desk top. In case that behavior wasn't bad enough, when a newspaper article describing the incident appeared in the paper, readers were pissed off, not at the public works supervisor who provoked a lawsuit against Clifton, but rather at the employee who filed it. It was like, "Here we go again." [laughter]

What else did we do? We held candidate forums, educational programs at the library and in my home, spoke at Clifton High on women's rights and body image, filed court briefs, held rallies and attended forums around topics such as discrimination, domestic violence, hospital closings, family courts, rights of mothers, child abuse. We protested when the wife of the mayor reported that he tried to strangle her with a telephone cord, and residents were far too quick to disregard her allegations and calls for justice. Our protest at Lodi City Hall was on network news, as well as in a network special on domestic violence. When NOW was considering new wording for the ERA, our chapter submitted a position paper in favor of the original wording and on the 75th anniversary of women voting, we had proclamations in commemoration of the day accepted by the cities of Clifton, Passaic and Paterson. We handed out sketch drawings of a perp at the request of the police when a Clifton girl was abducted. We did so many things over such a long period of time that it's hard to remember so many of them.

Passaic County NOW's greatest accomplishment regrettably isn't part of my story. In the late 1970s and or early 1980s, my feminist activism took a temporary dip. Although I never let my NOW membership lapse, when the chapter created the Passaic County battered women's shelter, I was largely absent. I had been recently divorced and reveling in my long overdue singlehood, while at the same time dealing with the challenges of motherhood, career and homeownership.

Passaic County NOW members shared good times together as well. Whenever there was a feminist play, we went. "I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road" or "I Can't Keep Running in Place" are a couple that I remember. Oh, we had a letter-writing campaign, where we sat around and I think ten people each picked their favorite "pissed-off about" issue and wrote a letter. Then, we made copies of all of the letters and mailed them to all of our chapter members, requesting that they pick the ones they agree with (hopefully all) and mail them out. So, we did some kind of [push] to get some letters out. Yes, that action resulted in some positive responses.

When, my daughter Rachel was in high school, she was on NOW's Young Feminist Task Force. She went for an introductory meeting to Washington, and because most of the kids were older

and she was still under eighteen, she stayed in Kim Gandy's house. Everybody else, I think, stayed in a hotel, but she stayed with Kim. Then, when she was a high school senior in 2006, Rachel became chapter coordinator of our local chapter, because I just didn't want to do it anymore and no one else wanted the job either. I wasn't president. We didn't have a president, but even if you say you don't have a president, somebody needs to create the agenda and somebody needs to send out meeting notices and all that and do membership, so I was kind of doing that. We were meeting at my house, and it was very hard, because different people showed up each month so we didn't have continuity from meeting to meeting. Members would show up for the annual barbeque, but in terms of activism, there just wasn't a lot going on by the first decade of the new millennium. One of Rachel's Smith friends--Smith does this summer Praxis Program, where they'll give you two or three thousand dollars to work for free your junior year for an organization--so one of Rachel's friends actually came and stayed with us one summer and worked for Passaic County NOW and tried to revitalize the chapter. But, by then, the chapter was on life-support, and when we tried and failed to revive it, we stopped meeting and closed shop. However, even though I'm now in Massachusetts, many of us have remained friends. [Editor's Note: Kim Gandy is an attorney and feminist who served as the president of NOW from 2001 to 2009.]

KR: With the Veteran Feminists of America, how did you first get involved? [Editor's Note: The Veteran Feminists of America (VFA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to documenting and preserving the histories of women and men involved in second wave feminism.]

KS: Well, I initially read an article about *Feminists Who Changed America* [*FWCA*] (being compiled by Barbara Love) asking Feminist Second Wavers to write short summaries about our activism. So, I wrote a blurb. Then, I guess, Mavra Stark, who was in Morris County NOW (before she moved to Pennsylvania) and an active VFA board member, I don't know for sure, but I think she was the one who recommended me to be on the board of the Veteran Feminists of America from New Jersey. She had been in the Morris County Chapter. Every now and then, we would invite MC NOW to our events. We had a couple of candidate forums and a couple of parties and we invited them. By then, they were a much more active chapter than we were and I knew some of them from state conferences as well. So, I think Mavra recommended me, although I don't know why.

Even before that, I got a letter from Jacqui Ceballos, founder, and at the time, president of VFA, asking me--they were looking through the *Feminists Who Changed America*, this was very bizarre, and would I consider being the first veteran feminist of the month on the VFA website. It made absolutely no sense to me, and I never got an answer why they picked me. I mean, if you look in that book--I was embarrassed that I'd even submitted for it--after I started reading it--I saw that the other feminists in there had started foundations, published books, been in government, sat on major boards, and I'm talking about being on a bus with an armed guard at Bethlehem Steel. So, I have no idea why Jacqui asked me, but I said, "Okay." Why wouldn't I say okay? I was flattered and excited, though mystified, at being chosen. That was either before I became a board member or after I became a board member, and Rebecca Lubetkin and I both joined the board at around the same time. Again, I don't know why any of this happened. It was totally unexpected.. [Editor's Note: Rebecca Lubetkin is a Professor Emerita at Rutgers

University, founder and director of the Consortium for Educational Equity, board member of the Veteran Feminists of America, and feminist activist in Morris County NOW.]

Now, they love me, because I keep the membership database. I'm one of the younger and more computer proficient members. [laughter] These are really prominent people that are on the board, including Muriel Fox, chair of the board, and Eleanor Pam, president of the organization. You would recognize many of their names, but some of them, apparently, don't know how to use the computers. [laughter] So, I was a database designer at my last job at Christ Hospital, and I loved that. I taught myself that. Of everything I did, I loved coding--not just coding. I loved creating a database and deciding what it should do and then making it do it. Not to just be a coder but to design it, I loved that. Early on, I had offered to create a compiled database for VFA, but by the time they took me up on the offer, I'd been away from database design long enough that my skills were too rusty to keep that promise. Instead, I just enter the data and create the reports the others need. That's basically my VFA volunteer assignment, and they appreciate it far too much. It's not much compared to what everyone else is doing, but it's a skill that they seem to need, so I'm happy to do that. The fact that I'm on the board of an organization with such really outstanding, prominent people who did so much for feminism is really an amazing honor to me.

I went to the women's march the day after Trump was inaugurated. That was just a total changing of the subject. I know why I changed the subject, because we took pictures before that march. On the VFA website, when they requested pictures of all the board members, everybody else submitted these nice formal photos, while my picture is of a crazy looking person in a "Resist" T-shirt. That picture was taken going to the women's march. I think that's what made me think of it. Oh, and while I'm on the subject, another thought about that march. After fifty years of marching and seeing no change, I was hesitant to go. The great group of women I was invited to join, however, made it an opportunity too great to pass up--in spite of the long ride from Massachusetts. I am so thankful I was there. What made the march itself so special to me is that in the course of fifty years, I'd become use to seeing guys, who always seemed to feel that need to take over, holding megaphones and leading chants at women's marches, but this time I really felt that they were there in a much more supportive and submissive role. It was great to see guys standing back.

VFA used to have events, but as the members are getting older (many in their eighties and nineties, though so high energy you'd never guess it) and since we come from all of the country, there is not as much travelling. [Editor's Note: The following sentence was added as an addendum to the transcript: This year our annual board meeting was supposed to be in Washington, D.C., during the NOW Conference, but of course, COVID-19 has put an end to that.]

Now, members are busy doing oral histories of VFA members and other prominent feminists. For mine, they're just going to use my three interviews I did for Morris County NOW's TV show New Directions for Women, hosted by Rebecca Lubetkin. [Editor's Note: Karen Spindel is referring to her three-part interview with Rebecca Lubetkin, host of the television show "New Directions for Women." New Directions is produced by the Morris County Chapter of NOW, and the interviews appear on YouTube.]

In October 2011, before I had even a thought about spending time in Northampton, (my daughter Rachel raised the idea at Thanksgiving dinner a month later), VFA held a conference in Winter Park, Florida at Rollins College. Rebecca Lubetkin and I sat together at the same table as Gloria Steinem and Sherrill Redmon, who though now retired was then the chief archivist of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith. Sherrill, who has worked with Gloria very, very closely at Smith on different initiatives, had accompanied her to the event. Ironically, when I went to Rachel's graduation at Smith the previous May, I said to her, "For four years, I've asked you to see the archives and you've never taken me to the archives. Do you think they might be open?" We went there and Rachel took me in. There's this woman there, who happens to be Sherrill, and I said, "I just had to see the archives before my daughter graduated," and I asked, "This is the best job in the world, isn't it?" She said, "Yes, it is," and we talked for about two minutes. I saw the archives. We left. Then five months later, I go down to this conference in Florida, and who's sitting at the same table with me but Gloria Steinem and Sherrill Redmon, and Rebecca Lubetkin, whom I already knew. So, we were at this table. That was the second time I met Sherrill.

I had not had any thought at that point that I was going to move to Northampton at all, nothing in my mind. But then I moved to Northampton in August 2012, and I sign up get out the vote (GOTV) for Elizabeth Warren's Senate campaign, and who do I meet in Elizabeth Warren's office who's also doing get out the vote and who am I paired up with--none other than Sherrill Redmon! [laughter] So, we became friends after that, I mean, three accidental meetings. Sherrill's the one who put me in touch with Fernanda Perrone at the Rutgers archives because they're colleagues, and Rutgers has agreed to house my papers and those of Passaic County NOW. Barbara Love, whom I know from VFA, came to stay with me for a few days this past year to do some research at the Sophia Smith Collection. In the past, she'd stayed with Sherrill. Rebecca Lubetkin came down to visit me to see why I loved this place so much, and she immediately understood. Sherrill joined us one night for dinner. It's both incredible and wonderful how one way or another, we aging feminists are all connecting. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Fernanda Perrone is an archivist and head of the Exhibitions Program at Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives.]

The first Veteran Feminists board meeting I attended was at a restaurant in the Village in New York. The second event I believe was at the Harvard Club. I don't know how they picked the Harvard Club, but that's where it was. I brought Rachel along because I thought she would enjoy meeting some of the people she might have studied in her Study of Women and Gender minor at Smith. She's so much younger, I don't know if these feminists are as exciting to her as they are to me. One day, I received an email from a Northampton organization that *Heather Booth: Changing the World* was being shown in Northampton at Forbes Library. So, that was kind of cool to go and see a documentary about a feminist hero you know from an organization you're in. When I first found out about it, I sent an email to Muriel Fox, Chair of the VFA Board. I said, "Guess what? The documentary about Heather is going to be shown at Forbes Library in Northampton," and the answer I got back was, "Really? I'll have to tell my daughter. She lives in Amherst," which is the next town over. So, her daughter came too. It's funny; it's like we're all so interconnected. Another crazy thing is that twice I got referred to Rutgers from people in Northampton. It's such a small feminist world. It *should be* a big feminist world. [Editor's Note:

Karen Spindel is referring to her to connection to Fernanda Perrone and then also to her connection to the interviewer Kathryn Tracy Rizzi, whose aunt is a Northampton neighbor and friend of Karen's.]

Yes, it's really great to be a part of Veteran Feminists, but I'm nervous about the end of my memoir, if I ever finish it, because I've written the end and I don't feel nearly as upbeat as many of them do about what we've accomplished, which I feel is pretty much all backsliding in a big way, starting with reproductive rights. I think it's extraordinary that the lesbian and gay movement has come this far. It used to be that Betty Friedan was afraid to talk about lesbians in NOW, referring to them as the "Lavender Menace" because she thought their presence in the organization would jeopardize the women's movement. Yet the LGBTQ movement has been a lot more successful, and hate to say it but I think it's because there're men in it. I know that the lesbians in Veteran Feminists talk about how they feel like we've accomplished a lot, but when I hear what they're talking about, it seems much more about gay rights than women's rights. [Editor's Note: Betty Friedan, feminist and author of the *Feminine Mystique*, co-founded the National Organization for Women in 1966 and served as the organization's first president.]

I'll tell you a quick current story. I'm working on the memoir. I'm in a writing group. I'm reading stuff. At some point, Trump gets elected. I can't really tell the story of how bad things used to be any more. I've seen the backsliding for many years now, but this election was the final straw. So, I started to write about how it's just as bad now as it was then, but in different ways. For example, then women could only play a very limited role in the military, not that the military and war are good, but if you have a military, women should have the same opportunities. . Now, women get in and it's reported that at least twenty-five percent are sexually assaulted and up to eighty percent are sexually harassed and women in the U.S. military are more likely to be raped by American soldiers than killed in combat. We call it progress. So, I go through and I write about how each thing that we thought was going to be a win ended up really being a loss. At the end of that incredibly depressing final chapter, some of my writing colleagues said I should instead end the memoir with something more upbeat, so it didn't sound like I was going to finish the book and do myself in. [laughter] Somehow, the ending sounded like that to everybody.

In May 2018, we're six of us on a family cruise, and my daughter Rachel and her partner Emily tell us they're expecting a baby. When I asked whose baby, my daughter says, "Emily's pregnant, but it's my egg." I said, "That's cool, that's really cool." I didn't know that this technology existed. I thought that was pretty great. Then, it turns out that my daughter, even though she's the DNA mother, can't be on the birth certificate in Connecticut because two mothers can't be on the birth certificate if they're not married. If they were married, they could both be mothers, but they're not married and they don't want to be married and I don't blame them. I think what the religious right has done to marriage or about marriage or the way they frame marriage, why would you want to? Anyway, so, they're not getting married, so now she can't be on the birth certificate.

As it now stands in Connecticut, lesbian partners are advised to pay lawyers several thousand dollars to adopt their own babies, while unmarried biological dads, straight and apparently even gay, are able to sign an acknowledgement of paternity. Rachel was obviously beside herself and

rightly so. I did some research. I said, "We're going to fix this." This was my new cause, see, so, this was my probable new last chapter, how I'm back in the game. I started by writing to the Attorney General of Connecticut and spoke with an assistant AG. I contacted lesbian and gay rights organizations, and GLAD (GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders), not to be confused with GLAAD, has assigned a pro bono attorney to help change a law that currently prevents only non-gestational mothers in same sex couples from being on their children's birth certificates. [Editor's Note: GLAD is a legal advocacy organization for individuals in LGBTQ+ communities. Founded as the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, GLAAD is a media-monitoring organization working to counter discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities.]

I needed a winnable cause, and I think their case is clear-cut. People in the know are advising Rachel, "Well, in the meantime, you'd better adopt." People are saying, "Adopt. You need to adopt. You need to pay three thousand dollars," or however much it costs. I said, "Absolutely don't do it" and Rachel and Emily agree. I said, "It doesn't matter. If you guys are going to be in a custody fight and you're both on the birth certificate or you're not both on the birth certificate, only one of you can get the kid anyway, you know, or you share." It's a bad idea to involve the courts anyway, because you never know what they're going to decide. I mean, look at the Mary Beth Whitehead case where the father and the surrogate mother got the parental rights and he got custody and she got visitation. That was a mess, actually, in my opinion. [Editor's Note: The case referred to above is the 1988 ruling by the N.J. Superior Court in the case known as *In Re Baby M*.]

Rachel just told me the new law is going to come up in Connecticut, but they're going to expand it even more. They want to give any non-married mother, even if she's not the DNA mother, the same ability to claim parental rights as an unmarried father. Even though the acknowledgement of paternity instructions suggest that a father might want to have a DNA test before signing the form, Connecticut doesn't require that proof. So, they're going for the whole thing, that any two lesbian mothers, even if not married, can be on the birth certificate. This is exciting that Rachel and Emily and I may be instrumental in getting the law changed in Connecticut. So, that's my final memoir chapter, that we can never stop fighting, protesting and advocating for what's right. It feels good to be back in the game. [Editor's Note: The following is an addendum that Karen Spindel added to the transcript: In conjunction with other civil rights organizations and members of the Connecticut legislature, in February 2020, the GLAD attorney presented new legislation that extends the same rights gay and straight unmarried fathers have to unmarried mothers. Rachel and Emily presented verbal testimony in committee, while Dylan, my grandbaby, sat on one of the legislator's laps and fed him snacks. The legislation and their testimony were well received by committee members of both parties and the new law is expected to pass, hopefully soon so that Rachel can finally be shown as Dylan's mom on her birth certificate.]

The other issue we always talked about were names and people changing their names. Rachel and Emily were deciding what to do about the baby's last name and since Rachel's name is already hyphenated, hyphenating was out. They were deciding what to do about that, and they were contemplating choosing a new family name. I said, "Don't do it." I said, "Each keep your own name," like they care what I say. If they don't agree with what I say, they don't waste any time in telling me so, but this particular time, I think they did agree because they each kept their own name. Emily's last name is Pagano and Rachel's is Prehodka-Spindel, hyphenated, and the

baby's name is Prendelano. It's got the "pre" for Prehodka, the "ndel" for the Spindel, and the "ano" for the Pagano. All three of them have different last names, so I think that's really cool.

Of course, when they sent out baby announcements saying only, "Dylan Ember Prendelano welcomed with love by Rachel and Emily," some people at first had no idea who they were from. [laughter] Some of my old friends, who I hadn't talked to [in a while] and I said, "Send them one," I don't think they had any idea. Rachel and Emily deliberately named the baby Dylan Ember, because it's a completely non-gendered name. When I named my older daughter Samantha, it was so she could be Sam. I didn't know that the need still existed when Rachel was born, but it clearly did.

So, anyway, we go out with Dylan and it's so funny. People feel this total need, not in Northampton so much, but in the rest of the world, this total need to have babies be gendered. If they're a girl, they have to wear this thing around the head, but we don't have non-gendered pronouns like in some other languages so we make it very hard to talk without assigning a gender. People were coming up, "Oh, how old is he?" [laughter] We just let it go at that. We don't gender Dylan, because we don't think that's important information about a ten-month-old baby. Once gendering happens, it really happens. I mean, people just immediately start thinking about the kid a certain way.

We noticed one person this weekend who called Dylan "he" also said "handsome." So, there's just a whole gendered vocabulary that goes with it. Dylan's room is dark blue, but it's got pictures of Amelia Earhart and Ada Lovelace, the computer programmer, and Maya Angelou, and I think they have one of Malala waiting to be hung. Anyhow, they have all these famous feminist's pictures up. [Editor's Note: Malala Yousafzai is an international education advocate and Nobel Prize winner. Her memoir *I Am Malala* (2013) details her experiences growing up Pakistan and surviving the assassination attempt made upon her by the Taliban.]

I said I thought Dylan should be a baby X and they shouldn't tell people her sex at all, and that way she could play with everybody. I think if kids don't know a child's sex, they won't assume a gender and both girls and boys will accept her into their playgroups. It's really weird how people still feel this need to gender their kids. Friends hand down used baby clothes, but Rachel commented to me that because these people know Dylan is a girl, "No one who has a boy will offer her clothes." The only people that offer her clothes are people with girls, and then the clothes are all pink and girlie. So, she ends up just passing them on. Dylan wears very gender-neutral clothing. She mostly wears jeans and T-shirts. She does, however, have one onesie that says, "Though she be little, she be fierce," and other onesies that say "Feminist Baby," and "Don't assume my gender."

None of that sex stereotyping has changed from when my kids were little, none of that has changed. When people have this absolute need to know what sex or gender the baby is, sometimes, we'll say, "Well, her sex is female, but she's going to have to decide about gender for herself." Sometimes, we'll say that. Then, people have no clue, no clue what you're talking about. [laughter] I mean, in Northampton, Massachusetts, they know.

KR: In Northampton, yes.

KS: So, it's interesting. [laughter] Any other questions?

KR: Well, before we end, is there anything you want to add?

KS: I'm sure there are, but right now they're not coming.

KR: All right. Well, let's conclude for today, and I want to thank you so much for being so generous with your time and for sharing your stories.

KS: Well, thank you for listening and recording my story. Maybe somebody will pick something out of it that will be, somehow, in one way or another, meaningful.

KR: All right, I am going to stop the recording.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

Transcribed by Jesse Braddell 11/14/2019
Reviewed by Zach Batista 3/24/2020
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 4/16/2020
Reviewed by Karen Spindel 6/4/2020
Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 6/16/2020