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Regional Oral History Office
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Suffragists Oral History Project

THE SUFFRAGISTS: FROM TEA-PARTIES TO PRISON

Sylvie Grace Thompson Thygeson	<i>In the Parlor</i>
Jessie Haver Butler	<i>On the Platform</i>
Miriam Allen deFord	<i>In the Streets</i>
Laura Ellsworth Seiler	<i>On the Soapbox</i>
Ernestine Hara Kettler	<i>Behind Bars</i>

Interviews Conducted by
Sherna Gluck

COPY 1





Ernestine Kettler



Miriam Allen deFord



Laura Seiler



Sylvie Thygeson



Jessie Haver Butler

THE SUFFRAGISTS: FROM TEA-PARTIES TO PRISON

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SUMMARY by Sherna Gluck

PREFACE

The Suffragists Oral History Project was designed to tape record interviews with the leaders of the woman's suffrage movement in order to document their activities in behalf of passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and their continuing careers as leaders of movements for welfare and labor reform, world peace, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Because the existing documentation of the suffrage struggle indicates a need for additional material on the campaign of the National Woman's Party, the contribution of this small but highly active group has been the major focus of the series.

The project, underwritten by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, enabled the Regional Oral History Office to record first-hand accounts of this early period in the development of women's rights with twelve women representing both the leadership and the rank and file of the movement. Five held important positions in the National Woman's Party. They are Sara Bard Field, Burnita Shelton Matthews, Alice Paul, Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, and Mabel Vernon. Seven interviews are with women who campaigned for suffrage at state and local levels, working with other suffrage organizations. Among this group is Jeannette Rankin, who capped a successful campaign for suffrage in Montana with election to the House of Representatives, the first woman to achieve this distinction. Others are Valeska Bary, Jessie Haver Butler, Miriam Allen de Ford, Ernestine Kettler, Laura Ellsworth Seiler, and Sylvie Thygeson.

Planning for the Suffragists Project and some preliminary interviews had been undertaken prior to receipt of the grant. The age of the women--74 to 104--was a compelling motivation. A number of these interviews were conducted by Sherna Gluck, Director of the Feminist History Research Project in Los Angeles, who has been recording interviews with women active in the suffrage campaigns and the early labor movement. Jacqueline Parker, who was doing post-doctoral research on the history of the social welfare movement, taped interviews with Valeska Bary. A small grant from a local donor permitted Malca Chall to record four sessions with Jeannette Rankin. Both Valeska Bary and Jeannette Rankin died within a few months of their last interviewing session.

The grant request submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation covered funding both to complete these already-recorded interviews and to broaden the scope and enrich the value of the project by the inclusion of several women not part of the leadership. The grant, made in April, 1973, also provided for the deposit of all the completed interviews in five major manuscript repositories which collect women's history materials.

In the process of research, a conference with Anita Politzer (who served more than three decades in the highest offices of the National Woman's Party, but was not well enough to tape record that story) produced the entire series of Equal Rights and those volumes of the Suffragist missing from Alice Paul's collection; negotiations are currently underway so that these in-party organs can be available to scholars everywhere.

The Suffragists Project as conceived by the Regional Oral History Office is to be the first unit in a series on women in politics. Unit two will focus on interviews with politically active and successful women during the years 1920-1970; and unit three, interviews with women who are incumbents in elective office today.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Malca Chall, Director
Suffragists Oral History Project

Amelia Fry, Interviewer-Editor

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

2 January 1974
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SUFFRAGISTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

BARY, Helen Valeska. Labor Administration and Social Security:
A Woman's Life. 1974

MATTHEWS, Burnita Shelton. Pathfinder in the Legal Aspects of
Women. 1975

PAUL, Alice. Conversations with Alice Paul: An Autobiography.
1975

RANKIN, Jeannette. Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and
Democratic Government. 1974

REYHER, Rebecca Hourwich. Working for Women's Equality. In Process

The Suffragists: From Tea-Parties to Prison. 1975

Thygeson, Sylvie, "In the Parlor"
Butler, Jessie Haver, "On the Platform"
deFord, Miriam Allen, "In the Streets"
Seiler, Laura Ellsworth, "On the Soapbox"
Kettler, Ernestine, "Behind Bars"

VERNON, Mabel. The Suffrage Campaign, Peace and International
Relations. 1975

FOREWORD

In October, 1972, Sherna Gluck came to the Regional Oral History Office to talk about plans for her newly organized women's history project, set up to "recreate what women were thinking and doing" during the years 1910-1930, particularly in the fields of suffrage, labor, and the professions.

The building of such a collection of archival material and oral history interviews around what Sherna labels the "ordinary woman" deserved and received from Willa Baum and me great encouragement, and with it the mutual hope that we might be able to tie our projects together in some way in the future. Nothing was possible until funds for the Suffragists Oral History Project became available from the Rockefeller Foundation in April, 1973.

By that time The Feminist History Research Project was a reality and many women had been interviewed, among them five suffragists. Because the focus of the Regional Oral History Office's project was aimed at the leadership of the suffrage movement, we welcomed the opportunity to have representation of the views of some rank-and-file suffragists; and we also appreciated the opportunity to incorporate some of the more feminist directions in research that the woman's movement is taking.

Thus, we were able to transcribe relevant excerpts of interviews from women we would otherwise have missed, and with Sherna Gluck's editorial assistance, to produce a volume of memoirs which will be a valuable addition to the historical evidence of the suffrage movement.

The sharing of information and ideas with Sherna has been a pleasant and stimulating experience during these past several years. The Office hopes to continue this fruitful cooperation as we move on to other aspects of women's history, particularly women in politics.

Malca Chall
Project Director
Suffragist Oral History Project



INTRODUCTION

Sylvie Thygeson, now almost 107 years old, recalls the discussion of woman's suffrage that took place sixty years ago over tea in her parlor in St. Paul, Minnesota. Jessie Haver Butler, now 88, remembers watching her mother stump for suffrage in a horse-drawn wagon in Colorado in 1893. Some years later, the young Jessie Haver did the same thing--by train. Miriam Allen deFord, who died in March at the age of 85, began her career in the movement in 1904 by stuffing envelopes at suffrage headquarters in Philadelphia. A few years later she was speaking to street-corner crowds from the top of a soapbox. Laura Seiler, now 83, spoke from atop soapboxes, horses, and the deck of a motorboat on the Hudson River. For the latter she used a megaphone to shout "votes for women" at unreceptive longshoremen on the docks. Ernestine Kettler, now 79, picketed for suffrage in front of the White House. That militant action earned her a jail sentence.

These women, through their work in the suffrage movement, made a significant contribution to the continuing struggle for self-government in the United States. They, like most other women, were not famous or powerful, and so conventional history has paid little attention to them, or what they did, or how they felt. No official documents have chronicled their activities, no biographers have summed up their beliefs. The only record of their lives is in their memories, and the only method of preserving that record is the oral history interview. Recording and preserving the memories of women like the unknown and unheralded suffragists included in this volume is one of the tasks of the Feminist History Research Project.

An independent women's research and education organization, The Feminist History Research Project was founded in 1972 with the express purpose of recreating women's recent past in the United States through oral history documentation of the lives of "ordinary" women. Women's beliefs, values and practices are being documented through their own words and recollections in a series of ongoing projects on women in the United States, 1900-1930: Women as Unskilled Laborers; Women in the Labor Movement; Women at Home; Women in Business, Entertainment and the Professions; Suffragists and Feminists; Women as Reformers, Radicals, Revolutionaries; and, Birth Control. Over 250 hours of interviews with

women have been recorded to date. Additionally, "living history" educational programs are being created from these interviews. The first of these is a tape/slide program on the suffrage movement, a program which utilizes much of the interview material to be found in this volume.

One of the first undertakings of the Feminist History Research Project at its inception in 1972 was the documentation of the lives of rank-and-file participants in the suffrage movement. Since, at the time of their activity in that movement, most suffragists were past thirty years of age, few survive today. Thus, The Feminist History Research Project sought to interview every suffragist brought to its attention. The following year, the Regional Oral History Office provided funds to transcribe and edit portions of these interviews for inclusion in the Suffragists Oral History Project of The Bancroft Library. The five women selected for this volume represent a fairly wide range of experience in the suffrage movement in terms of their personal backgrounds, ideologies, and tactical approaches.

In some ways these interviews provide historical insights that can be obtained in no other way. The facts and dates of the public record, no matter how accurate, cannot convey the complicated motivations and emotions of those who participated in a social movement. The prominent leaders of the movement usually speak of high-level debates and decisions. But any account of the suffrage movement is incomplete and superficial without some understanding of the millions of women whose participation made woman's suffrage a reality. These interviews are part of the effort to increase that understanding.

From the words of the participants themselves we can begin to appreciate the wide variety of reasons that women had for becoming involved in the suffrage movement. We can trace these motivations back to their origins in family background or childhood or ethical convictions. We can undertake to analyze the different ideologies within the suffrage movement; how they shaped the several suffrage organizations, attracted and affected the members and determined the tactics adopted to achieve the final objective. We can follow the lives of the "ordinary" suffragist after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and gain an understanding of how they related to other women's issues, and what happened to the suffrage movement as a whole. A more detailed discussion of these points will be found in the Summary which follows the five interviews.

Included with each of the five interviews is an interview history which describes the background and setting, a brief biography of the interviewee, photographs and relevant source material, and an index of the transcript.

The Feminist History Research Project would like to thank the women whose oral history interviews follow. They were, without exception, very generous of their time and their memories. We would also like to express our deep appreciation for the contributions they have made to the evolving history of the American woman.

Sherna Gluck, Director
Feminist History Research Project

April 1975
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Topanga, California 90290

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Regional Oral History Office
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Suffragists Oral History Project

Sylvie Grace Thompson Thygeson

IN THE PARLOR

Interviews Conducted by
Sherna Gluck
Ralda Sullivan
Mary Shepardson



Sylvie Grace Thompson Thygeson

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INTRODUCTION by Sherna Gluck

The following interviews with Sylvie Thygeson represent two distinct interviews conducted by different interviewers and for different purposes. The first interview was recorded by Ralda Thygeson Sullivan, a former granddaughter-in-law of Sylvie's. The intention of this interview was to capture, as part of the family heritage, recollections about Sylvie's life. Both Ralda and Sylvie treated the interview as part of the family relationship and process. Hence, although much of the material focused on Sylvie's suffrage and birth control activities, the interview was basically an intimate family portrait, often dealing with Sylvie's concern and feelings about her great grandchildren.

At the time of the first interview in June, 1972, Sylvie Thygeson, 104 years old, was still living in her own home in the Palo Alto area where the interview was conducted. She suffered from inoperable cataracts in both eyes, was deaf and rather frail. Despite these infirmities her mental condition was remarkable. The second interview was conducted in October, 1972, as part of The Feminist History Research Project. During the four-month interim, there had been a marked deterioration in Sylvie's health and the family was forced to place her in a convalescent hospital. Although still mentally alert, she was less vigorous than earlier and her grasp of details was not as good. Despite this, and even though there is some repetition of material, the second interview provides an additional dimension, helping us to understand the thoughtprocesses and motivations of an old suffragist.

At 104, Sylvie Thygeson was one of those rare human beings who cared so much about language. She carefully chose and enunciated every word. The transcription hardly conveys the quality of her language, but great care was taken by each interviewer while editing her own interview to preserve the quality of Sylvie's expression and syntax.

The editors were cognizant of the value of these interviews to gerontologists as well as historians. Therefore, little has been changed. The false starts and repetitions, the long, complex

sentences have been punctuated to enable the reader to gain some sense of the language of this unusual woman. The entire manuscript was carefully reviewed by Sylvie Thygeson's daughter, Mary Shepardson, who wrote the brief biography, developed a geneology and provided some explanatory footnotes (MTS). She also participated in the second interview.

December 1974

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SYLVIE GRACE THOMPSON THYGESON

Sylvie Grace Thompson was born on June 27, 1868 in a small town in Illinois, Forreston. She was one of eleven children, three of whom died in infancy. She attended school in Forreston until her father's death when she was sixteen years old. Her uncle, Judge Seymour Dwight Thompson, took her from the funeral to his home in St. Louis, Missouri. There she learned typing and short hand and worked on her uncle's law cases and law books. Two years later she joined her mother and younger sisters and brother in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she worked as a stenographer until her marriage in 1891 to Nels Marcus Thygeson, a lawyer in the firm of Munn, Boyeson and Thygeson. Later her husband became the general counsel for the Twin City Rapid Transit Company with offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her first child, Ruth A. Thygeson was born on April 9, 1895. A son was born on February 26, 1898 and named for his Norwegian grandfather, Elling. A second son, Phillips Baker Thygeson, was born on March 28, 1903 and a daughter, Mary was born on May 26, 1906.

It was during her residence in St. Paul, Minnesota, that Sylvie Thygeson was active in the birth control movement, the suffrage movement and was an officer of the Woman's Welfare League. Her husband died after a long illness of cancer in August of 1917 and Mrs. Thygeson moved her family to California so that the four children could attend Stanford University. Ruth and Phillips became M.D.'s, Elling an engineer, and Mary, many years later, a PhD in Anthropology. When the children were grown, Mrs. Thygeson joined her mother and two brothers in Los Angeles where she lived for twenty-five years until 1955 when she returned to Palo Alto. She lived in Palo Alto for nearly 20 years when at the age of 104 she was taken to live in a convalescent hospital. At the age of 105 she is in the Whitcomb Convalescent Hospital in Menlo Park.

Mary Thygeson Shepardson

September 1973
Box 25 Star Route
Redwood City, California

Genealogy
Sylvie Thygeson

McKee married Lucinda Putnam, niece of
Israel Putnam, general.

Children of McKee and Lucinda

Betsy McKee " Seymour Thompson
Philotus " "
Lyman " "
Elmira " "
Ardelia " "

Baker " Maria
Mary Ellen Baker b. 1845 " James Conklin Thompson
Elias Baker
Hiram Baker
Scott Graham (son of Maria and Graham)

Seymour Thompson and Betsy McKee's children

James Conklin Thompson " Mary Ellen Baker
Edward " "
William " "
Seymour Dwight " "
Charles (d. at 5 years)
Charlotte Jeanette

Children of James Conklin Thompson and Mary Ellen Baker (d. aged 101)

Alice Eudora Thompson
Charles Elmer
Harriet Jeanette
Sylvie Grace b. 1868 " Nels Marcus Thygeson 1891
Mary Gertrude (d. 1917)
Walter Henry (d. at 5 years)
Elizabeth Maria
Gladys Isola
Edith Beatrice (d. child)
Cicero Dwight (d. 2 days)
James Spencer

Children of Nels Marcus Thygeson and Sylvie Grace Thompson

Ruth Adelaide Thygeson b. 1895 " Dwight Emerson Shepardson 19
d. 1940
Elling Thygeson b. 1898 " Sophia Locke 1934
Phillips Baker Thygeson b. 1903 " Ruth Lee Spilman 1924
Mary Thygeson b. 1906 " Dwight E. Shepardson 1943
(d. 1966)

Children of Dwight E. Shepardson and Ruth A. Thygeson

Barbara Anita b. 1925

Children of Phillips Thygeson and Ruth Lee Spilman

Fritjof Peder Thygeson	b. 1930	"	Ralda Lee Meyerson 1950 (div. 1959)
Kristin Thygeson	b. 1935	"	Douglas Strong 1957

Children of Fritjof Thygeson and Balda Lee Meyerson

Kristin Lee Thygeson	b. 1952
Nels Marcus Thygeson	b. 1953

Children of Douglas Strong and Kristin Thygeson

Peder Strong	b. 1959
Beret Strong	b. 1961
Kore Strong	b. 1962

From Palo Alto Times, 15 May 1975

Sylvie Thygeson dies at 106

PALO ALTO TIMES 5-15-75

Mrs. Sylvie Grace Thygeson, a suffragette and long time Palo Alto resident, died Tuesday in a Menlo Park convalescent hospital at 106. She would have celebrated her 107th birthday June 27.

Mrs. Thygeson was a native of Forrester, Ill. One of her ancestors was a soldier in the American Revolutionary War and her grandfather was a Presbyterian minister who maintained a station on the Underground Railway to help Southern slaves escape to Canada. Her father and three uncles fought in the Civil War and her mother received a Civil War pension until her death at 101.

In 1891, Mrs. Thygeson married Nels Marcus Thygeson, the general counsel of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company in Minneapolis, Minn. During her long residence in St. Paul, Mrs. Thygeson was active in the struggle for women's suffrage. She was chairman of the state Birth Control League and helped to establish a birth control clinic in the early 1900s.

Her husband died in 1917 in California. Mrs. Thygeson moved to Palo Alto to educate her four children at Stanford University. After their graduations, she lived for 25 years in Los Angeles, returning to Palo Alto in 1955.

She maintained a keen interest in world affairs and in progressive movements until her death. She was a member of the Planned Parenthood Association, the NAACP, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Surviving are three children, Elling Thygeson, an engineer, of Seal Beach; Dr. Phillips Thygeson of Los

Altos, formerly director of the Proctor Foundation for Eye Research in San Francisco; and Dr. Mary Shepardson, professor emeritus of California State University, San Francisco. Another daughter, Dr. Ruth Shepardson, died in 1940.

Also surviving are three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

At her own request, there will be no funeral services.

MARY SHEPARDSON
BOX 25, STAR ROUTE, REDWOOD CITY, CA. 94062

May 22, 1975

Dear Sherna:

Mother died peacefully on May 13 at 6 P.M. in the Whitcomb Convalescent Hospital in Menlo Park where she had been for two and a half years. (This is not the one where you saw her.) She was lucid up until two days before her death and was able to recognize Ruth Lee and me but felt too weak to talk much. She took matters into her own hands in the end and refused to eat. She told us that she was dying and asked us please not to interfere. The doctor had promised not to use any artificial measures to keep her alive so no one did. Even so, the process took six weeks.

I had told her when the war was over and she said, "Yes, I understand, you said the war was over. And that's good, isn't it?"

Ralda's I hope you got the picture I sent to the Bancroft Library. I guess it was for your use. Also, Ralda worried about your putting in some of the remarks about the family that appeared in her tape. If you notice, ~~she~~^{mother} did not indulge in any criticism of her family when talking to you. But Ralda, of course, was family and according to her code, you can say anything you please to your own relatives.

Everyone has enjoyed your interview so much. Wasn't it a good thing that you did it when you did. Even a few months later ^{MOTHER} she was much less able to discourse on world problems. Her vocabulary kept up to the last. About three days before she died she said she would "exonerate" me if I didn't come to see her any more!

Thank you so much for your interest in Mother and your efforts to preserve her recollections.

As ever,

Mary

RALDA SULLIVAN INTERVIEWS SYLVIE THYGESON



INTERVIEW HISTORY

The interview took place at Sylvie Thygeson's home, 2325 Cornell in Palo Alto, on June 4, 1972, just about three weeks before Mrs. Thygeson's 104th birthday. Although Mrs. Thygeson's sight and hearing had begun to diminish, she was still alert and able to move about her one-bedroom house. Later in the summer, Mrs. Thygeson moved from the house to a convalescent home after she had become ill and unable to sustain living alone.

I first met Sylvie Thygeson in 1949 shortly before my marriage to Fritjof Thygeson, Sylvie's grandson by her son Phillips. Kristen Lee Mara and Nels Marcus are Sylvie's great-grandchildren from that marriage. Although, that marriage ended in divorce in 1959, Sylvie and I had become firm friends and continued to see each other over the years.

The interview was occasioned by my growing sense of the passage of time and the value of Sylvie Thygeson's recollections of her post-civil war youth and active middle years as a leader of the birth control and women's suffrage movements.

Ralda Sullivan
Interviewer-Editor

August 1973
Berkeley, California



I RALDA SULLIVAN INTERVIEWS SYLVIE THYGESON

Attitudes Toward Family Roles and Members

- Thygeson: Have you ever read that play, Oscar Wilde's story on The Woman of No Importance? You ought to read that. This woman was relegated as a woman of no importance. Of course, she had at a moment of temptation and mad infatuation this illegitimate child. Her husband belonged to the upper class. This son of course was not taken over or brought up by her husband. He left the baby with her. She brought it up, reared it and he became prime minister of England. He had designated her once when she appeared somewhere -- somebody asked who she was, and he said, "Oh, a woman of no importance."
- Sullivan: Her son said this?
- Thygeson: No, her lover, the father of her child. Her child that she loved and was devoted to and brought up became prime minister of England.
- Sullivan: Was the lover a lord or something like that?
- Thygeson: I've often thought of that. Who are really the prime ones?
- Sullivan: You feel the mother is the prime influence.
- Thygeson: Yes, it was the mother. She had kept the son, reared it and he became prime minister. Then at a later time when this woman who was his mother was elevated to this high position in society because her son was prime minister, and the father who had been the one on the upper level was on the lesser level, and so forth. Oscar Wilde brought out that that was the "woman of no importance."

Thygeson: It isn't a question with children of where they belong; it's a question that they do belong here. I think the three children you have are very dear and wonderful children. I feel it isn't for us to say when things happen. I think you've done your part. I think that along the way, since you started out very brilliantly, certainly as an honor student there at Stanford. That was a great thing at the time that you were. It wasn't appreciated as much as it should have been.

Sullivan: That has something to do with the woman's role. In my generation, in the fifties the girl was considered the one who would be the wife and mother, and if we married as students, which Fritjof and I did, then my role was to help him get ahead and help him get his PhD and teach school while he was doing that. [Fritjof Thygeson is Sylvie's grandson.]

Thygeson: Well, he lacked the balance wheel.

Sullivan: He really did.

Thygeson: I think we have to recognize that and see that. I'm one that kind of looks at things in a very serious sort of way. I don't just assume things are this or that way. There are so many undercurrents that happen in our lives and influence us in doing one way or another. And of course many times they would be different. In my life I was terribly fortunate, because I got about the finest man in the world when I married. It was through no virtue of mine or anything. He just fell in love with me, and it all worked out.

Sullivan: How old were you at the time?

Thygeson: He was just everything that you wanted in a man. I look back and I think that although I felt I did appreciate him to a large extent I didn't know enough to appreciate him enough. He had to come from a farm and work his own way through college and up into his profession, and then in his profession up in the upper ranks where he stood in that. He was young when he died, so he could have gone on to greater things.

Sullivan: Did he get an engineering degree too?

Thygeson: Yes, he got that as well as his legal degree.

- Sullivan: Can you give me some dates, such as how old you and he were when you first met and where you were and the circumstances? That would be very interesting.
- Thygeson: Since Marcus is the namesake of his great grandfather -- well, I don't know that there's anything that really matters very much. [Marcus Thygeson is Fritjof's and Balda's son.] He was just this boy off the farm. He went first to a normal school when he was still working on the farm, graduated from that -- a very high-grade normal school. Then he went to the university.
- Sullivan: Where was the farm that he grew up on. Was it in Minnesota?
- Thygeson: No, he came from Wisconsin, not far from St. Paul. He grew up on a farm. His father was a Norwegian farmer.
- Sullivan: And his mother too was Norwegian.
- Thygeson: He went to normal school, and he had to walk miles. But there was another boy in the next farm, and these two boys hobnobbed; they were friends all their lives. They worked together and they both graduated from this normal school and then went on to the University of Wisconsin.
- Sullivan: What was the other boy's name?
- Thygeson: Harold Harris. They were Damon and Pythias, those two boys, all their lives. They loved each other. They had associated ever since they knew anything about friendship of any kind. I look back on that, and one of the things that I bless myself for and sometimes get scared when I think about it, that I never interfered with it. And I could have interfered with it, because they used to go off every Sunday.
- Sullivan: After your marriage?
- Thygeson: They went off on a shooting tour. They never shot a rabbit. My husband couldn't have killed a fly. He wouldn't have thought of killing anyone, an animal or anything. I never interfered with that, with their going off on Sundays although sometimes I had wanted him to stay at home. But they had been inseparable since earliest boyhood.

Marcus comes from very good stock, but I'm sure he does too on your side, and don't you forget your

- Thygeson: side of it, because you have that in the way you work out life, and your brothers. I don't want to elevate one side and depreciate the other. The fact that my grandchildren have Jewish blood in them is all to the good.
- Sullivan: Yes, it's a very good combination.
- Thygeson: Because Jews have a high record down through history of accomplishment everywhere.
- Sullivan: I'll tell you more about my family, but I want to get yours down on this tape. You've told me things, but I want to get it down so I really remember it. I want to encourage you to talk about yourself.
- Thygeson: I think it's nice that children can have an idea that they come from very good stock. And I think with Marcus and, I call her Lili, of course what we know the most is on their father's side. [Lili is a nickname for Kristin Lee Gara Thygeson, sister of Marcus, daughter of Fritjof and Balda.] They have a great deal to be proud of on their father's side for what he has accomplished. But after it is all said and done it's what they do. Unless they make good, unless they do the work and accomplish things, what their ancestors did doesn't count at all. I think it's nice to feel that you have had some kind of foundation. But I never thought in my life that I could live off of my ancestors or feel that I could call on them for any praise for myself.
- Sullivan: I'd like to hear how you started out in Illinois and what your expectations were.

Childhood in Illinois - 1868-1884

- Thygeson: I don't know that there was anything particularly worthwhile. I was born in the little town of Forreston, a beautiful little town with white painted buildings and green roofs and green shutters, and very beautiful elm trees, and people loved flowers. Everybody had flowers.
- Sullivan: How many children were there and which one were you in

Sullivan: the family?

Thygeson: My mother brought up eight children. There were eight of us that grew up.

Sullivan: Were you the oldest?

Thygeson: I had two sisters older than I was. We were not any of us close together. My mother married at fifteen. So she had her children early. We were at least two years apart. As I tell Helena who is here with me, who was brought up an only child when her parents were advanced in years -- they were in their early forties when she was born, her father was over fifty but her mother was in her early forties -- she doesn't know at all what the joys of childhood are with brothers and sisters. [Helena Prosser was a companion hired to live with Sylvie.]

Sullivan: You feel you had a happy childhood in Forreston, Illinois.

Thygeson: Oh, yes! Whatever were the vicissitudes of that childhood it was always interesting. We were always interested in what each other was doing. We had our quarrels and strife and all the things that belong to childhood, possibly our little jealousies and things, I don't remember about that. I only know that I look back on a very happy childhood.

My mother was young. The only sad thing I remember about my mother was that she was an inveterate reader. If she got a book to read maybe we had to wait around for our meals in a very sad kind of way while our mother was absorbed in this book. One time we did the terrible thing, we bought a set of Dickens. It was six volumes, I remember so well, green-bound with three columns on the page. We paid fifteen cents a month to buy this set of Dickens, and when we got that set, oh how we suffered! Because our mother just sat there reading Dickens. She was an inveterate reader. She read all of George Eliot, all The Scottish Tales, everything.

I reproached her. She lived with me twenty-five years before she died. I reproached her many times about that terrible time when she sat there and read and was absorbed in those books. She read only good books.

- Thygeson: They were the books we brought her from school libraries, and so on.
- Sullivan: And you yourself began reading that quality literature at an early age?
- Thygeson: Yes. They were the books we brought in from the school library: George Eliot, The Scottish Tales, we had many German translations of very fine authors, things that we got from the Lutheran Church library.
- Sullivan: Were you in the Lutheran Church?
- Thygeson: We had no religion. In the whole town we were the only family that were atheists.
- Sullivan: How did your family become atheists?
- Thygeson: I don't know, because my grandfather Thompson was a Presbyterian minister.
- Sullivan: Was he the one who assisted slaves on the Underground Railway?
- Thygeson: Yes. And my mother's family were religious too. But my mother and father were not. We were brought up with no religion.
- Sullivan: What did your father do for a living?
- Thygeson: He was a small town lawyer. It amounted more to what today would be a justice of the peace, because no one went to law in those days to work out any case, but in real estate deals and all kinds of things my father settled these things. But he was a white collar -- he earned his living in a white collar way. We often had a precarious living. We never went hungry, because we always had a big garden in summer time. There was a lot of land, and everything was cheap. We had plenty of place to grow things. We raised chickens and everything. You had a lot of opportunity to earn one's living. So we never went hungry. We often didn't have much money to spend.
- Sullivan: So you experienced being poor and being different from the other children.



Thygeson: Being poor in this little town where I lived was a very different matter from being poor in a big city. For instance, one of the things was that we were never without milk, because people had cows. There was plenty of land and pasture for anybody to have a cow that wanted it. There was always milk, always milk to be given away. So all we would ever have to do would be to go after milk.

Sullivan: How about clothes?

Thygeson: My mother was very thrifty. She knew how to fashion things and sew. As we were all girls for so many years except for this one boy, and this beautiful material we call calico was only five cents a yard. And so in the summer time at least we always had what we thought were very pretty dresses, because my mother could fashion them. In the winter time you always had one or two very heavy woolen suits. Our winter coats my mother made. They were lined with blanket material, the kind we used on our beds. They were very warm. We lived in a cold climate.

Sullivan: Was this southern Illinois, or northern.

Thygeson: No, in the middle. I don't ever remember a time when we were hungry. It was never for any length of time that could leave an impression on our minds. In summer we had plenty of ground for gardens. My mother was very thrifty. We were too. We were taught to be a help in the garden and do things.

Sullivan: Did the fact of your parents being atheists make you feel left out of the town socially?

Thygeson: Yes, that was a problem socially. We overcame that by standing the highest in school. We were always on top. We always carried away all the honors. When we had a contest between the next town, which was a little larger than ours, we had a literary contest, my brother and I were both on the program. They couldn't leave either one of us off.

Sullivan: What did you do on the program?

Thygeson: I recited a wonderful poem that I still remember today. It was called "The Knight and the Page." I think it

Thygeson: has a large number of verses, six lines in every verse. My brother was on the debating team. So two of us out of our family were on that special competing team. No, they never could leave us out intellectually, because we were always there, all of us. There was not one of our family that fell behind scholastically. So when it came to taking a back seat, as you would have to if you were, what we called in those days, "dumb," we never were "dumb" in my family. I carried off the honors in that wonderful contest we had with the next town.

The next to the oldest in the family was a boy, and also the youngest. My youngest brother was born long after the oldest members of the family. They were away and married before my youngest brother was born.

No, my childhood was a happy one.

Sullivan: Do you want to tell about your schooling, how far you went in school and how you went to live with your uncle? How far did you go?

Thygeson: I graduated from high school. The high school was just as high a high school as we have them today, in that town where I lived. It was a kind of literary town. I taught when I graduated. My country school began a month before I graduated from high school. But they gave me my certificate. My father died that fall that I graduated from high school and taught that school. My uncle came and took me down to St. Louis. While I was down there I had a wonderful time. It was a wonderful time of mental and spiritual awakening. My uncle was a judge of the appellate court in St. Louis. He was a law book writer.

Sullivan: What was his name?

Thygeson: Seymour D. Thompson. He was one of the editors of The American Law Review. I was there two years. It was a wonderful experience. Progress and awakening and opening up of the mind. My uncle was a traveler. He went abroad after his duties were over. I worked verifying the cases that he cited. I had quite a lot of experience in what there was.

They lived in a great big, three-story, white,

Thygeson: stone-front house on one of the most beautiful streets in St. Louis. We had three servants in the house doing the work with a man outside cleaning the front steps and doing the work around. I became one of my uncle's helpers.

My father died the year I was sixteen.* My uncle came down to the funeral and took me back to St. Louis with him. I had those two years of very great awakening. My aunt was away at school with my two girl cousins. She went away to where her sister was living in Elton, Illinois. It was a semi-preparatory college school. I don't remember any more just what the name was. They went off to school and their mother went with them. She was away quite a bit of the time.

Sullivan: Was this uncle your father's brother?

Thygeson: Yes.

Sullivan: What were your duties?

Thygeson: I wrote the opinions of the court and of all the things that were interesting. Now I'm telling you what my own children have never been interested in. They've never been interested in knowing whatever my past life has been. It was a very interesting life. I was a person that had the ability to have some kind of awakening intellectually, like you have. My children haven't had this or interest in me. To them I've just been like "The Woman of No Importance." They haven't been at all interested in what I did or accomplished or anything. I had all that wonderful life and what I call awakening. I was born with intellectual parents. My father was what you would call an intellectual in the town where we lived. We were brought up to love good books, and everything.

Sullivan: What were your father's interests?

Thygeson: My father was a small town lawyer.

Sullivan: What did he like to read and what did he like to talk about?

*c. 1884. M.T.S.

Thygeson: He talked a lot about politics. We took the Chicago Inter-ocean. In our most poverty-stricken days we took the Chicago daily paper. We were 130 miles from Chicago. That came out every morning on the morning train that was going down south. My father got it. He used to read that paper walking the floor. We might be still sitting at the breakfast table. We always kept abreast of the news. I always had an intellectual home life.

Sullivan: Did you have music in the home, or art?

Thygeson: Yes, I have to tell about the wonderful thing that happened in our house. We became the owners of a secondhand piano, old-fashioned square rosewood piano. There were only three or four pianos in the town where I lived. So it was a wonderful distinction to own a piano.

Sullivan: How did you get that?

Thygeson: I don't know where we acquired it. My father acquired it in some business deal. My older sisters learned to play some simple pieces. Not one of us were musicians. We didn't take to music.

The only thing about this at all valuable for my great-grandchildren is the intellectual awakening. I think the same with them. It's the intellectual awakening they get, it's the going to school and what they are doing. I think we hear from Marcus and get these wonderful letters from him. That's the process he's going through now. Where he's moving around and doing these things he's getting a kind of intellectual awakening, and I think that's terribly important. So I am very happy about it. I think your two children are wonderful children. They don't take a back seat at all to anyone.

Youth in St. Louis

Sullivan: Do you want to tell about your intellectual awakening in St. Louis and what you discovered, who you met?

Thygeson: My uncle had all the volumes of illustrated Shakespeare. They had a little table which I remember where when

Thygeson: you wanted to read one of these wonderful books that were quite huge you put it out on this table and there was a chair by that. You sat at that table and you read this Shakespeare. And that was the way I read Shakespeare, quite a bit of it. I became very familiar with Othello and all the different ones.

My two years in St. Louis were a wonderful spiritual-- in a way, an intellectual and cultural kind of a relationship. I was just at that age where I was open to it all.

Sullivan: How did you get interested in social causes?

Thygeson: I wasn't interested in social problems at that time. They weren't being agitated in the same way at all. My cousin George, who was nineteen years old, was a medical student. The Missouri Medical School was located in St. Louis.

I went all over when I had any time in the evening. I worked many evenings, but when I did have time George and I went to all these different lectures on theosophy, spiritualism, and all kinds of things. We went to seances where they materialized in spiritualism. One time we went we had to link little fingers with everybody around the table, the lights were out, there was supposed to be a three-year old boy that had died years ago who belonged to one of the people at our table. He was materialized and floating in space. It was a very noted spiritualist who conducted these. They don't allow them any more, you know.

Sullivan: What did you think of that?

Thygeson: We went to everything and had all that experience. We just did everything. My cousin George, of course, was open to that. He was a medical student. He went later to Leipzig, Germany to study medicine before he became a doctor. We had a wonderful time, and as I say it had a great deal to do with my education and my whole outlook on life.

My family have never had the slightest interest in this. I don't know whether they think I'm inferior, but I've never been elevated in any way. I'm just in the background all along the way. I don't know that I've wanted to be in any other part. It's just that some way or other I would like to have been recognized

Thygeson: as a person who made some contribution to what has been done.

But they have not been interested in any of the dramatic side. It was very dramatic all the way what I went through. My two years living in kind of a mansion, because my uncle's house was very beautifully furnished with the mocha [mohair? MTS.] carpets in the great salons they had. They had these beautiful gold-framed pictures hanging on the sides of the large livingroom. I was living in great luxury. They had two regular servants who did the work and a man who did the outside work. I was living in kind of a luxury there and in an atmosphere that I had never lived in. I had come out of this little town in Illinois. It was a wonderful experience.

Sullivan: Did it make you desire to be wealthy?

Thygeson: No. My whole desire while I was there--because I couldn't have had any other kind, living with the people I was living with--was a great desire to acquire, to learn and to do something. My uncle valued learning. He was born a little boy back in the wilds of Iowa. His father was a Presbyterian minister and was burned to death in a prairie fire. My uncle and my own father and there were two other brothers had to make their own way. But they were all on the intellectual order. They didn't work by hand or anything. But my uncle was the one who succeeded more, of course.

Marriage in St. Paul - 1891

Sullivan: Did you meet Marcus in St. Louis?

Thygeson: I was going out to a lecture. I had to be back. I was going up to take a friend of mine out who was engaged. She was going up in the elevator. She had told us about this very nice man. I was going to the same lecture. It was a lecture on Shakespeare. Ingersoll was lecturing, Robert G. Ingersoll. We had to go back up. I forgot something. As we went up this young man stepped into the elevator. I whispered to Mrs. Burns, "That's Mr. Thygeson." He was going to take out this very intimate friend of mine who was engaged and whose lover (she was engaged to be married) was away and they had tickets, and so

Thyegson: she asked him to fill in and use Bob's tickets.

He heard me saying, "That's Mr. Thygeson." He heard me whispering this to her. He looked at me and he says--I don't know how true it was, that when he looked at me he said to himself that that was the girl he was going to marry. He always asserted that that was really true. I discounted it when he was telling me this.

Sullivan: How old was he? And how old were you?

Thyegson: I think he was twenty-five or twenty-six. I was twenty-three at the time I was married. I wasn't married young. But as far as attention was concerned I had had the usual amount of attention. I was reasonably interesting as a person. I had a number of friends I was more or less intimate with.

Sullivan: How about that man you were going to marry who was going to set up restaurants or something, and your uncle talked you out of it.

Thygeson: That was many years before that. I was just this young girl at that time, only sixteen years old. Oh yes. He was one of the boys that came out when I was teaching school out in the country. Yes, he was in my life. Oh no, my uncle interfered with that. He said, "No," right away. He said I wasn't fitted for that life. He sent him back.

Sullivan: What was it he was going to do?

Thygeson: He went out to Broken Bone, Nebraska. He was going to establish a restaurant out there first of all. I met him in this small town where I lived. He was very dear and nice. I really did care a lot about him. He was a very nice boy. He came from a nice family. His mother had been a nice person.

But my uncle said that I was totally unfitted for that type of life--which I was, being this cripple, having this bad ankle, and never brought up to anything like that, never brought up to hard work. On account of my sprained ankle I had never been brought up doing housework. My older sisters did that.

Sullivan: What happened to your ankle?

Thygeson: I was hastening along to school. I was going to have my examinations for high school. At a very early age. I was only twelve years old when I went into high school. I just kind of twisted my ankle, sprained it. We didn't have proper doctors. Afterwards I fell over on it and broke a bone in it. I had a lot of trouble. Oh yes, I cared a lot for that young man. He was very nice. But of course I was totally unfitted for that type of life, and it would have turned out disastrously. I don't know, though. I often think about it, because out in this section of Nebraska where he was going to locate afterwards gold mines were developed, and people became very wealthy. This man I was engaged to became very wealthy.

Sullivan: Were you very upset when your uncle broke that up?

Thygeson: No, I wasn't upset at all. I was going into a new and very wonderful life. Because my life down at my uncle's in St. Louis was like a dream world to me. I was living in luxury and what was a palace to me. It would be pretty nearly a palace today, not anything I'd ever lived in, with all the beautiful gold-framed mirrors, the carpets, the large rooms.

Sullivan: Did you meet your husband in St. Louis?

Thygeson: No, I met my husband in an elevator in St. Paul.

Sullivan: How did you get to St. Paul?

Thygeson: When I went from my uncle's my mother came to St. Paul from where she was living in our little town after my father died. She wanted me to come back to St. Paul and live there at home. She wanted me at home. She wanted me to get a job there in St. Paul and have the family united. I had one little brother and two little sisters. I was homesick too. I was devoted to my little brothers and sisters and to my mother. So it wasn't too hard to leave where I was, though it was entirely different. I came and I got a job.

Sullivan: What kind of a job?

Thygeson: Stenography. I had learned stenography and typewriting at my uncle's in order to do work for him. I was quite proficient, because I had done the opinions of the court.

Sullivan: Did you write them or did you take them down from dictation?

Thygeson: I took them from dictation. They were the opinions of the appellate court. They were very interesting, every one of them. All my work was always interesting. I was always alive to it. But I wanted to come home. I was very homesick. So I came home and I was there with my mother in St. Paul until my mother left to go down to where my sister was living, where she established a kind of business down there. I didn't go down. I got a job at \$100 a month, which was a fabulous sum at that time. I got that in stenography and typewriting.

It wasn't so long after that that I met my husband. We were only engaged five weeks when we were married. There wasn't any reason in the world why we shouldn't be married. He was without a home and I was without a home. There was every reason when we fell in love why we shouldn't be married and establish a home. It would have been strange to have gone on being engaged for a long time.

Sullivan: You met him in the elevator and five weeks later you were married?

Thygeson: Well, I didn't meet him in the elevator. I saw him there. Oh no, I met him later on. I met him in his own office.

Sullivan: How did that happen?

Thygeson: I went in there on some errand for the people I was working for. He was with a firm of lawyers, Munn, Boyesen and Thygeson. He was already established in his profession. He had his own private office.

Sullivan: Was Boyesen related to the writer, H. H. Boyesen?

Thygeson: Boyesen was another Norwegian who was in the firm. Mr. Munn was the senior partner in the firm.

Sullivan: Do you know the name, H. H. Boyesen, a Norwegian writer in America?

Thygeson: Oh yes, I know Boyesen is a writer coming from Norway. He was a noted person. Boyesen is not an unusual name in Norway. Thygeson is a very unusual name.

Sullivan: Is it part Danish?

Thygeson: Nobody knows any Thygesons.

Sullivan: Didn't they come originally from Bergen in Norway?

Thygeson: They came from Denmark originally.

Sullivan: And then lived in Norway?

Thygeson: I don't know that anybody knows too much about the origin of those names. It was not a common name. There was no other Thygeson in St. Paul except my husband. There was no other Thygeson in Los Angeles. There was never but one that they ever heard of in New York City. That's why I was always worried when Fritjof [her grandson] got his name into considerable prominence, because Thygeson was a very unusual name and you have to be very careful how you use an unusual name. There was never any other Thygeson in St. Paul, and we stood out. Fortunately, my husband stood high in the ranks, and so we never had to worry.

Of all the people in the whole world there never was a nicer, kinder or more capable man than my husband. So your children have a wonderful great-grandfather. You never need to be sorry that you named Marcus after his great-grandfather. He stood high in his community, high in other ways than his ability which was very good, but he stood for everything that was good and worthwhile.

Sullivan: Do you want to tell about his attitudes and the sorts of things he did stand for?

Thygeson: He was too busy a man to be out doing any saving the world. He was too busy in his law practice. They were a very noted firm, a very busy firm. But he stood for everything that was good; he stood for woman's suffrage and birth control and all these things that were good.

How She First Became Involved in the Suffrage and Birth Control Movements

Sullivan: How did you get interested and get started on woman's suffrage and birth control?

Thygeson: I think always I was interested in that. My mother was always interested in woman's suffrage. Way, way back, when my mother was young there were women working for suffrage.

Sullivan: What did they do? How did they go about it?

Thygeson: They talked it. They gave some lectures and did things in a way that people took part in some things that required women. My mother never had the time to take part in those things because she had too many children, but she was interested. It was just one of those things--like it was in your family.

If your children are brought up in an open-minded family where you discuss everything. It isn't that you just instill special principles in them. You know how it works with your children. You gave them a large outlook. You gave them anything that came along, everything they were able to investigate, look into, read about, study, one of those open-minded sorts of atmosphere, intellectual atmosphere where people are not limited.

Sullivan: What were you most interested in at that time, back in St. Paul? What social problems most interested you?

Thygeson: I was interested in every kind of social problem that came my way.

Sullivan: You worked for woman's suffrage and birth control.

Thygeson: Yes, I stood out. I was a little more aggressive than some of the people that I was associated with.

Sullivan: How did you get into the birth control movement?

Thygeson: I guess I was kind of born into it. I know that when Margaret Sanger and some of the women that came out publicly worked for it on a large scale it was the most natural thing in the world for me to join it and to go along with it as I did with what I thought were the progressive things at the time.

My husband was always progressive. We just went along. I don't know that I especially adopted anything. It's just like I think you've gone along with progressive things. You were just advanced. You didn't definitely

Thygeson: take up any special thing and say, "I'm going to do this or that." You just went along with the people and associated with the people that did the things that you wanted to do and that you liked, and that was the way I did.

Of course when I met my husband he was a progressive man. He liked me and he liked the way I did things. He was interested in my society and what I had to say and the things we talked about. We always had very interesting subjects to discuss at the table. He discussed things and I discussed things. I brought things to talk about and he brought things to talk about. Just one of those things where people who think they're intelligent, at least, sit at a table and converse, like you and I if we wanted to converse on special subjects.

Sullivan: Do you want to tell how you would spend a typical day when you were first married?

Thygeson: I don't know that I could do that, because I spent so many days that were either alike or that they were just what came along. Of course, I belonged to certain groups. We were working hard for the suffrage movement. The part I played in suffrage was, I think, a really good one. You had these little afternoon gatherings of women. You had a cup of tea. A little social gathering. While we were drinking tea I gave a little talk and they asked questions about what was going on. It was a lot better, I thought at the time, than to have a lecture. Because a lot of them wouldn't go to a lecture. I took my own neighborhood when I went out and did that talking.

Sullivan: Did you have them to your house for tea?

Thygeson: No, I went to their houses. They had a little afternoon tea just to hear me talk.

Sullivan: How many women would turn out.

Thygeson: Oh, there might be six or eight women in the group.

Sullivan: What kind of questions?

Thygeson: They asked all kinds of questions. I don't remember exactly. They were usually quite intelligent questions

Thygeson: as to what was being done, who was doing it, who was prominent at the time, things like that. I was, of course, enthusiastic, so I answered. I didn't think of putting over anything. I had no feeling that I was important in any way. We just met. It was a very nice, interesting social time for meeting people and enjoying ourselves. I don't remember anything but being very happy about it and feeling that when I went out and spent an afternoon that it was worthwhile. It was what I could do. I couldn't have gone out on the lecture stage.

Then, of course, one of the big things we did was this Woman's Welfare League.

The Woman's Welfare League in St. Paul

Sullivan: Yes, tell about that. You were the first vice-president.

Thygeson: Yes, it was incorporated. It was large enough to be incorporated and we gave a luncheon every Saturday at noon to a hundred women.

Sullivan: Who were these women?

Thygeson: Any women that came in.

Sullivan: Were they poor women?

Thygeson: They were women that were downtown. This was downtown in St. Paul. We had a very beautiful place to have this dinner, the second floor of this place that had glass on two sides. We had twenty-five tables.

Sullivan: What happened at these luncheons?

Thygeson: We had someone who came through St. Paul lecture. It was never any special person lecturing. One time it was David Starr Jordan. It was very prominent people from the East.

Sullivan: Sara Bard Field, was she one of these people that came through?

Thygeson: Yes, she was connected with a very wealthy group of

Thygeson: women in the East that were promoting woman's suffrage. She came and she lectured to the Women's Welfare League. I toted her around. I had a seven-passenger Cadillac car. I toted all the suffrage people around from one place to another. Then we had big banquets. There might be a hundred persons at the banquet. Then we had some very prominent speaker.

We took our husbands to these banquets. I remember one time, at one banquet especially, how inordinately proud of my husband I was when he looked so wonderful and intellectual that night. He got up and spoke. He spoke forcefully. He spoke about the suffrage movement. He said they should long have had suffrage. They should never have been without it. It was a highly intelligent talk that he gave. I was very proud of him. Everybody, all my friends, admired him and liked him. He was a very likable person. He was not only intelligent and advanced in his ideas.

My son, Phil, and my son, Elling, I don't know how they ever grew up, living in the atmosphere that they did, as they have grown up. Not that they haven't accomplished in a certain part of the world. Of course, my son, Phil, as you know, his name is known all over the world.* In every part of the world there are clinics. Comparatively recently a clinic was established in Samoa where there was an outbreak. He went down there and established this clinic and left a young doctor coming out from here who was in charge of it. He has done inestimable work when it comes to the discovery that he made of the cure of blindness. Many people he has saved from blindness. So I forgive him for what I consider his narrow-minded or reactionary ideas along social lines.

Sullivan: What else were your husband's ideas on social problems?

Thygeson: He didn't have any social problems of his own. He was much too busy a man in his profession. He went everywhere with me. He believed entirely in woman's suffrage. There never was a question with him about suffrage or any of those things. He was just as free and open-minded a man as you can think of -- just like you are

*Phillips Thygeson is an eminent ophthalmologist.

- Thygeson: as a person. You don't have to start and figure out and think about when it comes to these larger social questions. You're just a part of them. Of course, I've always recognized that in you. I'm sorry that my sons, neither one of them, are that large and open-minded like their father and I were. It's one of the queerer things of life.
- Sullivan: Were some of the people you knew opposed to woman's suffrage? Did you get some bad reactions from other men and other women?
- Thygeson: We had a lot of people who came in. We allowed everyone to come in and speak for and against.
- Sullivan: What kind of reactions against woman's suffrage did you get?
- Thygeson: They came and listened. There was never any bad reaction. The people who came to those lectures were intelligent people who wanted to know what was going on in the world. It was all a part in our lives of education. Just as I think it probably is today when our young people go out among these things. Only there aren't these special questions that come up like women's suffrage and birth control. Those have all been settled.
- You're that kind of an intelligent mother that you've brought your children up to openly consider these things and want to hear about them and do about them. I told both Lili and Marcus never to criticize their mother. I said that that's a bad habit to get into.
- Sullivan: I appreciate that very much.
- Thygeson: It's just a bad habit to get into. Because your mother treasured you, brought you up, and she's given you very advanced ideas, and don't start in criticizing. When you start criticizing you don't get anywhere.
- Sullivan: Did you feel critical of your mother when you were young?
- Thygeson: No, my mother was very advanced in her ideas. She always was ahead of her time. She married when she was fifteen, but she was very bright, and she was a great reader. When my mother died at 101 she was a highly

Thygeson: intelligent woman. She knew what was going on all over the world. I asked her on her deathbed -- those last days she had were spent at the hospital, she had had that broken hip -- what she thought of the world and the way it was going because I valued her opinion.

She hadn't the good eyesight that I have; she listened a great deal to the radio, to all kinds of opinions, and so forth. She said that we were going on to worse things. We were in no position where we were going to right some of the wrongs in the world. There was going to be this upheaval. And, of course, we've gone into these wars since then.

I don't think we're on the road to improvement at all. If we're on the road to anything we're on the road to worse things, because we've got very blind people that are running our government and no highly intelligent, bright-minded people who really want the world to be better running it in high places.

Her Philosophical Outlook: Evolutionists vs. Space Binders

Sullivan: What hope do you see for the world?

Thygeson: The world always was in turmoil. You have to view the world from the evolutionary point of view. Don't just view it from the Nixon administration and things like this. You have to analyze how far we've gone from Neanderthal Man up to the present time, remembering that in the time of the Neanderthal Man they just picked up a stone and knocked the brains out of anyone next to them, when they didn't like them.

Now we try them and put them in prison, and if we don't like what they're thinking or doing we keep them there as long as we can. We're going on and doing all those things against our fellow creatures, but we're doing it in a little better way. What I would like you to do with your children would be to look at the world from the evolutionary point of view, not just how it is today but the direction in which we're going and then play your part in that direction.

Sullivan: What direction would you like to see?

Thygeson: People will always go on progressing and learning, learning how better to live together, and also to regulate more the property of the world, the people of the world, not breed too many children. There are many more than we can take care of financially. Do things that we already have learned are very sensible. You know as much as I do about that, because you have all these progressive ideas. You're not sitting back there in a vacuum waiting to be told what to do. You know a lot of things. You have brought up two very nice children. Just to what extent you have succeeded in enlarging their vision of evolution -- that's what we always have to proceed in. No, remember that. It's the evolutionary point of view.

You make little changes here and there in the government that we think are for the better and for people, but in the long run for the advancement of the world it has to be from the evolutionary point of view. The question is whether in your life here you have helped to advance that evolutionary point of view, played your little part in it, or whether . . .

It's like that man that wrote this book. Kowinsky -- he was an engineer from Poland. He wrote a book called The Manhood of Humanity. He said that in this world we are all evolutionists or space binders. He said the great masses of people in the world are just space binders, that all they really contribute to the world is to fill up space living, that there is only a certain per cent of them that are evolutionists, that want to project something into the future that's more worthwhile. It's a wonderful book.

Sullivan: Did you think you were working for evolution when you were very young? Were you conscious of your ideas of working for evolution when you were in your twenties?

Thygeson: No, I just felt we live in a world of evolution. I always believed in evolution. I thought Kowinsky's idea was one that illustrated more than anything what I thought about life. Are we evolutionists that have helped forward the world? By the children we've produced or by what we've done have we made a definite contribution, or are we just sitting there in space and existing? You can't restrict them, because they're away from you and not a part of you. In my family, I think Mary [Shepardson] is carrying on in a very fine way in her teaching of anthropology, the story of

Thygeson: man and man's place in the world. I wish she had a little more of the evolutionary point about it, as I think I have.

Her Work With the Birth Control Clinic

Sullivan: Could we go back a bit and talk about the birth control movement, because Mary has a note here that the birth control movement was criminal. I'd like to know what your ideas were in going into it, and what you did, and how you organized.

Thygeson: It was the most natural thing in the world to go into birth control. I limited my own family. We were married four years before I had a child, and then my children were three years apart. I wasn't plunging into a large family. We limited and I believed in that limited birth control for every family. I went along with Margaret Sanger.

We established the clinic, myself and two other women. Women had access to the information that would help them limit their families. Women didn't know in those earlier days anything about family limitation, and the only way they could practice family limitation was by abstention. You know that many people aren't capable of abstention. I can't blame them or anything like that, because they're born that way. They can't mind or anything interfere -- I think it's especially difficult in a way for men, who shouldn't be too much blamed about things. So I thought it was necessary, and Margaret Sanger thought it was, to give women the information where they could limit this on their own.

Sullivan: What kind of information did you give?

Thygeson: She has her book, you can buy the Margaret Sanger book.

Sullivan: What did you do in the clinic?

Thygeson: I couldn't tell about it or anything. She has her very definite ways of limiting, of preventing pregnancy.

Sullivan: Do you remember how the clinic was organized, how you set about that and who you did it with?

Thygeson: A group of women in my town, women of standing in the community, that is, whose husbands had some kind of standing. We established the Birth Control Clinic. Margaret Sanger came and lectured to us. We accepted her ideas and believed in it. We ourselves had had no difficulty in limiting our families. One of these women had only one child, of the three women of us that established the clinic. Mrs. Alice Bacon, one of my friends, had four children, and I had four.

Sullivan: The other was Grace Keller.

Thygeson: We had them because we wanted them. I didn't have any children that I didn't want. We wanted all the children we had. My husband was very fond of children, and he would have been the most disappointed man in the world if I had not wanted children. He loved children. I don't know if I lived it over again if I would have had four children. But at that time we thought we were amply able to support four children. We thought it was very nice to have them. They were not close together. Some of them were five years apart. I think maybe the only one of the children who was what you might call an accident was Mary. But Mary was born out of a great affection. Her birth was inevitable in a way, I think.

My husband was very fond of children. He just loved them. He would have loved his grandchildren and great-grandchildren if he had lived. He would have loved them beyond measure. He would have been terribly disappointed if he hadn't had children. I wouldn't have dared to live my married life without children.

Sullivan: These women who came to the Birth Control Clinic, were they lower class women? Were they poor women?

Thygeson: These two women and I established the clinic, then got these doctors to associate with us. You couldn't do anything without the doctors. We had two doctors, very fine, wonderful, high-spirited men. They sanctioned the birth control movement and said they would work with us. One of these men we never knew if he was a bachelor or what he was. He was not married, no wife at the time. Just what he had gone into, or what it was we never knew. The other man had a wife and four children. He was very much in favor of having birth control. So he gave out information at the clinic without any fanfare or difficulty at all.

- Thygeson: I went through all kinds of things. I had my name written up editorially in the big newspaper of St. Paul.
- Sullivan: What did they say?
- Thygeson: Denouncing me. It was a criminal offense in those days to practice birth control. Our clinic was against the law. You couldn't buy birth control material in the stores anywhere.
- Sullivan: So how could anybody get it?
- Thygeson: You couldn't carry around anything like that. I had to rely on my husband's prestige in the community. He had real prestige. They would have thought a long time before arresting me on birth control with my husband in the position he was. Then, besides, a lot more people were beginning to believe in it and think it was the right thing. But when I was doing it it was illegal.
- Sullivan: What years was this?
- Thygeson: I'd have to go back and figure. You see, I'm one hundred and four now, and it would have been way back, I think this was in my early days when I was in my late thirties. So it would be seventy years or more back.
- Sullivan: Around 1900, 1902.*
- Thygeson: It was illegal. Women practiced it, of course, but they practiced it in the privacy of their lives. It wasn't open to the general public. All kinds of women who didn't have birth control had to go on having these unwanted children and have too many.
- Sullivan: Where could a woman get birth control materials in that day?
- Thygeson: We gave it in our clinic. (When my daughter, Ruth, was at the head of the clinics over here in Oakland and Berkeley they gave out information, and they had no difficulty at all.)
- Sullivan: What did you call the clinic?
- Thygeson: We didn't advertise. We were entirely secret and

*This date is more likely 1915 or 1916 (S.G.)

Thygeson: had no name. I remember one time when a young man, a very nice young man, came up from the country, and he had just been newly married, and he had heard about birth control and he wanted to get the information, he didn't want to get his wife pregnant right away. Yet he didn't want to do things, do what they have to do -- so he came one morning to my house. We had this very heart-to-heart conversation about family, raising families, and so forth, and then I sent him, of course, to the clinic. He'd heard about me and I sent him to the clinic where they gave him the very definite information, Margaret Sanger's device that she had at the time, fitted him out.

What we were doing was very active work. It was not only advocating what we were doing, but it was helping people that couldn't otherwise have done anything about it. Because after all if you don't have the cooperation of your husband you have to have other mechanical means to limit birth.

Sullivan: Where did the money come from to run the clinic?

Thygeson: It didn't take much money to run the clinic.

Sullivan: Did people pay you?

Thygeson: I don't remember that we had to collect money for it. I don't remember that we ever had any money troubles. I think money was handed out. I don't remember that we ever had to go out [to get money], or that we were hampered for lack of money. We could just give people who came to us the information, and they had to spend the money. We could get Margaret Sanger's design for limiting family, but it cost a certain amount, but they always paid for it. We didn't have to furnish it to anyone.

Sullivan: Where was the clinic? Did you have to pay rent for some space?

Thygeson: We had a clinic, but it wasn't designated a birth control clinic. It was just an office, a room where we met and had lectures, and we lectured on the desirability of birth control, tried to educate people to the idea of too many people in the world and things like that. I don't remember that we ever had any difficulties about money. I went along in a terribly interested

Thygeson: and happy way, because I had a very happy family, a very wonderful husband. I was enjoying my life to the fullest extent.

Sullivan: Did any of your friends object to what you were doing?

Thygeson: I don't know how many of my social friends knew what I was doing. I wasn't out lecturing to the general public. My name wasn't prominent in that way at all. We were just doing sort of underground work, working with Margaret Sanger principally. She was the great birth control person at that time. It hadn't anything to do with my social life. We didn't make a social affair of it at any time.

We were just working along, just as I would be doing now if I were working among people. I wouldn't be out having a meeting and a place to meet and all that kind of thing. I'd be doing probably the same thing, meeting around at houses, educating women who were either newly married or going to be married, giving them the information. Of course, we did meet many people. I was as active in the suffrage movement as I was in the birth control movement.

Sullivan: Were you doing both at the same time?

Thygeson: I was always present in the birth control movement, present today. I am still doing it, wherever it's necessary. People come along, young people, I have people over in Los Altos, young people, newly married. They wanted to know, not so much they know about birth control, much more than was known in my day, they like to discuss it.

Her Work with the Women's Welfare League

Sullivan: Were you doing the Women's Welfare League at the same time?

Thygeson: That went on for several years. I was the first vice president. We had the president, who was not at the meetings. She was a very wealthy woman that went away with her husband every year; they went to Europe, in the summer they went down south. I was always there presiding.

Sullivan: What was the president's name?

Thygeson: Mrs. C. P. Noyes. Her husband was a wholesale druggist in St. Paul. They were very wealthy people. She was a very beautiful, high-minded woman. She came over to my house -- I didn't live in the high-grade section that she lived in, I lived in the middle section of St. Paul, on the other side was the poorer element -- She came over one morning and begged me to come over on Summit Avenue where the elite lived and to be her guest for a certain time and go to these social affairs that were being given, not birth control affairs, especially, and go where I could meet these people in this higher social circle and talk to them. She wanted me to be her house guest. I declined that.

Sullivan: What did she want you to do? Contact high society people?

Thygeson: She wanted me to go there and mingle in the social life and in my talks to talk to these women about the larger views I had on suffrage and the woman question, and various things, which was not too far advanced in those days. It was an advanced thing for women to be out advocating suffrage or birth control at that time.

She thought I was greatly fitted for taking part in that social atmosphere. I told her I wasn't at all fitted for that. I told her I would be making faux pas on every occasion. I told her that in that life in society you have to be born to it. You're not fitted, whatever you may think you are, whatever you may think you can do, you're going to be gauche on many occasions. You've read the story, haven't you, of that miner's daughter who married the Rockefeller and had his child. She told her story of what happens. She was very beautiful, she knew how to dress. She had very good manners.

Sullivan: Do you want to tell about going to the Soviet Union? And your trips abroad? Did you go for the Women's League for Peace and Freedom?

Thygeson: It was something very special, something way out of this world. Mary and I were there. It was a time not long after the Revolution. It was always interesting. We went along with a very interesting group. I don't know that there's anything particular. We just accepted things as they were and adapted ourselves to them.

- Sullivan: With this Women's Welfare League Mary has here that you had the only Negro couple in town (in St. Paul) belonging to that. What was that?
- Thygeson: That was a very prominent organization with a hundred women.
- Sullivan: Were these women middle-class women? Were there poor women in the group. What kind of backgrounds did these women come from?
- Thygeson: It had the background of woman's suffrage which we hadn't had at that time. It had a very active background. Sara Bard Field and a lot of very prominent women -- they didn't belong to the Women's Welfare League, because that was a St. Paul organization -- but we were organized legally. We were highly organized. We had about a hundred members. We gave a luncheon every week on Saturday.
- Sullivan: What was the main purpose?
- Thygeson: Education. We were educating for suffrage. Suffrage was not established at that time. We not only lectured for suffrage but we also lectured for birth control and any of the things that belonged to women. I was the first vice president of that. Our president was the woman I told you about who wanted me to go over to her house. She was a woman of high social standing in St. Paul. But she went away every summer, all summer, and every winter, all winter, so I was the presiding officer of the group. Then we had all the people that came in to lecture for us. These were people who came through St. Paul. St. Paul is half way on the traveling scale.
- Sullivan: Did you give them fees for lecturing?
- Thygeson: Our lectures were free. We served a luncheon for 25¢ every week on Saturday.
- Sullivan: Who did the cooking?
- Thygeson: We brought things. The woman that did my washing and ironing, when it came my turn to furnish the luncheon, she did it for me. She was very capable. We took turns, the women on the staff. We had very prominent women on the staff, very nice, intelligent, some of

Thygeson: the women of the highest intelligence. They took turns.

Sullivan: What about this "only Negro couple in town?"

Thygeson: Yes, they belonged to this League. He was a man of quite high standing in the community. He had attained some very fine position. Both of them were highly educated. We stood high in the community, because we had all these very fine lecturers that came. When these lecturers from abroad came to St. Paul they wanted to go from New York or Boston or one of those places to the coast here. Always when they stopped in St. Paul on the way we had them lecture to us. So we had a lot of these.

We were very educational. I think we did a great deal in that line. We were very active and did a lot. We didn't draw the line too strictly about things. Woman's suffrage was not declared at that time. Woman's suffrage was not established and birth control was not established. So we had both of these things to establish and work with. We had very interesting people that came out. They worked with us. That is, they gave their lectures.

One of the people from the coast here was David Starr Jordan. He lectured more than once to us. Because when he went back and forth he stopped off there and gave us a talk for our Saturday afternoon talk.

The father of one of the women who was at the head of our program had been governor of the state of Minnesota.

Sullivan: Who was that?

Thygeson: Mrs. Hamlin. She stood high in our work. She was highly intelligent. She was responsible for many of the programs. We worked with all the nice women. Sara Bard Field would come from the East where she had gone off to Erskine Scott Wood, the man she married later on. She was living with him in sin at that time, because his wife wouldn't divorce him. But we welcomed her. She was very beautiful. She dressed very beautifully. She came to this group of very interesting, fine women.

Sullivan: Do you remember what she talked about?

Thygeson: She talked on suffrage and the woman question. I toted her around with these other women that came from the East in my Cadillac car, different places where she wanted to go. She lectured sometimes in more than one place. I never intruded myself as a personality, never. I was the chauffeur when I was driving her around.

We had our big banquets when some of them came. I remember once, though, a great thrill I had. We were having a banquet. There was a large group of women and their husbands there. It was a time when the women brought their husbands.

My husband was called upon to speak. I never will forget that night. I was so overwhelmingly proud of him. He got up and gave a very fine, sensible, wonderful talk. Although he was not a handsome man at all he seemed very handsome to me that night. He was distinguished looking. The way he spoke and the subject he spoke on -- he was one to be highly proud of. I remember that great thrill I had. That remained with me a long, long time. I was so proud for all the things he stood for. They were so fine and good.

Sullivan: Did you have problems dealing with the city government. Did they try to stop you from running the Birth Control Clinic? Did they try to interfere with your activities?

Thygeson: No, not especially. I was written up editorially, written up detrimentally as being the head of the birth control movement. As long as my husband didn't mind it I didn't mind it. They couldn't say anything really bad. They wouldn't have done it on account of my husband's prominence. I didn't have anything to fear. I had no social position I was wrecking.

Sullivan: Did you work in politics at all?

Thygeson: No, I didn't work in the actual political situation. I just worked in the educational side. We brought the fine speakers, so many fine speakers to the city, and those that came through. One of our group, Mrs. Hamlin, was largely responsible for that, the one whose father had been governor of Minnesota at one time. He was a very prominent man. Mrs. Hamlin was a very highly educated woman. I think she graduated from some eastern college.

Sullivan: Do you remember the rest of her name?

Thygeson: Leonora Hamlin. We called her Norah Hamlin. She worked with us heart and soul. I was very glad to be intimately associated with her. I was happy to be associated with all those women.

Sullivan: Were the people who came to the Birth Control Clinic poor people?

Thygeson: I never had any function at the Birth Control Clinic myself, because we had these two doctors, one from St. Paul and one from Minneapolis.

Sullivan: Do you remember their names?

Thygeson: I'd like to remember their names. One of them came out several years afterwards to visit me and stayed three days with me in my Palo Alto house. He was one of the doctors that officiated at this special clinic in Minneapolis. The other doctor I can't remember his name at all. I really didn't have anything to do with them.

Sullivan: Was there more than one clinic, or was there just one?

Thygeson: There was this one special clinic in the interurban district, that I was associated with. I didn't have anything to do with that. We just furnished this instrument that Margaret Sanger had invented for the prevention of pregnancy. It was a very ingenious sort of one. They have found easier methods than that.

Sullivan: Do you remember how much people had to pay for it?

Thygeson: I don't think it was very much. Maybe \$1.25, something like that. Of course you didn't [say] much about what people paid for it because it was illegal, it was illegal to disseminate birth control, so we weren't out peddling birth control instruments. That wasn't done at all. It was highly illegal to even give out birth control. You can't imagine that now. It's very difficult to imagine that you couldn't legally limit the size of your family.

Sullivan: You and Mrs. Bacon and Mrs. Keller got together and set up this clinic?

Thygeson: Yes, Mrs. Bacon and Mrs. Keller were the women.

Sullivan: How was it actually that you set it up? Can you tell how you organized it?

Thygeson: It was the other women who were deeply interested in it. They went out and rented the room and did everything. They took over and did all that other part of it, the part that was necessary like setting up the work, the cleaning and having the doctors come. I didn't know the doctors. One I did know, but I wouldn't have known him, except that he came out to California and stayed three days at my house with me. He remembered me and had a very high opinion of me for running the clinic. So he came out later on especially to Palo Alto to see me.

Sullivan: Who paid the rent for the room for the clinic.

Thygeson: We had dues for our club. We had dues for the Women's Welfare League. We took in quite a bit of money at our weekend luncheon. We charged 25¢ a meal for a small luncheon. We took in quite a bit of money every week. We served a hundred people. Of course they paid only 25¢, but we didn't have to pay any of our helpers. There was no expense to it. We brought in food, a lot of us, that didn't cost anything. So it was all clear money that we made.

We were a very enthusiastic group. We were deeply interested in what we were doing. I think we accomplished a great deal. There were other women that were associated, women whose names were more prominent than mine, who lent their names to doing these things.

Sullivan: Do you want to give some of their names?

Thygeson: Mary tried to find the little booklet I have that was published on our Welfare League. In that booklet were the women who functioned as officers etc. Some day we'll look for it. I told her not to muss things up too much in that box because I would never get them back into shape again if she undid too much. It's not important who the names were, because they are long since dead and forgotten. The whole thing is a long time over.

Sullivan: How did you stop working with them? Was it moving to Palo Alto that ended your work?

Thygeson: We broke up because everybody changed and moved away. The older people that were there, their children grew up and married and many of them had gone out here to California, like I had. Many of them had died. That was a very simple way, the way it wound up. Because we didn't all remain the same age, there together. Many of them were older, younger. Some married. Some died.

Woman's Welfare League
 Studio Building
 Fourth and Market Sts.
 St. Paul

President -- Mrs. C.P. Noyes
 First Vice-Pres. -- Mrs. N.M. Thygeson
 Second Vice-Pres. -- Mrs. H.A. Tomlinson
 Third Vice-Pres. -- Mrs. I.L. Rypins
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 Social Conditions -- Mrs. H.A. Tomlinson
 Suffrage Extension -- Mrs. A.M. Burt

SHERNA GLUCK AND MARY SHEPARDSON INTERVIEW SYLVIE THYGESON

INTERVIEW HISTORY

The following interview with Sylvie Thygeson, conducted October 12, 1972, in a convalescent hospital in California, was the first undertaken by The Feminist History Research Project. Sylvie Thygeson's name had been given to us by Esther Hurwitt, a family friend living in Los Angeles. Esther had been an intimate friend of Sylvie's deceased daughter, Ruth, and as a result of Esther's relationship to Sylvie and the family, called Sylvie "Mother T."

Sylvie had become a legend to the many women in Los Angeles who heard of her through Esther, and also referred to the remarkable old suffragist simply as "Mother T." In learning of "Mother T's" name, I discovered that she was the grandmother of Fritjof Thygeson, whom I had known twenty years before.

Mary Shepardson, Sylvie's daughter, herself a remarkable woman, accompanied me on the interview. We arrived at the convalescent hospital without any advance warning. I had very little knowledge of Sylvie Thygeson's activities and at the time was not even aware of the earlier interview recorded by Ralda. And, I was totally unprepared to meet a 104-year old face-to-face. The experience was a profound one.

It became immediately clear that Sylvie Thygeson was an exceptional woman. Perhaps the most striking element of the interview experience, though, was the contrast between the hospital environment and this unusual 104-year old woman discursing on her world view. As she recounts her role in "the great evolutionary process," there is the counterpoint (clear on the tape) of bingo numbers being called by the recreation leader in order to divert the other residents--all of whom are younger than Sylvie.

Of all the interviews I have subsequently taped (some one hundred hours), this has been the most memorable and the most moving--not just because it was my first, and not just because of the bizarre contrast between Sylvie Thygeson's words and the calling of the bingo numbers. It is unforgettable because over one hundred years of the United States history was represented by this woman whose name is derived from a pre-Civil War encounter between her father and a runaway slave. And it is unforgettable because of the very nature of the woman who is Sylvie Thygeson.

Sherna Gluck
Interviewer-Editor

January 1974

II SHERNA GLUCK AND MARY SHEPARDSON INTERVIEW
SYLVIE THYGESON

The Birth Control Movement, St. Paul, Minnesota

Gluck: Can you tell me a little bit about your work in the birth control movement.

Thygeson: We three women -- there were two connected with me -- organized this birth control clinic that we had; it functioned [sic] in St. Paul. We had one doctor from Minneapolis and one from St. Paul that assisted us in the clinic.

Gluck: What did you do exactly?

Thygeson: This was the birth control movement. I don't know that there was -- It had to be secret because it was against the law. It was against the law at that time to buy any contraceptive material; anything that prevented conception. It was against the law at that time. And certainly it was against the law to print anything or to advertise in any way, shape or manner any kind of thing you were doing in the line of birth control. Because, as I say, it was against the law.

Gluck: What year was this that you had the clinic?

Thygeson: What year? I can't remember special years. Because I have never formulated it. It was never published except just as anyone made a little sketch of it. A little notice or something might have been published in one of the other papers; because it was so strictly against the law that we weren't printing it nor advertising it nor doing anything public about it. As I say, you don't do something that is against the ordinances of your city and the laws of your state. You don't do anything in the open.

Shepardson: Mother, who was in with you?

Thygeson: There were two women. I wouldn't want to mention their names.

Shepardson: Why not? They are dead. And they'd be happy to have a place in history. Was it Mrs. Benepe?
[Mrs. L.M. Benepe]

Thygeson: No. I said that I won't mention their names.

Shepardson: All right.

Thygeson: Because it was illegal.

Shepardson: It's not illegal now.

Thygeson: Well, I don't know that they would want me to be mentioning their names. Of course, associated with me -- there were three other women associated very closely with me. I don't need to mention their names, who they were. There were three of them.* They were very prominent women. One of the husbands -- the husband of one of the women was a doctor, a very prominent doctor in St. Paul. And as I say, the work we were doing was strictly illegal.

Gluck: Did you just give out information or did you have contraceptives, too?

Thygeson: No. We followed Margaret Sanger. We advocated and we circulated the birth control contrivance she had invented. We worked very strictly with her, of course, because she was organizing the movement that went all over the country.

Shepardson: Was she the one who asked you to set this up?

Thygeson: Well, I don't know that anyone asked us to set it up. I think it was needed and she just helped us. She gave us information and advice and help. Mainly, of course, she gave us information which we circulated

*There were three including Sylvie Thygeson. S.G.

Thygeson: and gave out.

I was written up because of the prominence of my husband. I wouldn't have been -- My two co-partners, they would have been written up as much as I was if their husbands had been as prominent as mine. One of them was a doctor and the other [woman] was divorced from her husband, so there wasn't any natural thing there about the Clinic, and so forth. But my husband was very prominent in the city and so I was written up. I was written up editorially in our principal paper, the Pioneer Press.

Shepardson: Denounced? Were you denounced, mother?

Thygeson: I wasn't exactly denounced. I wasn't commended. But it was just giving out information and commenting a little about it. I don't remember. I had saved all the clippings and then I left them with one of my workmates there. I left them with Mrs. Keller [Grace Keller] when I went to California, when I took you children to California one winter. They were mislaid or lost or stolen. She thought they were stolen.

Shepardson: I was looking for them in your books. I couldn't find anything about it there.

Thygeson: No. All that material that was collected and saved was stolen that winter I came to California -- stolen or lost. She doesn't know what ever became of it. It disappeared in her house.

Gluck: How was the clinic supported? Where did the money come from?

Thygeson: Oh, it came from all kinds of sources. It came from anyone and everyone who wanted to make a contribution. It was just like these other movements. It was a volunteer movement and whoever felt interested in it or wanted it to continue made a contribution.

Relationship between Birth Control Movement and
the Suffrage Movement in St. Paul

Thygeson: It was like the suffrage movement which, in a certain way, was somewhat identified with it at that time;

Thygeson: because most of the women who were very prominent in the suffrage movement were also prominent in the birth control movement. Some of the wealthy women of the city.

I don't know that there's anything more to tell except that we worked all the time with it and we had very prominent speakers come from all over.

Shepardson: This is on the suffrage movement, right?

Thygeson: Yes, on the suffrage movement -- well, the birth control movement. In my life the two were so closely identified. I mean we worked -- we were working at the same time on both movements.

Gluck: You were working in the suffrage movement in Minnesota?

Thygeson: The group that I was working with identified with both movements. We had the wife of a professor at the college in Indiana, the State University. She was a very fluent speaker. We had her lecturing in St. Paul and other places. I paid her expenses for a month's suffrage work in Iowa. She gave a whole month up to that. I paid her expenses for that. She was a fluent speaker and very attractive.

Shepardson: What was her name?

Thygeson: I've forgotten her name just now. I shouldn't forget it, but I've forgotten a lot of things.

Gluck: Did you work for the suffrage amendment when you were in Minnesota?

Thygeson: Yes, we were working constantly for the suffrage movement as well as the birth control movement. They were part of our lives. We were identified with them there in our work; with both movements, the suffrage movement and the birth control movement.

The Suffrage Movement Viewed as Educational and Evolutionary Process

Shepardson: What was the name of the organization you worked with mostly, Mother? The Woman's Welfare League?

Thygeson: Well, that was one of the big city organizations. Yes, that was one of the big city organizations that I worked with. You saw the little booklet in my box.

Shepardson: Yes.

Thygeson: It was published. We had our constitution published. We were prominent. We were very prominent as a birth control league. That is The Woman's Welfare League was a very prominent organization. We served a hundred luncheons every week, every Saturday, at 25¢ a piece. We served a hundred luncheons. In order to get the group together. And then we had all the prominent speakers, the different people that came through St. Paul traveling.

Gluck: Was this for both suffrage and birth control?

Thygeson: The Woman's Welfare League which was identified with suffrage. They couldn't be identified with the birth control movement because that was illegal. But the women who belonged to the Welfare League and were officers in it all supported the Birth Control League. So we were closely identified; not as an organization, but the people were closely identified with the movement.

Gluck: How did you feel women would change after suffrage became effective?

Thygeson: I never had any illusions about what women would do. I was never that foolish as to -- no, I think women are responsible for a great deal of the backwardness of the world. I never had any feeling at all that the world would be better and go on to happier and wiser things. I thought women were just as corrupt in every way as men were and just as lacking in any kind of judgement. In other words, I never had any illusion about women.

I think we tried to have a myth, you know, that

Thygeson: women were superior; that if the world had suffrage that was advocated then the whole world would be better and all these things that were evil would disappear. All of which was perfect nonsense, because women were just people like men were; good and bad, enlightened and not, the same as men were. And I never had the illusions.

Your father had a lot of illusions about what women would do, but I never had any of those illusions.

Gluck: Did you feel, though, that things would change for women themselves, that they would be --

Thygeson: Well, I believe in evolution and in progress. I couldn't read the history of the world from Neanderthal Man up to the present time without knowing there'd be a great many changes. I looked at it intelligently. I didn't look at it in the light that women, as women, were going to change. They would change as a group of people, as a product coming along in the evolution of society and the world; not as men, or women.

Shepardson: Then, why did you work for suffrage?

Thygeson: Because it was part of the movement. It was a part of -- Every great movement -- These movements are going on today at the present time. Each little thing helps the larger movement until it comes out and can really accomplish something. It educates and works. It's a part of the education of the world, these small movements are. These little groups that we have around that are trying to do world betterment. They're just a part of the educational process. They can't of their own. Any of these small groups at any time can't accomplish anything. It has to be in the larger effort as they put that forth. So it was all a great part, as I looked at it, a part of an educational process.

Shepardson: But don't you think that the Nineteenth Amendment was a direct benefit to women?

Thygeson: Well, of course I do! I think it was not only of benefit to them, but I think it was part of the educational process. It was inevitable that women were to vote. They were human beings endowed with certain, as we say the old words, "inalienable rights."

Thygeson: They had the creation of things, the same process that men had and had to be a part of it. I thought as the world progressed and went on further that men and women would come to have absolutely equal rights. They'd be human beings, not sexes. They'd be human beings and have certain inalienable rights, both sexes.

Gluck: Did you feel that the suffrage movement would accomplish that?

Thygeson: Certainly, I thought that for women to have the right to vote the same as men -- it was ridiculous when you stop to think of it, that in a world composed of women and men, and where the women had the most influence because they brought up the children, and in the end had far more influence than the men -- that they should be the ones restricted in what was a larger field for progress and that was in the voting process and in the participation in municipal affairs and state affairs.

I don't think we've gone very far yet, because we are far away yet from anyone thinking of a woman being president of the United States. There isn't any reason in the world why some women aren't just as capable as some men to become head of the government. But we're a long way from that, I think. Of course, I might be surprised if I were to live on and see that it would be possible much sooner than I am looking for it. But women will run for president of the United States.

Gluck: After the suffrage amendment was passed did you feel there were any changes in this country?

Thygeson: Of course there have been many changes that have happened and much broadening out since the amendment was passed -- the Woman's Suffrage Amendment. It was just a part of the education evolution of the world; not just a little movement or something in itself. It wasn't that. It was part of the larger educational process; the evolution of the world since the first history we have of it, Neanderthal Man -- since his origin. All these little things like birth control and everything are just parts of a great movement of evolution. That's all the way I can explain it. Just as we're going on and on.

- Thygeson: We're going on to greater and greater evolutionary processes all through.
- Shepardson: Mother, do you think the position of women is better than it was when you were my age or Sherna's age?
- Thygeson: Well, the only thing is that things then that were just evolving --we were just coming out of-- are just taken so completely for granted that we don't even stop to think about it. No one thinks for a moment, or stops to think, that it's uncommon or unusual for women to go to the polls and vote. We don't even think of that. It's so common now. We don't think of the fight that was made for it. We just accept it. And that's the way with all these processes. To my mind, the whole process is a process of evolution.
- Shepardson: But I mean, specially, on the woman question. What do you think are some of the advances that have been made since you were a girl?
- Thygeson: I don't know.
- Shepardson: What about from the point of view of education. Do you think women have more chance to get a higher education?
- Thygeson: Oh, I think they have every chance. There isn't any restriction at all on women now. There's no lack of what they can do and where they can go and how they can be educated; but I don't think women are more advanced in any way than men are. I have no illusions. It's only along some lines that they are a little more interested and that they work a little harder. But as to thinking that women in any way -- I would say that not in any way do I think women are superior to men. I think they are all human beings. There are just as many very high spirited men working for good ends and the same high spirited women -- It's just part of the evolutionary movement.
- Gluck: Did you have any disappointments after the passage of the suffrage amendment? Did you think that things hadn't gone as you hoped they might?
- Thygeson: No, because I never had any illusions to start

Thygeson: with. I was too -- for God's sake, I hope I was -- too intelligent to have illusions. I wouldn't want to be accused of that. Because women are human beings the same as men.

Shepardson: How about women in the peace movement. Were you ever connected with the International League for Peace and Freedom?

Thygeson: Yes, I belonged to it. I was a part of it. We had our organization there. We gave a dinner. Every weekend we gave a Saturday luncheon.

Shepardson: No, I'm talking about the peace organization. The Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, not the Women's Welfare League. Did you belong to that?*

Thygeson: I don't know that I definitely belonged. I was working and in sympathy with the various movements. As head of a very large organization as the Women's Welfare League was - we catered to international as well as national speakers.

Shepardson: Who were some of those big "peace" women that used to come? Didn't you entertain a lot of those International League leaders?

Thygeson: Sara Bard Field was one of them [suffragist]. She is living here in California. She would be the one to interview if you wanted to interview about suffrage.

Shepardson: She is in worse condition than you are, Mother.

Thygeson: Well, she was a great worker and a very efficient worker. Her picture hangs in the Library of Congress along with some other women that worked. She was very efficient. She gave up all of her time and she had a wonderful husband that helped out. He was a fluent speaker and a very humorous one. There were many wonderful women who were working in the suffrage movement at the time that I was.

*Though the questions of Mary Shepardson related to the World War I peace movement, Sylvie Thygeson misunderstood or did not hear properly, and continued referring to the suffrage group. S.G.

Thygeson:

I was limited. My time was limited, in a way, because I had four children. I was quite free because I had good help with the children that left me the free time to do things. It was Lala being there that left me the free time to do what I did do.* So instead of devoting myself to you children at that particular time when you were small I gave it to the suffrage and the birth control movement, of which I really was a part. It's not anything to be regretted. It was a part of the larger movement.

That's the way I want you children to regard it, as part of participating in the larger movements of the world. I could have devoted more time to family. You are well looked after and well taken care of and beautifully tended in every way, so I wasn't neglecting you. And I gained a great deal of prominence, more prominence than I would have had - except that I had four children that were all thriving and they never had any problems in school or any troubles or any backward -- They were all progressive, my children were. They did me credit all along the line. Anyone who wanted to write me up with my children, they have good material to go on. Because my boys never did a thing that was questionable, and I never had any trouble in any way.

Family Background

Shepardson: How about your mother? Wasn't Grandma a friend of Margaret Sanger's?

Thygeson: No. She knew Margaret Sanger just as someone coming through, coming to Portland.

Shepardson: Didn't she entertain her there?

Thygeson: Yes, she entertained Margaret Sanger. Oh yes, my mother was part of the liberal movement, of course. She went right along with every phase of the

*S. Anna Larson, a graduate in the first nursing class of Anchor Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota. M.T.S.

Thygeson: liberal movement.

Shepardson: And she was born in 1845? Went through the Civil War?

Thygeson: Yes, she went through the Civil War as a young woman, a very young woman with her children. Your grandfather, of course, was in the Civil War. He served with Grant. He was with Grant at Vicksburg. And he was wounded in the head. He was wounded and had to have a silver plate. He did his share. They put a special tomb over his grave back in Illinois where he was buried because he had served in the Civil War.

Shepardson: Mother, I was trying to tell that story of how you got the name Sylvie. I'm not sure I have it right. Do you want to tell it again?

Thygeson: It was just that my grandparents were coming along the Mason-Dixon Line and at this one spot where they stopped and were entertained with this fleeing Negro family: husband and wife and two or three children. There was this little Negro girl that my father - he was a little boy at the time - got well acquainted with the two or three days that they were held over there on their way. It was a part of the Mason-Dixon Line that my grandparents belonged to.* And so years afterwards when I came along they were thinking about a name and wondering. I was the fourth child in the family and they had no special name for me. My father suggested, "Call her after that little girl from Louisiana." This particular set of Negroes were from Louisiana. They had a little girl that had a French name. And so they said, "Let's call her that." Since they didn't have any other name in view. So I was named that.

Shepardson: Didn't your grandfather have a station on the Underground Railroad?

Thygeson: He wasn't in charge of a station. No, but he stopped at these stations. He wasn't in charge of a station. They went on their way still further, way across from Rochester, New York, clear across the country into Iowa. They stopped at Fayette, Iowa, a little

*The Underground Railroad. MTS.

Thygeson: place there - a little fort, I think it was at the time. They stopped there and settled, in Fayette, Iowa.

My grandfather was a Presbyterian minister. He had a congregation there. He was a real pioneer. But he was burned to death in that prairie fire. He'd been out ministering to a sick patient - a patient who was dying, in fact - cross country. He had taken his little boy with him, his five-year-old son, and coming back they were caught in this prairie fire and burned to death. That's the way my grandfather met his death. He was on this errand of mercy and coming back from it.

So I never had any religion and I had less after I knew that story - that my grandfather had been on this mission of giving spiritual help. He was a minister. He was a Presbyterian minister. He was giving spiritual help to this woman who was dying, and he'd gone across on this prairie and coming back he and his little boy he had taken with him were caught in the prairie fire and burned to death. So I never in the world could have had any religion after that, hearing that story.

Social Concerns in California

Gluck: When you came out to California did you continue your work on birth control and suffrage?

Thygeson: I don't know exactly when I actually moved to California.

Shepardson: 1917.

Thygeson: Oh, I was always in some way or other connected with the movement. I never lost out in connection with the movement. I'm connected with it today. I'm still a member of the organization at San Jose. [The Planned Parenthood] I have contributed.

Shepardson: Tell her what you belong to right now. You belong to Planned Parenthood --

Thygeson: Yes. I belong to the ACLU.

Shepardson: The NAACP. Weren't you one of the first members? Haven't you belonged to the NAACP since it was founded?

Thygeson: Yes, I think so. I couldn't swear to it. But I think there's no question because I can't remember when I didn't belong. I wouldn't like to be put on the stand and have to certify, because I wouldn't remember.

Gluck: What kind of work did you do when you came out to California, when you left Minnesota? What sort of activities were you involved in?

Thygeson: I don't know that I could tell, because I was always very active in whatever there was going on. I was active just as I had been up until this time. That's one of the things that brought Marian McKay and myself together; the San Jose birth control movement. She was greatly interested in it. She has given me these generous presents of ten dollars and things like that for the Birth Control League, for our work in that. But I've been greatly interested.

One of my greatest interests at the present time is the ACLU, the free speech movement. That I think is terribly important that we keep that alive. I belonged to that since its inception. One of the things back there when it was first organized by Roger Baldwin. I consider that one of the most valuable organizations that we have in this country. I wish my family felt the same. I don't urge anything on them because they are highly intelligent, each one of them, and they know what they want and what they consider valuable.

Shepardson: What are you talking about? I belong to the ACLU. Sometimes they kind of bother me, defending Shockley.

Thygeson: Well, you'd better stick with it.

Shepardson: They are raising a case here that Shockley isn't allowed to give his racist course over there at Stanford. Stanford blew the whistle on him. It kind of bugged me to be putting money into anything like that. But if you've got to be consistent --

- Thygeson: Anyway I consider it -- whatever variations there may be, I still consider it one of the most valuable organizations and I belong to it and, as far as I know, I'm still a member of it. I also am a member of the San Jose Birth Control League.
- Gluck: Did you set up any more birth control clinics when you came to California? Did you set up more clinics here?
- Thygeson: No, I think there were already clinics here.
- Shepardson: How about Ruthie? [Ruth Thygeson Shepardson, Sylvie Thygeson's other daughter]
- Thygeson: Oh yes, she did a great deal of work in the birth control movement, Ruthie did, before she died. When you bring her up I have to think that she and I worked together. I contributed money to things and she did the work. She gave her time and her experience and her knowledge as a doctor.
- Shepardson: Where did Ruthie have her clinic, mother?
- Thygeson: Her work was done a great deal in Berkeley and in Oakland in the schools. She was the birth control worker. In the schools.*
- Shepardson: She had a special clinic, didn't she?
- Thygeson: Yes, she belonged to a special clinic. I can't say that I know too much about that. I don't know too much about that. Because that was done without my particular participation or knowledge. She functioned, she gave her services as a doctor. That was not given to promote the movement or anything like that. It was given as a genuine service in showing how to work the birth control contrivance that was used. In other words, how to use what knowledge was available; how to make it practical and use it. She gave out that which was very valuable to receive and have and give.

*Ruth was on the staff at U.C. examining students. I don't think she worked in the lower schools. MTS.

Reaction to Voting

- Gluck: When was the first time that you voted? Was it in 1920 right after the suffrage amendment?
- Thygeson: It was the very earliest time that anyone could vote that I voted. If I had my scrapbook here -- One of my scrapbooks where my friend who was one of the intimate co-workers, Mrs. Benepe, gave a humorous picture there of our first movement in voting, of an old cat going out and voting --
- Shepardson: I saw that picture not too long ago. I'll show it to Shema.
- Thygeson: That was illustrative of the fad of our being out and having the vote. She saw the humorous side of it. She knew our having the vote, while it was a step forward, she knew we wouldn't do anything with it because we were no more enlightened than the men were. Most women were not as enlightened as the men. Most women are very ignorant. They are today as you know. You'll find among the women, many, many women, the great masses of women, aren't one bit interested in politics.
- Shepardson: Of your children who were the ones going out and doing things as far as movements were concerned, yours sons or your daughters?
- Thygeson: It was my daughters. But my sons have always fully believed in all these progressive movements. They have never been a part of the backward movement. They don't know what it is. They've always been progressive.
- Shepardson: They are good on the woman question and on the racial question.
- Gluck: How did you feel the first time you voted? Do you remember what it was like?
- Thygeson: I'm afraid to say I never had any illusions. I never had any illusions that women were out to save the world.
- Shepardson: Wasn't it a thrill to vote for the first time?

Thygeson: I don't know that I could say that it was. It isn't any more of a thrill than I would feel now for some forward radical movement progressing into a regulation thing.

The Evolutionary Process: A World View

Thygeson: To my mind, I was transfixed with the theory of evolution. I am so imbued with the theory of evolution that not any of these things come as great surprises. They're all a part of the radical, the movements of the world, the movements of evolution.

Gluck: Do you think these changes would have occurred if you hadn't done the work you did?

Thygeson: I don't know that I could say that. Perhaps if I hadn't done what I did somebody else would have come along and done it. Who can say? You can't say that. I think I just worked along with the evolution of my time. I think if I hadn't done what I did, as I did it, that someone else would have come along and done it. I think it is inevitable - it was inevitable - that we go on with a certain kind of progress just like you're doing things now. How do you come, young as you are, to be wanting to do these things? Why do you want to? Why do you give a damn as to what happens?

Gluck: I think because there were women like you before me.

Thygeson: Yes. I think it's because you do care; you do care about things and you want to be (know you are) a part of the evolutionary process, and you want to be a good part of that and an intelligent part. And so you play your part. And if you know anything about the world you know that you progress along evolutionary lines and that certain progress will be made. It might not be made as rapidly nor as efficiently and some things might not be accomplished as quickly if there weren't these ardent workers who fully believe in things. But progress will come because it's inevitable in the evolutionary progress of the world.

- Gluck: Looking back now what kind of progress do you think has occurred for women in the last fifty years?
- Thygeson: You mean what the women have done? Well, I don't know that I could say, because my own thoughts and mind have gone so completely along -- not with the women as a movement but with both sexes, with humanity working as a movement. It has gone along so completely in that line. I can't - I don't - separate women from men.
- Gluck: But you were working primarily for women in the birth control movement and in the suffrage movement, weren't you?
- Thygeson: Of course you have to there. There's a definite line from the very nature of the way people are organized and born. It isn't so definite in the suffrage line. But I think these things are bound to come along as the world progresses. There's no way in which you can stop them. But of course you can always help along by going along with an intelligent process. And I want my family to go along with the intelligent process. Mary has and she's gone along. And her sister did, too; highly intelligently along very progressive lines. In every line she has been working in she has gone along progressive lines. She has made a great contribution to the world advancement of knowledge and enterprise and looking at things; an intelligent way of grasping. I think she has made very great progress in what she has done.
- Shepardson: Put up a fight for middle aged women, Mother, in the academic world. I am fighting for old women in the academic world.*

The Progressive Roots

- Gluck: Do you remember how you first got involved in all of the activities; in the suffrage fight, in the birth

*I am referring to the fight I made to get a PhD in Anthropology at age fifty. MTS.

Gluck: control fight, and in social movements? Do you remember how you first began?

Thygeson: I don't think there was ever a time - because my mother was a highly progressive woman - I don't think there was ever a time when I wasn't interested; had to be converted to some movement. It was just the way you were brought up, dear. You can't remember a time. You couldn't possibly remember a time when you first developed and saw light, and so forth, because it was always there before you that you could see. That's the way it was with me. My mother was a highly progressive woman for her time. She was highly progressive for her time.

Shepardson: Didn't you have some trouble in your childhood because your family was not religious in that little town where you lived?

Thygeson: We would have been ostracized in that little town where we lived if we hadn't been children as progressive as we were. We never had failures in school, my family. We were a large family. There were probably five or six of us functioning each time [in school]. We never had failures. We stood among the progressive children of the time. We were always high in school. I went into high school - it was a regular high school - when I was twelve years old. We were all progressive. We were advanced in our studies. We were advanced when we graduated from high school. They had good schools in this little town where I lived. We had a very fine high school. We had some of the finest eachers because we had young men who just came out of college. The principal, the man who was head of the high school where I graduated, was a graduate of one of the big eastern colleges - Princeton, I think. He was one of the graduates. And a very wonderful high school teacher he was. He gave us all advanced ideas.

But I would never have been as far in advance in my way of thinking and viewing of life if it hadn't been for my mother - and my father too, of course. We took it for granted - because he was the best educated man in the little town where I was born. We just took it for granted about my father and his family, because they were all students.

Thygeson: But my mother was only fifteen years old when she married. She had her whole life and education - at least in the higher ranks - to be lived and it was very important the way she lived it. And as we were numerous children it was highly to my mother's credit that she never deviated from the intellectual side of life. She read all the finest books and had the finest literature and did everything right, from the beginning, along with us children as we went along. And never fell back at any time on her lack of comprehension on what our aims in life should be.

Then, of course, I had the good fortune to meet and marry a highly intelligent young man. Of course he was a college graduate. He had graduated in engineering as well as in legal work and was highly efficient. So things went along naturally, in a natural progressive way.

As you know my children have all been Stanford students. There never was a thought in my life about my children not being able to enter any college they wanted to go to. And of course they were. Three of them were graduates of Stanford. One was within a very short time of graduating but he was called out to his job by the oil company that he has worked for all his life. He was gifted. He was the gifted one of the family. Elling was the gifted one. He had your father's mathematical -- your father besides being a good lawyer had a mathematical gift. Elling inherited that from your father.

Shepardson: The rest of us didn't get it.

Gluck: Do you feel looking back that there were things that you wanted to do that you couldn't do because you were a woman; like going on to college or having any sort of profession?

Thygeson: Oh yes, that was a very great loss to me when I was young, coming out, that I couldn't go to college. But I never had the hope that I could go. Because we were never able financially to have ever financed anything like going to college. So it was never a part of my life. But I had unusual experiences; my two years session, my two years life in St. Louis [with my uncle, Seymour Dwight Thompson].

Shepardson: He was judge of the appellate court?

Thygeson: He was judge of what was called the St. Louis Court of Appeals; not the national, but the St. Louis Court of Appeals. He was a law book writer. His law books had extensive circulation. Here and abroad. I helped in the writing of a couple of those law books when I was there, the two years I was there.

I had every opportunity for a very progressive kind of existence. And it did wonders for me in opening my eyes to the world - the world at large - so that I could never go back to a very narrow existence. I lived it, and it was all a great personal pleasure, like all one's knowledge is. Your own knowledge and your own awakening. Just the fact that you have this interest in the past and what was accomplished and done. You wouldn't have any interest in it if you hadn't felt it always led to something that was broader. That's what our knowledge does: It leads to something always beyond ourselves when we acquire knowledge. All you could do for children - all I could do for my children - was to furnish them with an expansive home life and also to go as far as they could go and as far as they wanted to go and give them the opportunity of progressing as far as they wanted to go. Always have places and opportunities open for that. That's all you can do. You can't put brains into people. You have just to give them the environment, the part that their brains can absorb.

Are you married. And do you have children?

Gluck: I'm married but I don't have children.

Thygeson: But if you did have that's all you can do.

Shepardson: She is a sociologist, she does sociology research. She knows Esther [a family friend].

Thygeson: I know from the very fact that you want to sit here and listen to me shows you are progressive and that you can have some conception of the fact that each one, no matter how simple that can be, or in what a simple way that can be, can always make a contribution to the larger expanse of knowledge. That's the way I feel. Any one of us can make that their larger contribution to the world of knowledge, wherever that is made and in however small or large way it can be made. It's valuable. You shouldn't

Thygeson: ever give up doing something because you can't do better or do more. You should do what you can. So I've always tried to work along progressive lines. All you can give your children, if one has children, is to give them the opportunity for progressing.

The U.S.S.R. 1929

Gluck: I understand that you went to the Soviet Union in about 1929. Do you remember how you felt women were doing there compared to the United States?

Thygeson: How did I think it was in the Soviet Union? Oh, I had no illusions about things at all. I felt that history was being played there. The Soviet Union was writing history. They were in the forces of evolution as much as anyone. They could only play the part that was possible for them. You can't go out and make over something. You have to deal with people.

Shepardson: You can go backwards, can't you? How about Hitler? Was he with the forces of evolution?

Thygeson: You can't to any large extent [go backwards]. He played a brief time there. But the people couldn't go any faster than they can go along certain lines. They can have climaxes and certain kinds of things.

Shepardson: Did you notice in the Soviet Union women having more types of jobs than here in the United States? Did you notice any freedom for the women?

Thygeson: They had complete freedom. What more could they have?

Gluck: Did they have birth control?

Thygeson: Yes, they had everything! They had complete freedom. There were no restrictions on them, so I don't know what more they could have had. Oh yes, when they had the revolution they had complete freedom, as much as any of the women would take.

The women were very ignorant, a great many of them. They never had had any opportunities for any kind of education or knowledge or anything. But

Thygeson: they had all the freedom -- every kind of freedom that they could possibly take and absorb. It wasn't any question of restriction or they were held back and had to fight for something. It wasn't that at all. The only question was getting them to accept the freedom that they had and to measure up to it. They came along very rapidly, the Soviet Union did. Because their women there were of a much higher order mentally than they knew they were. They didn't themselves know how much freedom they could absorb. They didn't know enough. They didn't know how much they could. But they did go along, and they have gone along with the process, what I would call the evolutionary process, there.

The "Natural Superiority of Women": An Illusion

Gluck: Did you feel that women were able to be free if they were the ones that still had the sole responsibility for children?

Thygeson: Oh yes, I thought probably for some generations to come because it's always women who bear the children and they have to have responsibility for them. Oh yes! I think that women must always feel that - and probably always feel it just a little more than men from the very nature of the process of birth. But I don't know about it educationwise, if there is any difference and that women have any higher function because they are mothers. There's a lot of that nonsense that I don't subscribe to at all about what happens and so forth. You're intelligent, and you have to be born with a certain kind of intelligence. As you know yourself, you have to be born with the desire to learn, and if you're not born with that desire you don't care about it and you don't learn and you go along with just the common mass -- if you don't have this special interest in the pursuit of knowledge. I'm not given to any of these ideas, possibly not as much as I should be, that women are at all superior or that they would do anything better.

Shepardson: They live longer, Mother, you'll admit that.

Thygeson: Yes. I think that maybe they have more influence. But the great masses of women around one are not any people you can be particularly proud of any more than the men around us.

- Gluck: Did you feel that was true when you were working in the suffrage and birth control movements?
- Thygeson: Oh yes, I never had any [conceptions] of the superiority of women. Oh, no, I never had that. I could never have had that idea that women were superior when I had the kind of a husband I had. He was highly superior. He embraced all the good traits that any woman -- high-minded traits, the intellectual impetus, ambitions and everything, he embraced everything in that line that I wished and desired for my children, and which I couldn't certainly surpass in any way. And so I never had any illusions of the superiority of women.
- Shepardson: You remember you thought your mother was superior to your father, didn't you?
- Thygeson: You mean intellectually?
- Shepardson: No, I mean as a person.
- Thygeson: Well, I think my mother was superior in this way. I don't know that I can even really judge those things because it's the way you were born. My father was born with a high temper. He got quickly angry at things.
- Shepardson: Maybe the silver plate in his head had something to do with that?
- Thygeson: Yes. My mother was more placid. It was difficult for her to get angry. My father could be angry and he could denounce, and so forth, but he did value education; he did value everything, had ideals that were good. I never considered him as well balanced a person, at all, as I considered my mother. She was only fifteen years old when she married. She was just a child and he was twenty-seven years old. He had been to what they thought of as a college in those days. It had the same kind of a standing as a college has today. It was only seminary, but he had the advantage of that. That was considered one of the higher institutions in those days. It was a seminary.

He was quick-tempered. My mother was not. My mother had hard work getting angry. She had a very well balanced temperment. My father could get angry hastily. So I always knew when I was a child living in my mother's home there -- I always

Thygeson: knew that I never wanted to be like my father. I knew that. I never wanted to give way to quick temper, denounce, do that. And I never have! Because I didn't admire that type of person that gives way to an unbalanced temper, a fruitless kind of anger.

Attitudes Toward War

Gluck: Do you remember how you felt about the First World War?

Shepardson: You were opposed to it, weren't you?

Thygeson: Oh yes, I was definitely opposed to any war, that any young man should go and sacrifice his life for some vague principle.

Shepardson: But in the Second World War you didn't take that position, did you? When it was a question of Hitler.

Thygeson: No, I was opposed to Hitler and worked against him.*

Shepardson: You supported that war, didn't you?

Thygeson: I suppose I did. I can't remember exactly.

Shepardson: I have a picture of you getting something -- [a certificate for a contribution M T S] in front of a poster of a woman who had lost four boys in the war. You supported that war, you remember that.

Gluck: When you were opposed to the First World War did you talk to other people and make speeches. Were you in any group?

Thygeson: I can't remember so much about the war status.

Shepardson: We were living here in Palo Alto. The war started when we were in Old Orchard, Maine. It was still on when we moved to Palo Alto. It was still on in 1917

*When she was moved to a convalescent hospital, her books on the labor movement and the U.S.S.R. were sent to Emil Freed for the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. She had known him in Los Angeles through the Anti-Nazi League. She was a "premature anti-Nazi" she told me. M.T.S.

Shepardson: and 1918. You were opposed to the war, weren't you?

Thygeson: Oh yes, I was opposed to the war.

As we look back, things get to be alike - the further back we recede, they begin to look a little shadier. We don't remember so clearly.

Shepardson: Are you tired?

Thygeson: Yes, I think.

-- personal things especially when you are a mother with children, a wife and a mother. Of course it's valuable because you can't help exercising influence, one way or the other, in the very nature of the bringing up of the children. The home environment has a great deal to do with the way children feel and think.

[Sylvie Thygeson was obviously tired and the interview was terminated at this point, with a personal message given to Sherna Gluck for transmission to a family friend.]

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Regional Oral History Office
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University of California, Berkeley

Suffragists Oral History Project

Jessie Haver Butler

ON THE PLATFORM

An Interview Conducted by
Sherna Gluck



Jessie Haver Butler
1973

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Jessie Haver Butler was among the first of the suffragists contacted by The Feminist History Research Project. She is a well-known figure in the feminist movement in the Los Angeles area, her involvement dating back to the late 1960s when she formed a public speaking class in an effort to help launch a speakers bureau for Los Angeles NOW (National Organization for Women). Since then she has appeared and spoken at every celebration of woman's suffrage. Most recently she spearheaded an active campaign by Pomona Valley NOW for the provision of Child Care Centers in newly constructed tract housing. At eighty-eight, she exhibits the physical vitality of someone half her age.

Jessie Haver Butler is a rather large, imposing woman who pays close attention to her physical condition and appearance. She lives alone in an apartment in a retirement community in Claremont. (Her husband of fifty-four years, Hugh Butler, was permanently hospitalized several years ago.) Her move to the retirement community nine years ago was motivated more by her disdain of household duties than by physical incapacity.

Her small apartment reflects her commitment and interests; her desk is piled high with papers, current feminist publications, and copies of Prevention magazine. Photographs of her grandchildren occupy a prominent place in her decor, as do the photographs of her 1909 graduating class from Smith College, and of the Butlers at their presentation to the Royal Court in the 1920s. Her bookshelves are crammed with feminist writings, old and new, books written by her spiritual teacher, Ann Ree Colton, and copies of her own book, Time to Speak Up.

Beginning in November, 1972, a series of nine interviews (approximately eleven hours) were recorded with Ms. Butler in her apartment. She was most cooperative and candid. The interviews represent an in-depth look at the woman and her life, a life reflecting many avenues of interest and activity.

For the current volume, only selected portions of the total series were included; basic background information, early suffrage interest and commitment, the suffrage years, and a condensed look at her life since 1920. Missing are the richly detailed interviews relating to her early working years in New York, her job with the Minimum Wage Commission in Boston, her life and activities in London, her role as mother and wife, and her later career

teaching public speaking. However, material from each of these time periods is incorporated into the current volume to provide the full context and background to the suffrage story. The complete series of interviews is in the archives of The Feminist History Research Project.

Because the interview in this volume represents selections from the entire series--perhaps one-third of the total recorded material--some reorganization of the transcription was necessary. The basic interview segments were left largely intact. In the review process, however, the interviewee did make many changes--more in polishing language than in deleting material. She also added text, including a closing section. Thus, there are some stylistic variations in this final manuscript representing the difference between the verbatim spoken and the written word.

Sherna Gluck
Interviewer-Editor

December 1974

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Personal Biography

Born to Clara Rehwoldt and Edwin B. Haver
October 27, 1886, Pueblo, Colorado

Married: Hugh Butler, 1920

Children: Daughter, Rosemary (Wohlhieter), 1924
Son, Richard, 1926

Grandchildren: 3 granddaughters, 1 grandson

Education

Central High School, Pueblo, Colorado, 1902-1906
Smith College, 1906-1909, B.A.
George Washington University, 1935-1937

Career

Legal Stenographer, Pueblo, 1909-1911
MacMillan and Company, Assistant to Head of College Textbook
Division, 1911
Secretary, Pulitzer School of Journalism, Columbia University,
1911-1913
Statistician and Investigator, Massachusetts Minimum Wage
Commission, 1913-1917
Investigator, U.S. Department of Labor, 1917-1919
Legislative Agent, Washington, D.C. Consumers League, 1919-1920
Legislative Advocate, League of Women Voters, 1920
Public Speaker, 1935 to present
Teacher of Public Speaking, 1937-1950; 1970

Organizational Affiliations

Current Events Circle, American Women's Club, London, 1921-1929
Needham Women's Club, 1930-1935
General Federation of Women's Clubs (Board), 1940-1950
Washington, D.C. League of Women Voters, 1939-1950
Pomona League of Women Voters, 1950 to present
Democratic Women's Club, 1950 to present
Claremont Women's Club, 1950 to present
Speech Association of American, 1945 to present
National Organization for Women, 1968 to present

Writings

Time to Speak Up, 1946 (Revised 1952, 1957)
Autobiography, 1950 (Unpublished)
Adams Other Wife, 1967 (Unpublished)

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Parents, Family Life

Butler: The background of both parents is amazing, really. It's an example of what fine people helped to build America, yet handicapped because of the pioneer struggle that there was.

We must never forget that the United States was built from the Atlantic to the Pacific in just two hundred years. What's two hundred years to build a great nation! A lot of the people who helped build up that West, like my father and mother, were rare people. Had they been fifty years later, they'd have been leaders in any community where they were. But there they were with all that talent in this primitive environment. That's, of course, what's built America.

Before I talk about my mother, I'd like to give a few words about her family background. Her father was a graduate of Berlin University. He was also trained as a Lutheran minister and he was inspired to come to America to Christianize the Indians. He also wanted to get out of Germany because that was the era in which Bismarck was launching his great Prussian military program. Siegmund Rehwaldt was a short little man. He wore chin whiskers like Oom Paul [Paul Kruger, late Nineteenth Century South African Transvaal statesman] in Africa did.

He traveled to Iowa and later to Nebraska. In his life, he founded all the Lutheran churches in Nebraska and a great many private Lutheran schools that are still in existence. He evidently was a man of great drive and energy. In Nebraska, then, he had six children.

Butler: During the birth of the last child, there was an Indian raid and his wife died in childbirth. So he put all his smallest children into the hands of different farmers in the area. But my mother, who was the oldest, and her sister (she was ten years old and her sister was eight) were put in an orphanage.

What an orphanage in Nebraska must have been like is hard to imagine. I later learned through analysis in London that my mother was raped in that orphanage, which accounted for the fact that there was a tremendous emotional situation with her and me from the beginning. This is just the kind of thing that happened in those early days.

When she was sixteen years old, she wanted to get educated, evidently having inherited the kind of mind that her father had. He let her go to Colorado, which in those days had the best school system of the West, even before women had the vote.

My mother went to Pueblo, Colorado. She became a maid for one of the leading families of that city; the husband had the first store for men's clothing. But she was not a full-time worker; she went to high school as well as working in this family. Being a German girl, she was a good cook and a good housekeeper, and a pretty woman; she was short, with blue eyes and a gay and happy character.

In that job, she met my father who was the first dairyman of Pueblo. He had founded or started a dairy a mile and a half west of Pueblo. He had built his house of adobe bricks that he had made himself on the ground; formed them, baked them and then built his home. Then he brought his wife to this house already built.

Gluck: How old was she when they married, do you know?

Butler: She was about twenty-two. No, she was a little younger than that. She died when she was thirty-two and I was ten years old. I can't figure out just at this moment how young she was; she was a fairly young woman.

The interesting story is that she and my father, just like myself and my husband, were very much interested in public questions. In those days, instead of reading about communism if you were radical, you read about

Butler: socialism. So their favorite book was Looking Backward by Edward Bellamy. It was one of the first books on socialism and is still a very interesting and well-written book. Only Das Kapital by Karl Marx exceeded this book's popularity.

Before my mother was married, she wanted to go back and visit her German relatives in Nebraska. To their horror and astonishment, she pasted a notice on the door of her father's church that on a certain night she was going to give a lecture on socialism. You can imagine--in a typical German farm community where the girls were supposed to be housewives for life, to have a young girl like that, about to be married, lecturing on socialism was a shock. Everybody went to hear what she said but disapproved of it thoroughly, I later learned.

Years later, when I was in Smith College, I stopped at this community on the way home. My mother's younger sister told me this story with great reluctance. She said, "You know, your mother was really peculiar. We never quite understood her." I said, "How was she peculiar?" Then she told me this story about socialism and her lecture. I said, "Did people go?" "Yes, the church was filled; it was such a sensation. But they felt very sorry for her future husband, that he was marrying such a strange and peculiar woman."

Then I remember vividly when the campaign for woman's suffrage was going on in Colorado, how she climbed into that spring wagon--I can see her yet doing it. Why she didn't take me along--that would have been a good thing to do, but I think I was babysitting at this point. She toured that valley to get the men to vote for woman's suffrage.

And of course that great woman's suffrage leader, Susan B. Anthony, had been out there all over the state for months. She walked, she rode donkeys, and do you know what she did when she got to a mining town? There was no place to speak but the saloons. So she walked into the saloons--cold--where she made her speeches. The men were so grateful and happy to see that lovely Quaker woman who would take such an interest in them that she was a sensation.

Butler: Women were scarce in Colorado in those days and terribly valuable. Susan B. Anthony was such a sweet and gracious person! That she would take the trouble to go into the saloons and talk to the men was one way that Colorado got the vote.

Gluck: Did your mother go with Susan B. Anthony?

Butler: No, she never met her as far as I know. She did her little--what do you call it?--thing all on her own in that valley.

While I'm on the subject of that valley of the Arkansas River and the farm area where we were, there wasn't a single family in that area whose mother brought up their children; mothers all died early. There were no doctors, there were no sinks in the kitchens, there were no bathrooms, no telephones, and there were no cars. I was born with no one there but my father to help with the process.

But my mother was very smart; she had a great big book with which she was thoroughly familiar. She was another faddist. It's been natural that I've been somewhat of a faddist all my life.

My mother was interested in modern nutrition. There was a man named Dr. Jackson where Pillsbury Flour is now, who started a whole system of new ways of eating. My mother had all these books. He had some strange ideas that didn't fit in with farm life very well. One of them was that there was to be no supper; that people were healthier without eating a big supper. Of course, this was difficult for my father. He had five hired men who were fed by my mother in our home. To go without supper until breakfast, from the dinner meal until breakfast, must have been a great strain.

My brother and I took care of the situation. We swiped turnips, and celery, and watermelons, and corn from all the neighboring fields, and apples, too. So, we were well-fed, even though there was no supper in the kitchen. In fact, we became such thorough thieves when it came to finding food at night that our mother had to hide everything that was edible in the kitchen. She was unable to cope with the thievery.

Butler: One thing I did, too, that was not very honest. My mother would never let me have any candy. Even then, the theory was that candy and sweets were bad for children; we know now she was right. So I used to take my Sunday school money and fill up the bags with candy.

Then later, as we got a little older, our father bought us a little Shetland pony and cart to drive to school; we were two miles from the school, out of the valley, up over the hills and across the prairies.

Gluck: Was it a regular ranch with animals?

Butler: Yes. My father had a hundred cows; he had the largest milk barn in all of Colorado. Had he have been living fifty years later, he would have been a very great man because he had a fine mind and was an organizer and had created this modern dairy of Holstein cattle.

Another animal I had was a lamb for a plaything. But you know, the lamb, just loved to hide. Then when some man put down a pail of milk, he would go and sink his nose in it up to his ears. So, there was great talk about how that lamb was going to end his life. And he did; he had a tragic ending in the end. I never forgave them for killing him for our food.

But this little Shetland pony and cart that we had was a sensation at the Carlisle School in Pueblo. It was in that school that I had a gifted teacher of rhetoric in the fourth grade--a teaching that has stayed with me all my life. She was a humpback, a homely little woman, but a great teacher. And I loved English rhetoric at that age, so you see how important such teaching can be. Colorado had some great teachers. (I'll tell about another one later on.)

Gluck: Was your brother younger than you?

Butler: Yes, he was younger. Anyway, one day I did buy an extra load of candy, but it had to be all "et" before I arrived home. So I was very busy consuming candy. I laid the reins of the pony down against the little dashboard. He knew the way home so well that I felt he could be trusted while I was consuming the candy. But the trouble was that at the last turn in the road, he made a sharp turn, and the little two wheel cart turned upside down landing me on the road with my candy.

Butler: The next thing I saw, the pony was dashing down the road with the cart upside down. He carried it right on through the barn. Nobody knew I was there with the candy; I had to dispose of it at once.

The cart was badly damaged. My father thought it was due to carelessness, so that summer he made me pick peas in a neighboring farm in the hot Colorado sun to earn the money to mend the little cart. I still remember that horrid experience. I never bought anymore candy again.

Gluck: How old were you then, when you picked the peas?

Butler: I think I was the ripe age of eight or nine years old. It was a horrible job, in the hot fields, to pick those peas. Another way I earned money, I went up on the prairie where cattle had died and gathered up bones. They were very smelly but also brought in a lot of money. When the summer was over, I had earned enough money to mend the cart and go back to school.

Gluck: Did you and your brother help in milking the cows and in the dairy operation?

Butler: No, no. It was a highly organized dairy with hired men whom my mother fed, as well as had children. Just think of it, she had four children in the end, and no sink--just a cistern out in the backyard.

We were never allowed out in the barn at all. I would have refused to milk a cow. Somehow I felt myself superior to such a low undertaking. They never could have made me do it.

Gluck: So you were the oldest, then, of what was later four children?

Butler: That's right.

Gluck: Did the other three live through childhood?

Butler: Well, the youngest one was drowned in the irrigating ditch. Four days later my mother died. That was when I was ten years old.

I was with my mother when she died. She had a very tragic death. Just before she died, she told me

Butler: that I was to get educated; that I was a bright child. This was news to me. She had never talked to me up till this point as if I were an intelligent, understanding person.

She had never let me help her in the kitchen-- which was a mistake. But she was so busy and under such pressure, I suspect she felt she didn't have time. So my job there was to be a babysitter, a job I loathed because I had other things I wanted to do.

Incidentally, I did not like dolls. But I loved animals. For example, I had a cat. She was called "Old Three Legs" because early in her career, when she was going through the big alfalfa field near our place one leg was cut off by the mowing machine, right at the knuckle. That didn't stop her; she still had three legs. So every year, she produced a nice litter or ten or twelve kittens. Finally, one of her children had kittens. I took great interest in these kittens and did everything I could to further their growth successfully. But the mother was killed by the mowing machine. We found all the kittens up in the barn crying for food. Well, I knew "Three Legs" had a set of kittens, so I thought maybe she'd give the other litter some milk. This sort of undertaking interested me intensely rather than that of dolls.

So I took "Three Legs" to the screaming kittens. She laid down at once and gave them a big meal. She really had a big lot of meal to give, regardless of her three legs. The next thing I saw, she was moving them one by one down with her litter of kittens. So she was one of those who believed in helping orphans. She brought up the whole twenty-four kittens with my help. She brought them up successfully. I was very proud of her!

My brother had said he was going to take the starving kittens, put them in a bag with a rock and take them over and dump them in the river. I said if he did that, he'd never live to tell the tale; I would punish him in such a way he'd never forget it.

Then there's another amusing story, too. When I was in the fourth grade where I was getting these fine lessons on rhetoric, I invited the whole grade to come out one Saturday in the summer for a picnic. Somehow

Butler: or other, the parents let them go. So they all came and we had a big picnic; they brought some lunches and we had a lot of things to eat.

Then I asked them would they like to go wading in the river. Oh yes, they'd like to wade in the river! So we ran over to the river. I didn't know it was full of holes. Pretty soon, first one little skirt and then another began getting wet. So I said, "Let's take everything off; that's the way the boys do. Why shouldn't we do it?"

Well, they were in doubt as to whether that was a nice thing to do or not, they were in great doubt! But they were all getting wet, so I led the procession. My cousin, who was a very religious little girl and very particular, refused, but everybody else stripped.

We hung the clothes up on the shrubbery by the side of the river, and we had a swim! As you know, nothing feels so good as water on the body without a costume on it, so we just had a gorgeous time, the whole crowd. Then everybody began putting clothes on and looking very ashamed to think they'd done it.

Finally, they all went home and told their mothers. Meanwhile, I found that my mother and one of the hired men had lost us. They were going up and down that river but they never found us beyond that shrubbery; nor did they know we were in there swimming. I found out later that every girl was told that never again could she come to our ranch and visit me--a naughty girl like me that would get them to go in swimming without clothes on.

Gluck: The school that you went to was in the town, Pueblo?

Butler: It was on the edge of Pueblo, Carlisle School, an excellent school.

Gluck: Were the girls and the boys in the same classes together, or were they separate?

Butler: Oh yes, it was a regular public school. The principal was a very strong, domineering woman, an excellent teacher. I never liked her because in her class she said that her life was getting very difficult because she could never get Jessie to stop talking--in class or out of class. So I didn't get on too well with her. Her name was Miss Chase.

Gluck: Then you went from there on to high school?

Butler: Then, after my mother died, my father took on Maude Fitch, who had been my mother's intimate friend and had been a school teacher. She came as a housekeeper (with her mother) and, in the end, my father married her.

She was a marvelous woman and an excellent disciplinarian. I went haywire after my mother died; I really took it terribly hard. I was really almost impossible to handle, but she could do it. She had me ride my pony out across the prairie to get calmed down.

My father sold the dairy and we moved down onto the other side of Pueblo and he went into the cattle-raising business. He had thousands of acres of land and cattle--which, as you know, is one of the big industries of Colorado and Texas. I mention that because I had something to do with the cattle industry in the Congress years later after I became a lobbyist.

While we were there--we were there just two or three years--my father found a family in Pueblo for me to live in and do housework while I went to school.

Gluck: How old were you then?

Butler: I was then fourteen years old; I was a sophomore in high school. By the way, I was a horrible household worker. I broke dishes. I dropped everything. I didn't seem to have my heart in housework from the beginning. Then I hadn't been trained by my mother, anyway.

Early Determination: the Seeds of the Future

Butler: When I was fourteen years old, in a geometry class--a very mediocre geometry class--suddenly there walked into the room the first modern woman I had ever seen. Up to that point, my knowledge of women was of Mexican housewives and ranch women done up in calico dresses. I assumed that's the way everybody would look when they got older. This woman was beautiful. She was tall and stylishly dressed. She was from Ohio

Butler: and a gifted teacher. My problem was, how could I get her to know I was around?

I was at this point having a very bad time with my stepmother who'd gone into the menopause period. She had had a child. She was in a terrible emotional and mental condition and she should never have been left in our family at all; she would threaten day after day to burn the house down--and she meant it.

So I was going through this frightful situation, helping with the housework and everything, when this new teacher walked into the room. I thought, "Maybe I can get her to help me." But how? She couldn't see me at all. I was badly dressed. Honestly, I looked older than I do now. I was all round-shouldered and an unhappy child. There were all these pretty little girls with nice dresses that their mothers had made and everything, so she didn't know I was there.

Then she began giving an original problem in geometry that students were to work at home. Everyday she would ask, "Who has the [answer to the] original problem?" Nobody ever had the answer. One night I was sitting in our kitchen, where we then lived on the edge of Pueblo, to do the homework. I said, "If I could get that original problem, she'd know I was there." I wasn't interested in mathematics; I was interested in getting help. I was desperate!

I sat at that kitchen table as I said, "I must get that problem." But it was just Greek. I could not get it. So I went to bed and what do you think happened? I dreamed the answer! I saw it on the blackboard. So I woke up at once and memorized it.

That morning downstairs at five in the morning I wrote it down and proved it. That day, the teacher said, "Who has the original problem?" My hand shot up in the air, and she said, "Why Jessie, have you got it?" I said, "Yes, I have." She said, "All right, go on. Put it up on the board."

I don't think modesty at that point was my great asset. I strutted up to the board. And the answer was right. Well, wasn't I astonished! After that, five days in succession, I had the [answer to the] original problem. I had found how it worked. At the

Butler: end of the week, the teacher called me to the desk and she said, "Now Jessie, I want you to tell me who's helping you with your original problems." I said, "Miss Mumford! I did them myself. I'm not that kind of a girl!"

From then on, I knew she knew I was there. And it was she, in the end, who got me off to Smith College.

Gluck: Did you have this housekeeping job during the day or were you actually living in this home?

Butler: We had now moved in [to Pueblo]. It soon became evident that I was not a successful household assistant. My father saw I needed to be in the public schools in the city instead of the horrid little schools out in the country that were very inadequate. He sold his cattle ranch and moved to Pueblo and went into the real estate business. He was very successful in it; he was a very clever man.

Gluck: How long did you live at this household?

Butler: Just during the school term.

Gluck: Was it because they felt a girl should be trained to do this. The family didn't need the money, did they?

Butler: Well, there was no other way to get me into town and in that school except to live in somebody's home. Yes, he didn't have the money to pay for that. Anyway, where would I live? But if I was working in somebody's home, then I was properly sheltered and all the rest of it, you see. I only did that two years. Then he sold his ranch and moved into the edge of town. I had a bicycle and rode to school. I'm now in high school.

Now, I'd like to tell just one more incident. This incident about the geometry was so amusing! It was that very year that I met this beautiful teacher that I called on the principal of the high school one night. If ever a man looked like Abraham Lincoln, that was the man. He was a very great teacher and a very wise man.

I called on him and asked him--remembering that my mother had said to get educated--what was the best woman's college in America? I did not want

Butler: to go to a college where there were men, where I would be distracted from getting an education. I felt even then that getting an education was a job in itself and that it was better to put off companionship with men until after education was absorbed.

The principal said Vassar was one of the best colleges, but it was for very rich girls. I said, "Well, I won't be rich. I don't want to go there." Then he said that Wellesley was a pretty good college but never interested him especially. But Smith College was one of the most alert and modern colleges, he thought that was one of the best. I said, "Thank you very much. I will go there."

He looked somewhat surprised. I didn't exactly look like a Smith College possibility. I was ill, and I was badly dressed, and so on. But that night, I dragged ten dollars out of my father on some excuse-- ten dollars to him in those days was a lot of money-- and I got myself enrolled in Smith College at the age of fourteen.

Gluck: At fourteen? How did you do that?

Butler: I wrote to find out what you had to do, and they said you had to send ten dollars to get enrolled. In those days, Smith College was very eager to get western girls. Not many western girls went to Smith. Secondly, they were admitting girls if they had high marks without taking an examination. So I wrote and found out that they needed ten dollars for enrollment, and I got myself enrolled. But nobody knew it.

Then I figured, "I'm not what they call an "all A" kind of student. I can't read books, memorize what is in the books and write down what's in the books. I write down what I think about what's in the book," and that doesn't go down--either in high school or college, I found out later. So I figured that I was really going to have to slug like I'd done in geometry to secure high enough marks for entrance.

For the next two years, I got up every morning at four o'clock to do homework so that no children or anybody around would bother me. you see. Later. I

Butler: began staying at the high school and getting homework done in the library where it was quiet and peaceful. I ended up with very high marks. But, oh, it was a terrible strain.

In the end, this Mr. Barrett, the principal, put me on the graduating program. My contribution to graduation was to recite Van Dyke's great essay, "The Lost Word."

Then an incident happened. My stepmother was so ill by this time and so unaffiliated to her family life because of her illness, that I had to get all my own clothes. I got a dressmaker myself and was getting a dress made to wear for this graduation. I had to walk down from our house across the prairie a mile and a half to get on a streetcar to get to the dressmaker's.

It was about three weeks before graduation. Saturday morning it always was my job to clean the house from top to toe. On this particular Saturday morning I had to go down and have my dress fitted. I told my stepmother, I said, "I can't clean the house today. I've got to get my dress fitted." She said, "If you go out of that door this morning, you need never come back." I went upstairs and said, "What do you know about that! I'm all through here. I am kicked out." I was delighted. I was a typical eighteen--you know how the eighteens are now.

So I put on my hat and coat, got my purse and without a word, walked out of the door, went down and got on the streetcar. One of my best friends, Lorena Underhill lived in her mother's boarding house. I beat it to her boarding house to ask her if she'd take me in; \$16 a week it was. She said, "Why yes, Jessie, we'd love to have you here."

I was a wreck, physically, with the housework I had to do, the nervous strain I had been under, and the studying I was doing. I was in awful shape. I went down to the office and told my father what had happened; I holed in there for the summer and got rested and just really--it was wonderful.

But suddenly I developed a terrible ulcer on my right eye, and there was no eye doctor in Pueblo. Now

Butler: I'm going to tell you about two miracles. I believe in miracles. The first miracle happened in the middle of that summer when the first eye doctor that Pueblo had ever had arrived from Philadelphia. He was one of the great eye specialists, in the last stages of T.B.

In those days, many people with T.B. would go to Colorado. If they arrived there in time, they were cured in that high altitude. So I beat it down to his office the minute I heard he was there. He said, "Oh, that's a terrible eye," but if I would come to his office every day and sit all morning so that he could treat it every half hour, he thought he could save my eye. So I did. That's the first miracle. And he did-- he saved my eye.

The second one was three weeks before I was to leave for Smith College. Nobody knew it except I talked a lot about going to Smith College. I had a room reserved and I was admitted. I just had three or four weeks before I was to go when my stepmother committed suicide.

My father came for me and brought me home [from the boarding house in Pueblo]. The minister of our church called. By that time the news had got out that I was going to Smith College. He said that it was my duty to stay home and take care of my family, my brother and sister.

Whereupon, the darling teacher arrived back for the fall session. Upon hearing of the tragedy in our home, she called on my father and said if he didn't get me out of there at once, I'd be dead in a year. That got me to Smith College. Three weeks later, I was on the transcontinental train headed for Northampton, Massachusetts.

Gluck: Did your father give you the money for college?

Butler: Of course he did. So what? He owed me that money, I'm telling you, for what I did to keep that family going and that food going--all through high school.

Gluck: Did you have to fight about it or was he quite willing?

Butler: When the teacher got through with him, he had nothing

Butler: more to say. He said to her, "What will I do?" She said, "That's your problem, not hers."

And then the second miracle happened. About ten days before I was to leave, a letter arrived from a fourth cousin of my father's from Illinois. She was in Denver and wanted to come to visit us. I said to my father, "We can't!" Our house was hectic and the whole situation was so awful. He said, "But I always liked Emily Bonham and I'd love to see her." He wrote and invited her to come.

We went down to the train one afternoon, and the sweetest little woman I ever laid eyes on got off. She was five feet two, had lovely soft brown eyes, was beautifully dressed and was just a darling. So she came out to our home. The next morning I explained I had to leave to go to the oculist. She said, "That's all right. Don't worry, I'll be all right."

That afternoon, when I came home, there was the smell of food in the air. The kitchen floor was waxed, the old kitchen stove was blacked, there was a white tablecloth and the silver was cleaned. We sat down to the first really decent meal we'd had in months.

At the meal I said, "What have you been doing all your life?" "Well," she said, "I stayed home with my father and mother on this farm. First my mother died, and then last month my father died. I don't know what to do. I have to have a home," she said with tears in her eyes. I said, "Well, there's a home here needs somebody like that."

I went out to my father sitting on the porch and I said, "She says she wants a home, Father." "Yes," he said, "I thought about that." The next morning he had a new housekeeper. She helped me buy some clothes and a trunk and got me off to Smith College. That was miracle number two.

Gluck: Did your father object to your going in the beginning?

Butler: No. Well, he made fun of me when I kept talking in high school. He said that most girls he'd known would say, "I'm going to get educated, get married and have babies." But not Jessie! She's going to get educated in high school and go to Smith College. So, he knew that it was in the air, of course.

Gluck: Did your brother later go to college also?

Butler: No. He went awhile to Dartmouth. I got him to Dartmouth, but he was not a scholar and not interested in studying. In the end he married a girl with a lot of ranch money and had a big ranch down near Boone, Colorado.

Gluck: And your younger sister, did she go to college?

Butler: No, she didn't. That's another long story. She was the sweetest and least ambitious member of the whole family, and very domestic. A very beautiful child. I think she must have inherited her looks from our mother. She had blue eyes and she was just a beautiful little girl and very sweet and gracious.

After I got to Boston, when I was working with the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission, she got into a tangle at home. She wanted to do something. She did want to be a musician. She went to Chicago to try to do that, and that didn't work out. She'd gone back home. I wrote and asked her what did she want to do and she said if she couldn't be a musician, she wanted to be a nurse.

I said, "In Boston we have the greatest hospital of America, the Massachusetts General." I sent her the money and she came on and went in as a nurse and became a great success.

Later, she came to England when I had a very serious illness. On the boat she met a brilliant Harvard professor. They had a love affair on the boat and she married him; went on and lived at Harvard and had a very wonderful life.

Gluck: You were the only one of the three children who had a college education?

Butler: That's right.

Gluck: Were there other girls in that town who went to college?

Butler: Maybe there was one more girl who did, but I often think about my father who had taken the whole thing not very seriously. In the first place, he didn't see why I couldn't go to school in Colorado instead of

Butler: Northampton, Massachusetts; he didn't see that importance.

After I graduated, I was walking along the street with him one day and he met one of his business associates. This man said, "Well, is this the daughter who graduated from Smith College?" My father said, "Yes." He said to my father, "Well, how did you happen to send her to Smith College?" My father said, "Well, I thought the best was none too good for her." So that was that.

SMITH COLLEGE: THE OPENING OF NEW VISTAS

Gluck: Were there other girls in that town who had been going to college, or were you among the first?

Butler: I was among the first. Of course, to go to Smith College and get into that beautiful New England cultural atmosphere just completely altered my life. It took me out of that pioneer environment that I'd come from and got me into the cultural world of America--it changed my life.

Gluck: What was your course of study like at Smith?

Butler: That's interesting. In junior year I enrolled in the first class in psychology that was taught in America--the very first class. Up until then I had to take another year of Latin and Greek--subjects that were presented from high school. So I took psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, ethics and logic. I didn't understand philosophy very well, but I adored it and took every course in that department.

But I went crazy over psychology and in the end it became a tremendous part of my life later in London. (I attended the Tavistock Clinic in Psychology there which was conducted by Dr. Jones, the Freudian, and Dr. James J. Hadfield, the first Jungian psychotherapist. Four years of study with Dr. Hadfield followed, a study that changed my life and character.) So that psychology class at Smith was partly responsible for helping me to find my identify in life.

I did want to learn to write, so I took a writing course. We had a teacher whose special interests were in students who could do poetry and fiction. I wasn't that type of student. Once or twice I wrote

Butler: something that she said had a possibility, but I didn't get very far with it.

I was dying for a speech course but there were no speech courses! There are none at Smith College yet. All they did was to test you. If you didn't stutter, then you didn't need speech. I went into the only speech class that they offered. It concentrated entirely on enunciation and diction. I had a voice you could hear a mile. What I wanted to learn was how to reach an audience; how to get material over; how to communicate; how to express it; how to organize ideas. There was no such class there.

I don't know what else I took. I took a lot of history. I took a course in Bible study that was very interesting.

I wouldn't make any dates at Smith at all. Amherst boys go up there, and boys from Yale, and Harvard, and Dartmouth. Many students had dates for weekends. I wasn't going to get sidetracked with dates. While they were out dating, I was in the library. That Smith library was so beautiful and filled with great literature. I read all of Bernard Shaw and all of H.G. Wells.

During those years the girls would want me to go to dances and parties, but I said, "No. I'm getting educated. I haven't time." I never had a date till junior year when we had our junior prom, which you always do.

One of my best friends from Great Neck, Long Island said her boy was coming up to Northampton. He wanted to bring his boyfriend. So she roped me in on the junior prom. His name was Horace Lyon of Lyon's tooth powder. He was a very fine young man. He later came to Colorado to marry me, but I was still too busy getting educated and getting a career started so I didn't want to get married until later on.

Gluck: Were there any particular teachers at Smith that you remember having a great influence on you? This is a period when there were a lot of socialists around, weren't there?

Butler: Frankly, I was disappointed in my teachers. In my opinion, they weren't very interesting. What I

Butler: longed for was women teachers to give me a plan for my span of life. We sat around our rooms for hours at a time, "How are we going to carry on with this intellectual life and yet have a home and children?" There was nobody there who had done it; there was nobody there interested in homes and children and there was no guidance.

As a matter of fact, it was not a healthy environment in a way. There was a great deal of homosexual relations going on there. Then we had a terrible tragedy in our class that nobody had coped with. Now, that wouldn't happen today, of course. I'm sure all those colleges have psychiatric departments and psychiatric help.

There was a girl in our class who was a very masculine type of girl who was head of the basketball program, a marvellous player, and another who was a very beautiful, sweet, delicate, typically feminine girl. The two of them lived together.

The one girl went up to Dartmouth for a weekend-- she loved boyfriends so she went up to a Dartmouth to dance a great deal. A boy in Dartmouth fell in love with her--a perfectly brilliant, gifted young boy. But her roommate was determined to break that up. When the summer came (I think it was in junior year) they went to Chicago where the roommate lived. This young man also lived in Chicago. They found out that his mother had been in a mental institution. She persuaded her roommate to cancel the engagement.

When they came back to college that fall, he wrote frantic letters. He felt that his fiance was being influenced. The roommate got her to send his letters back unopened. This lovely girl was also an actress. We had Midsummernight's Dream for our play that year and she had the lead part of the lovely girl that danced and sang--I can't remember what she was called.

One day we were all looking out of the window-- the whole campus was rocked with this love affair because the young man had come to town and was hanging around, trying to see his fiance. She was sneaking out the back door, dodging him. We thought that was terribly exciting and a great love affair, but nobody

Butler: else took any interest in it or knew what to do or tried to do anything.

As we leaned out of the window one day, we saw her coming along when he met her. She was swinging along gay as a lark. He had his hat pulled down over his eyes. They walked across our building into the center of the campus where he shot her and himself on the campus before our eyes.

I was very critical of that affair. I said, "That's what's the matter with this college, there's no humanity in it. There's no guidance for women, the guidance that we need." There isn't any there yet, much, I'll tell you that.

Gluck: Were the faculty male?

Butler: No, there were a lot of women on the faculty, but they were mostly unmarried women. Some of them, I expect, were very good teachers. I know who my greatest teacher was. It was the one who taught psychology. He was simply great. I just adored the whole thing. I didn't fall for many of the others; they didn't even touch my high school teacher.

Gluck: The main problem was, then, that you wanted to still be able to pursue some sort of career or interest and figure out how you could do both that and become married and have a family.

Butler: Yes. How could I coordinate this? From all I knew of married life, you spent your life having babies, washing "diadies" [diapers] and cooking. Therefore, how were you going to keep up with your intellectual life? No one had the answer; they haven't the answer yet. But I found the answer in London, and I'm giving a lecture on it next Thursday out at Cal State in Northridge [California State University].

Gluck: Did most of the other girls feel this way or did they just assume they were going to get married and forget about any career?

Butler: They weren't as upset about it as I was. I upset them a lot, you know. You see, my mother had said, "Get educated." She didn't say, "Be a housekeeper." I had no image of being a housekeeper, except inside me I wanted to have a baby; I wanted to have children.

Gluck: So at Smith, you already had a very strongly developed feminist consciousness?

Butler: Right. Yes. I was a feminist from the very beginning.

Gluck: Did you have any idea what it was you wanted to do at that point?

Butler: Well, something happened that guided me. I have been blessed all my life with running into that marvelous guidance. In Colorado, out on a ranch, there was an Englishman, a graduate of Oxford University. He had a red-haired daughter that he had entirely educated until she entered the senior year in the Central High School.

This red-haired girl rode horseback, brought up on this ranch. He had the philosophy that a girl should be herself, do what she wanted to. Typical English people are a lot more liberal about women, incidentally, than we are in our country. We're still held down by the pioneer image that the men had to have a woman run a home or they couldn't have homes. The British have all kinds of ways of running homes; they don't depend on one woman to do the whole thing, you see.

He'd brought up this girl, Mary Thornton, a brilliant, beautiful girl. She went into the high school just for the senior year to graduate because she wanted to go back east and be trained as a nurse. The one girl she picked out for a friend was myself. She couldn't see anybody else.

She began inviting me out to their ranch for weekends in senior year. In the process, I began telling them what my home problem was. This Englishman's whole home was filled with English things along with an English wife, of course.

The reason he went to Colorado was that he was the younger son of a titled family. In England in those days, it still is so, the older son inherits the title and the estate and the younger son has to be either a minister or a soldier. Cholmondeley Thornton didn't want to be a minister and he didn't want to be a soldier, so he came to America to be what he wanted to be. He had this ranch.

Butler: When I was a sophomore in college, I went out to his ranch for the weekend. He had okayed my getting to Smith, too, of course. He said what was I going to do when I got through and I said most of the Smith girls teach. "Well," he said, "you aren't going to be any good as a teacher, a typical teacher fitting into the machinery of teaching. But your father is a brilliant businessman and you've probably inherited a lot of his ability. Why don't you spend your summers learning shorthand-typewriting?"

 "Well," I said, "I've never heard of a Smith girl learning shorthand typing." I was beginning to be very top-lofty, you see.

 Anyway, when I got back after junior year, my father and stepmother decided that as I was having this vast sum of money spent on me--twelve hundred a year--that in the summer I could come home and take the place of the weekly cleaning lady. You know, why not? Instead of having a weekly cleaner do all over the house and do all the washing and ironing, I would do it. At that point, I felt called upon to learn shorthand typewriting--right away.

 I beat it down to the little school there. The minute I hit that typewriter, I found I didn't know how to spell. So I began getting a little respectful. Finally, I worked like a dog on it. I saw that it was a tremendous thing. It was hard work. The next summer I went back and put in another summer on it.

 When I went back to Smith and told my friends at the end of the summer just off of their summer beaches what I was doing, they asked "why did I want to learn shorthand-typewriting, and just be an office secretary?" I mean, really, a Smith girl a secretary! By this time, I'd gotten very respectful of the whole thing.

 I'd like to add a comment about co-education colleges. I am dead against co-education during college years for my type of student. Being immature, as many college students my age were, mentally and physically, such students are not ready to struggle with a lively social life as well as with the kind of intense study that goes with a college education.

Butler: Besides, in a woman's college like Smith, the entire emphasis of the curriculum and environment is adjusted to the characteristics of the single sex, the only important sex there. Had there been men students in that college, the women would have become a second sex down the line.

That would have altered my life and my development as I am sure it would do for many others. I needed to be in an environment where studies and interests were primary. This fact in later life gave me the courage and desire to take positions that were vital and important. I have often noticed how few women have the courage to speak up when it's necessary. They have never learned nor have they found out how important it is for them to stand up and speak.

THE BEGINNING OF A CAREER

Butler: When I went back to Pueblo after I graduated, I suggested that I work in my father's office and keep his office work going. He'd never had a secretary. Then I would take in shorthand-typewriting from the lawyers in the building, and that way I'd earn some extra money. He agreed and I did a lot--not very well, I'm not a good typist, yet. But I did earn a lot of money, quite a lot. There was no typist there, certainly none that had had a college education.

At the end of that second summer, I told my father I wanted to go back to the Smith reunion. I made him pay me, too. He didn't like that very well either, and neither did my stepmother. I lived at home and ate at home but I didn't do very much work.

I went back to the reunion. Then I heard that one of the English teachers had opened an employment bureau for Smith graduates that weren't teachers. I beat it to her office and I said, "I hear that you have this employment bureau." She said, "What can you do, Jessie?" I said, "I'm a legal secretary." She said, "WHAT? You're the first girl to enter that room with a business training! I've got a hundred jobs for you."

"Where are they?" "All over the place," she said. "I haven't got anybody to fill them." One of them was with the MacMillan Publishing Company on Fifth Avenue, as an assistant to the head of the college textbook department.

Gluck: That was in New York?

Butler: That was in New York. By September of that year, 1911,

Butler: I started my work on Fifth Avenue with a secretary and file clerk--I never touched a typewriter. But he wouldn't have anyone there who didn't know how to typewrite because that was considered a business training. My salary was \$14 a week.

Gluck: What did you do exactly at that job?

Butler: I was assistant to the head of the college textbook department. That meant that every time a college book was published, I had to find the courses that book would fit. I had in back of my desk four hundred college catalogues. I had to write to the man that had the course and tell him about the book and, "would he like a sample copy." Of course, if he liked the sample copy, four hundred books, or how ever many would go to that school, you see. It was very fascinating.

I didn't even know how to write a letter. Here I'd taken this English course, but I couldn't even write a simple letter. My boss had to teach me to write those letters. He was quite happy, though, with the way I did it. I had a secretary and file clerk. It was terribly hard work. I had to punch a time clock, too, like all the lower-paid employees.

Gluck: What was your work schedule like? Was it a forty-eight hour week?

Butler: Oh yes. It fitted in with the publishing business. And, of course, it turned out to be a great experience to get that inside look into one of the biggest publishing firms in New York--and a British firm.

Gluck: Were there other women working there, or were they only the secretaries?

Butler: Oh yes. Oh no. Well, then I said to him, "Fourteen dollars a week is going to be difficult for me to live on in New York City. When do I make more money?" He said, "At Christmas," if I would make good. At Christmas, my envelope had another dollar in it. I took it in and said, "Is this my increase?" I held it up. He said, "Well, Miss Haver, I think you take a very unfortunate attitude. I came here for \$10 a week." I said, "I'm told now you're getting twenty-four hundred a year. How soon will I get that?"

Butler: Well, really, Miss Haver, we have Jessie Reid here. She has edited whole series of books. She's been here twenty-five years. She gets \$25 a week and she's a Wellesley graduate." Twenty-five dollars a week, you see, after twenty-five years was the status.

I met Jessie Reid in the restroom later and I said, "Miss Reid, do you know what you're doing to the women in this firm?"--with my knees knocking. She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Every time we want more money-- I'm getting \$14 a week --we're told about you and how you've been here twenty-five years and you're getting \$25 a week and have edited whole series of books."

"WHAT?" she said. "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm telling you what happens and what you're doing to us." She said, "Why, Miss Haver, I have a little apartment around the corner. I have no family. I love this sort of work. I was born for it. I never dreamed that I was setting a standard for this whole firm. That's terrible."

She promptly went up to the president and spoke as follows: "I have come to tell you that beginning next Monday, I want \$600 a year and I want royalties for all the books I've edited." to which the president angrily answered, "Miss Reid! Have you lost your mind?" "No," she said, "I've just found it." She was a marvelous little quiet type of woman. "Well," he said, "you're fired as of next Monday." You know what happened? The next Monday, five publishers were there in the office after her. She went out at five thousand a year.

What I did was to get Jessie Reid a \$5000 salary and then I prepared myself to be moved out as a result of my efforts. So I walked up Fifth Avenue where the five women's colleges had started an employment service for college women who were not teachers [and told them about the situation]. They said, "Oh, goody! We knew this was going on there at that company and we're tickled to death to see you. We have another gorgeous job for you." (I now realize that the college employment office must have been responsible for sending the editors to the MacMillan Company to secure the services of Jessie Reid. I never thought of that before!)

Butler: The new job was to be the first secretary of the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia. Instead of fourteen dollars a week, I was to get eighty-five dollars a month. I was to be allowed to live in Whittier Hall, the lovely Columbia dormitory--quite a change from the horrible cheap boarding house that I was inhabiting near the MacMillan Company.

There I stayed for two years. Then, again, there was a very bad employment situation--from the feminist point of view--that I couldn't take. I didn't know I was a feminist in those days, but I knew what was endurable. I didn't intend to die on the job. So I went again to my employment office on Fifth Avenue. Fortunately they had a job in Boston to be a statistician and an investigator for the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission. On this job I was to get \$1300 a year.

So, Amy Hewes, executive secretary of the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission and a professor at Mount Holyoke College interviewed me. I was invited to come to Boston the next month.

Gluck: That was about 1915?

Butler: No, that was about 1913. I stayed in Boston four years where I was taught statistics and investigation skills; working to bring about a minimum wage for women in the state of Massachusetts. This was the era when women were beginning to work outside their homes; but they were the most exploited workers that ever existed. They were getting around four dollars a week in candy factories, in laundries and in Five and Dime stores. The Massachusetts Consumers' League had secured passage of a law that allowed the employees (of the Minimum Wage Commission) to copy payrolls. So I was sent out to big factories and industries to copy payrolls and then I was taught how to take those facts and put them into statistical tables. It was a very great education and training era for me.

I wanted more than anything else to help women. I became dedicated, in a way, to the woman's world and the woman's needs. Of course, that dedication was really backed by the tragedy of my own family life; and my mother's death when I was ten, and how I had lived in that valley where no woman in any family who gave birth to their children lived to bring them up. I had lived in an area, you see, where there were no

Butler: phones, no doctors, no cars--it was the primitive life of early America. (Yet it was in this early pioneer life that our great nation was built.)

I had seen and suffered personally terrible experiences as a girl and young woman. I began to be curious then because, you see, I'm a Libra. A Libra person's keynote is balance and justice.

I didn't think it was justice for women to suffer like that. Now I was finding women suffering outside the home, working in industry at starvation wages! All down the line, it seemed to me, that it was a rough world for women. I wanted to find out why, and to help change it.

Gluck: So when you saw the kind of wages these women were getting it really had quite an effect on you?

Butler: I saw how they had to try to survive. Most of them stayed with their families. Of course, they were not paying for their keep with these wages. Or, they had men friends that they lived with. They had to do one or the other. Neither one was justice because they were not carrying their own weight. They couldn't earn enough to survive without help from either their families or their boyfriends. I didn't think that was just.

I remember, of course, that was the era--and this you need to know--when Edward A. Filene built the biggest, most beautiful woman's store in Boston. All this shouting about a minimum wage had reached his ear. From the beginning, he paid the highest minimum wage that was ever paid, \$8 a week. That was unheard of in those days, when the women were getting \$4 and \$5 a week. Edward A. Filene paid \$8 a week minimum.

So the finest saleswomen came to his store. His store was beautiful; they had a big organ that played music all the time, and all these beautiful, attractive, skilled saleswomen were there to serve the customers. And so this store thrived! And on good minimum wages! Everybody was happy. That helped, too.

Bluck: By the time you left Boston, the minimum wage had already been established?

Butler: Yes, it had become an accepted fact. Quite a number

Butler: of boards were at work setting up new standards of wages. I left there to become an employee of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C. at a much higher salary.

WASHINGTON, D.C.: NEW PATHS TO BREAK

The Bureau of Labor Statistics

Gluck: Why did you decide to leave Boston?

Butler: World War I was on. I heard that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics was looking for statisticians to do a survey of the cost of living in Washington, D.C. I needed a higher salary. I wrote out my experience and was immediately invited down for an interview. I landed the job, so now I was under civil service. The experience in Boston had been invaluable.

Gluck: What was this new job paying?

Butler: I found myself in Washington, D.C. at \$1500 a year. Federal employment is always valuable; opportunities to grow are everywhere. Also, World War I provided a rare opportunity to go into U.S. government employment. Immediately, of course, I became interested in the woman's suffrage movement which, at that time, was working to get a resolution through the United States Senate.

Alice Paul, leader of the National Woman's Party, had a lovely house right on the edge of Lafayette Square across from the White House. There was a big dining room. A great many of my luncheons were there when I worked in the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

That was a fascinating job. We had to go all over Washington, where civil servants lived. Washington is a city of enormous crowds of civil service workers; nearly a million workers were living

Butler: there in sort of small, brick row houses. They're very common to that part of the world.

We had to go out and ring doorbells to get the families' budget; what their income was and how it was spent. We were trying to determine if the civil service people were getting enough to live on. Those were the statistics that we were collecting. I knew now how to make statistical tables and how to interview people; I am especially good at that sort of interviewing.

I was there two years. I just adored it. The war was on. It was a great experience to be involved in that kind of a statistical survey.

Gluck: When you came to Washington, was that your first association with the suffrage movement?

Butler: The first close association.

In Boston, I went to a lot of meetings, also to a great many meetings on birth control. Margaret Sanger was always coming up there and lecturing because they had a very bad law in Massachusetts and no information on birth control. I went several times to hear Mrs. Pankhurst from England speak--every time she came there. I went to all the big suffrage meetings in Boston while I was there, but I couldn't do much about it at that time because I was busy earning a living.

In Washington, I began going to Alice Paul's place. That's where I met Hazel Hunkins and all these other people.

The Consumers League: Minimum Wages; the Meat Packing Industry

Gluck: When did you start your relationship with the Consumers League?

Butler: At the end of two years, I had become very friendly with the secretary of the Consumers League of Washington, Mrs. Zold. I knew the Consumers League background from Boston because that was one of the finest leagues

Butler: they had. I admired them; I knew the work they were doing, I knew their whole story, the background and everything.

Finally, this woman decided she had to go somewhere, or there was some reason why she couldn't carry on and they offered me the job.

Gluck: Do you recall how much you earned at that job?

Butler: I had a good salary; it was better than I'd been getting all along. But, of course, it was dependent on my raising the money to pay it, which was a little awkward. [Laughter]

I liked it because I was my own boss and could run the whole show. I had my own office in the Munsey Building, and at times I had secretaries to come and help me run the office. I set up meetings and lectured, not very much lecturing because I hadn't been trained to speak and I didn't know how. But I did speak.

Gluck: It was basically a one-woman operation then?

Butler: Yes. I was the woman.

I had an executive committee, like all such organizations. I was the only paid employee. They got up meetings and I got up meetings and we raised money and so on.

There were very talented women on the executive committee of that Consumers League, brilliant Washington women that otherwise I would not have known at all. One can live in Washington their whole life and not meet such women. Among them were the two sisters-in-law of Justice Brandeis (the Goldmark sisters). They were prominent in the New York Consumers League, as well, Florence Kelley, of course, kept coming down to Washington due to her keen interest in the U.S. government.

Gluck: You knew Florence Kelley?

Butler: Oh, yes! She was the national president of it.

So, I began doing some very successful work at raising money. I've forgotten what the issues were then

Butler: except to get a minimum wage law for the District of Columbia. You see, although the number of employees in Washington was not large and there weren't any great factories and industry there, the women were being exploited, alright!--in laundries, and stores, and restaurants.

In order to get the minimum wage for the District of Columbia the U.S. Congress had to pass a minimum wage law--it is they who govern Washington, D.C. A minimum wage law that was passed by the United States Congress would set an important precedent for the rest of the country.

To get a minimum wage law through the U.S. Congress was a little different from getting it through the Massachusetts state legislature or any other state legislature.

The Goldmarks worked with Justice Brandeis to draft the law. Then I was asked to present the bill, as soon as possible, to a legislator who was sympathetic to the issue. Justice Brandeis thought it would take two years to get it through, but it went through in six months, to the astonishment of everybody!

In a way, it's a very interesting story because I was really at the head of the procession of women working outside their homes and with the U.S. government. I was running into all the problems headlong. Being of pioneer stock from Colorado, I was a pioneer up there, as well. It was great. I never had so much fun.

Gluck: Can you tell me more about how you worked to get the Minimum Wage bill through Congress?

Butler: As it happened, the man that we invited to introduce the bill into the lower house of the national legislature was Congressman Edward Keating from Pueblo, Colorado, my home town. He knew my father, but I had never met him before. Congressman Keating was a very broad-minded legislator, one of the very rare men at that time who had a social conscience and who understood the background of the Minimum Wage law. He jumped at the chance to introduce the bill into the lower house. Then, we secured Senator Henry Hollis of New Hampshire to introduce the bill to the Senate. He was very close to Woodrow Wilson, the president of the U.S. at that time. The Democrats were ruling

Butler: the Senate and the president was, of course, a Democrat.

So there we were with our little bill, now safely introduced into the Congress. My next job was to go up to the Capitol to learn how to be a lobbyist. Certainly the rules of legislation had to be studied at once.

I found out that the first man to be consulted was Congressman Ben Johnson of Kentucky. He was chairman of the House District Committee, that governed Washington. He was considered an old bear where women were concerned.

He loathed having women clattering down the marble corridors of the House Office Building. He loathed advanced human ideas about things like minimum wages and women getting a living wage. Besides women had no rights in the House Office Building as they were not voters.

In fact, he was the heartbreak of the city because no decent enlightened legislation for Washington could get through Ben Johnson. He seemed just impossible.

I remember the day that Pauline Goldmark asked me, "What are you going to do about Ben Johnson? How are you going to get around him?" They seemed to think, somehow, that maybe I'd find a way, but they weren't sure. I will never forget the day I first called on him in his office.

Of course he had women working quietly in the rear of his office but any woman with the status of a lobbyist was just like a red flag to a bull. This I knew.

I had a cute little cotton dress; it had red and white little fine checks--you know we used to always wear those checked dresses. It had a ruffle right down the front--all starched and looking gay and fresh.

So I walked into Congressman Ben Johnson's back office as the door was open. There he sat at his great huge desk looking very important. "Congressman," I said, "may I please speak to you for a few minutes?" I was very courteous. Looking up, he growled, "What are you doing here?! Why aren't you home having

Butler: babies where you belong?!"

I knew the fate of our minimum wage bill hung on my answer. "Well, Congressman," I answered in a soft tone, "you see, it's an awkward situation; you're supposed to have a husband before you have a baby, and I haven't got a husband." "Well why don't you get one?" he said. "Well," I said, "Congressman, I would like one, but so far all the good ones are already married." Of course, he was already married too. "Oh, that's tough," he said.

His voice changed, his tone, and he said, "Well, come on and sit down and tell me what I can do for you. I'll have to help you, I can see that." I said, "Yes, Congressman, I do need help."

I started talking to him about this minimum wage bill and the women down in the five and ten cent store downtown that were getting \$4 a week and having to either live on their families or live with a man; and how we wanted to change that. He said, "What can I do for you?" "Well, Congressman," I said, "if you'll just set a date for the hearing, I will see that the leading employers of all the stores are there; I happen to know Edward Filene from Boston. He's now in town. He has this huge store where all his employees are on minimum wages, and he's also been president of the International Businessmen's Association. He's widely known. If I can get him to appear at your hearing and these leading store men are there you'd be on the front page of every newspaper in Washington. How would you like that?"

"Well," he said, "that would be all right. When do you want your date?" He set the date. I walked right downtown in this gay mood I was in at this point and there was Edward Filene and he said, "I would be honored to speak at your hearing." So I walked right back to the congressman and I said, "He's coming." "Well," he said, "this begins to look interesting."

We had the hearing and it was jammed with the leading employers of Washington. Edward Filene made the first speech and it was gorgeous. He told them how it paid to pay women well. They brought in the business, and that's what you're after, business. A well-paid happy, gay, well-cared-for, well-fed clerk in your

Butler: store brings in the business. They saw that point.

Gluck: Was this minimum wage for just women?

Butler: Just women. The men, of course, in all those areas were organized, but there were no women's organizations at all. No woman would ever have gotten a job in Washington if she'd belonged to a clerk's organization, or a labor organization.

I've forgotten how long it was--but it was no time before he had that bill through the House. The women couldn't believe it! Of course, Florence Kelley came down and spoke, but they just couldn't believe it; this thing they had fought and struggled for for years with such anguish would just fly through the U.S. Congress with no opposition.

I went up to Congressman Johnson afterwards to thank him. "Well," he said, "you know, Miss Haver, I have a lot of influence around here." "Oh, Congressman," I said, "that's why I came to you first. We all know that." "Well," he said, "if there's ever anything you want around here, just let me know. I'm at your service." With that, I bade him goodbye and beat it over to the Senate.

Senator Hollis said, "We can't get that bill when it comes up into our committee unless you can get Senator Reed Smoot to okay it."

Gluck: Who was that?

Butler: Reed Smoot was the most difficult man in the United States Senate. He was head of the Rules Committee; he sat right down on the center aisle so that not a single bill could go anywhere unless he okayed it.

It was at a time when Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania, one of the worst politicians that ever was in the United States Senate, was practically running the Senate. There was a terrible situation there for any kind of legislation at all. It was one of the most corrupt Senates they ever had. Any legislation of a humane order was doomed from the beginning.

Anyway, the thing to do was call on Senator Reed Smoot. The president of the District Consumers

Butler: League was Mrs. Edward Costigan, whose husband was head of the Tariff Commission in Washington. He had been Governor of Colorado. They were both brilliant, and dedicated leaders. They decided that our president had better go with me to call on Senator Reed Smoot.

I don't know whether they thought he was going to chop my head off, or what. I knew he wouldn't because Reed Smoot was from Salt Lake City. He was one of the leading Mormons, a very brilliant, clever legislator; a tall, handsome man--a gentleman.

Anyway, Mrs. Costigan--who was a lovely, sweet, gracious woman--and I descended on his office. We had an appointment. As we came in he rose graciously from his desk. "How do you do, ladies?" He had a seat at one side of his desk for me and one for Mrs. Costigan.

I said, "Senator, we have come up to talk to you about this minimum wage bill. It's now gone through the House and so, of course, we look forward to your help to get it through the Senate." Whereupon, he rose suddenly from his desk and began to pound his desk so that everything on his desk danced. He said, "You women, with all this socialistic legislation! You know what? I'd like to be president of the United States when all this legislation gets in there. I'd just like to be president. I could be the greatest dictator you ever saw with this kind of legislation coming up!"

Mrs. Costigan commenced to tremble; she looked at the senator with horror, as the desk was dancing with objects on it. But I just looked at him and smiled sweetly as I said, "You know, Senator, I wish you could be president of the United States." "Well!" he said, as he sat down with a bump. "Why would you like to see me as president?" You see, that wasn't a very smart remark; I knew he was dying to be president, and he was capable of being president. He was a very great legislator, but he was a Mormon. At that time, our country was a little stuffy about appointing people with such a strong religious background as that.

Then again he said, "Why would you like to see me as president?" "You see, Senator," I answered, "if you

Butler: were president, and issues like this came up, you'd just have to look at both sides of the question and you're not used to doing that. Besides, this would make of you a greater leader than you are now."
 "Well," he said, "what do you want me to do, then?"

I said, "When that bill comes in, would you just pick up your things and leave your seat until we can get it into Senator Hollis's committee?" He said, "All right. I'll be glad to do it. I'm glad to have met you ladies." We shook hands and left.

Mrs. Costigan could hardly walk out of the room; she was so frightened at what had happened. [Laughter] But everything was all right. As the bill reached the senator's desk I saw him gather up his papers and walk out. In no time, Senator Hollis had a hearing that was equally impressive; we didn't have to work so hard for it because he was a very generous and enlightened man from New Hampshire and one of the great leaders of the United States Senate. The bill went flying through. The president signed it within six months instead of two years.

Gluck: So that was the first major piece of legislation for which you lobbied?

Butler: In the process, you have to remember, that you must almost live up at that Capitol. I was there in the Senate gallery for weeks watching the men and studying the program. You have to really absorb that whole mechanism into your system. But I never loved anything in my life [like that]! I was completely fulfilled, as a woman even, for after all, I was helping women; I seemed just complete mentally; everything I had in me I seemed to be using and using effectively. I didn't know where it came from, but that was the story.

Gluck: Were there other women lobbyists?

Butler: Very few, and they were the suffrage lobbyists. Alice Paul was carrying on her picketing of the White House, against the law of the city. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt was living in the big hotel down on Pennsylvania Avenue while her cohorts were calling on the senator from Idaho who was stalling the bill after all these years, Senator Borah. Up until then, he had been the

Butler: bill's principle supporter; but for some reason he had changed his mind.

I often ate in the Capitol dining room where all the guests were eating and senators were there, too. I began to know many of them as I went to the hearings.

Then, right in the midst of all that, I discovered the hearings on the meat-packing industry.

Gluck: That was after the Minimum Wage Law was passed?

Butler: No, it was still hanging fire. As I remember, it hadn't gone into the Senate yet.

Well, I was clicking along the corridor there one day--I think this was in the House. I looked into a room and there was a hearing going on. The congressmen were there at a long table. A man was sitting at the end of the table speaking, evidently. I knew instantly that it was a meat-packers hearing because at that time they were publishing huge pages in the Washington Post and the Evening Star--flattering pages about their great skill as meat packers. But there wasn't a word of the hearings in any local papers; certainly not in the Washington papers.

I don't know how far their advertising was going, but I was surely aroused at the time. It was the most brazen advertising I'd ever seen for a big industry! It was obvious that they must have had a lot at stake.

In my childhood I'd spend several years on a ranch south of Pueblo when my father had gone into the business of raising cattle on the range. I remember his riding out in the midst of the terrible snow storms they had in Colorado, hunting up his cows and getting the fences mended. It's a difficult life. My father was not highly educated but he was basically a cultured man. He wasn't one of these tough old cattlemen that could stand that kind of life. So I knew what it cost to raise cattle on the range.

Anyway, on this particular day, I just dropped in. It happened that that was one of the days that the Armour Packing Company had cornered rice and made a huge fortune out of it. Women shoppers had been told to buy rice instead of potatoes because the war was on and they had to have the potatoes for men in

Butler: the army, both here and abroad.

There were no newspaper people at the hearings. So, when I caught this story of the rice, I beat it down to the woman editor of the Christian Science Monitor. (Eventually, I'll think of her name--she was a very great newspaperwoman.) "Look," I said, "you must report this hearing. This is hot stuff!"

She took the story and sent it to the Monitor. Soon it came out on the front page--as her story, of course. Immediately, all other newspapers saw it there. The next day, ten women were at the hearing with nice little pencils and notebooks!

Gluck: Were they from the Consumers League?

Butler: Yes, they were on the board of the District Consumers League, including Mrs. Edward Costigan, the president. I had called them all up saying, "This is a terrible story. This is a consumers' story. It has to do with women. Please get down there tomorrow." So there they were.

When all those women filed in, you ought to have seen the expression on the men's faces--especially of the man that was the district attorney back in Chicago who was brought there to protect these men and their companies and conduct this hearing. The expression on the faces of all of them, because of these women with their pencils, taking down notes--were just cataclysmic!

After that, of course, there was a meeting of the District Consumers League where the women reported what they had heard. They began filling that hearing room with an audience, all the time. In the meantime, I was still lobbying for the Minimum Wage Law.

Everybody became excited. Finally, Mrs. Kelley was persuaded to come down and testify. She was very unwilling to do so because it was really not their field; their field was women in industry, women's wages. To get off into this great monopoly of the meat packers was just something she didn't want to do, had never done. I don't know how I ever persuaded her to

Butler: do it; she did not do it happily because it was out of their line. It's a wonder she ever came. She didn't carry too much weight.

A lot of publicity followed. The whole thing broke open. I attended the hearings every day writing up what went on and keeping the Christian Science Monitor posted. Then there was another brilliant newspaperman on the United Press, whose stories came out of Washington. He was a brilliant newspaperman, very famous. (His name, of course, has just gone from me now.) He liked my reports so he commenced sending them out through the UP all over the country. The advertising stopped; it was a failure because the thing had broken loose and was being publicised.

It was during this period that my two years of employment as a secretary of the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University paid off: I had absorbed valuable journalism techniques.

Gluck: This all occurred during the lobbying for the minimum wage.

Do you remember when, in all of that you went to New Jersey to take on that job to see what women's working conditions were like? Was that after that?

Butler: No, it was before that. It was soon after I became interested in the minimum wage in Washington. Suddenly, I heard about a factory strike up in New Jersey. I think I used a holiday; it took me two or three weeks to do it.

Gluck: It was while you were secretary of the Consumers' League?

Butler: Yes. I was still secretary of the Consumers' League. Harry Laidler was then secretary of some consumer organization in New York. He was very much interested in minimum wage and all those issues, see. He knew I was doing that investigation.

Well, I went up to the Botany Mills in New Jersey. (They weren't right in Patterson, as I remember it.) I secured a room and then found out how to get a job there. I went out early one morning. It was terribly

Butler: snowy, the ground was covered with snow.

There was no way to get to the factory except to walk two or three miles from the town where the workers lived; the factory was way out from where they lived. Nobody had horses or cars. It was another world from this. You just had to walk out there. It was a terrible experience just to walk there.

I secured a job instantly and was assigned to one of their crack weavers, a marvelous, clever woman. She was my teacher. She at once took an interest in me. She just took me over as if I were her little assistant and taught me how to run those great weaving machines.

How did we eat out there? They had lunchrooms, but they were very ordinary. The restrooms were terrible-- so was the whole environment. Then there wasn't any daylight, just solid brick walls and no windows. When I arrived there it was before the sun was up and I left there at night when the sun was gone. So I never saw daylight at all. That's what killed me. I thought I'd die!

Gluck: Was there heat?

Butler: Yes. I don't remember being cold.

Also, I had to stand for hours. There was no place to sit down even. That was a terrible thing. And there was something terrible about the eating; workers had to stand in line for a chance to get in there to eat. There was nothing done to take the ache out of the body from the standing. And then the noise of these machines was something terrible!

While I was there, one of the men weavers on the other side came over to my teacher and asked her if she thought maybe he could get me for a wife. He said, "She looks like she'd be a good wife." [Laughter] He asked her, you see, what he should do. He said that I looked like I'd be a good wife and asked her how she thought that he could get acquainted with me. She discouraged him; I told her she'd better just discourage him.

She was very suspicious of me; she sensed that I wasn't of the same breed that they all were. But

Butler: she loved me. She thought I was just lovely. And she said I tried so hard but she didn't think I'd ever become as skilled as she was because I just haven't got manual dexterity in my hands. She helped me all she could. I worked there two weeks, but I thought I'd die. I never went through such a terrible experience.

Gluck: Then did you write articles about it?

Butler: Yes, I wrote an article about it for Harry Laidler. He published it so it went all over the East. He didn't put my name on it; I asked him not to.

That story created a complete change in the whole knitting industry of New Jersey. It went all over and encouraged people to know that those workers needed either a minimum wage or labor unions.

Also I remember that the story created one of the worst strikes they'd ever had. Harry Laidler got it into the right press. I had told everything that was wrong there and about the horrible business of walking out to that factory. I asked why they didn't get streetcars to come out there and bring those workers out and back! I'll tell you something funny about me. Whenever I suddenly step into something, something always happens. I don't know why--just something happens!

Harry Laidler sent me the printed story of the result of that experience. He said I was responsible for it!

Gluck: Then you went back to Washington?

Butler: Yes, and I didn't tell anybody what I'd been doing. Nobody knew where I was or anything. I couldn't understand why I'd done such a crazy thing! It was a risky thing to do. It's a wonder I ever got away with it! Physically, it took me quite a long time to recover from the effect of it.

Gluck: But you felt that you wanted to see this first hand?

Butler: Yes. I just wanted to see what it was like and what it felt like to work in a situation like that. The woman who taught me was the principal teacher and she was sweet; but what she had gone through physically for

Butler: that job was something terrible! She told me, she said, "You know, out here we don't last long; we just die. I haven't very many more years. I won't last long either. This kills us and we know it. We aren't here very long. We just plain die."

Of course, they had no medical care, no fringe benefits; they had nothing. I don't think they had any holiday pay or anything else. Nothing could have been worse than the labor situation in that factory; you just couldn't have had it worse. I got all of it. I got the whole story.

Gluck: Then, after the meat packing hearings, was there other legislation for which you were lobbying?

Butler: No.

On The Periphery of the Suffrage Drama

Gluck: Jessie, during your activities in Washington, D.C., did you have any contact with the suffragists?

Butler: I was intimately involved with them; for instance, Alice Paul had a lovely house there right across from the White House, where everybody ate. I was with them, but I did not work for them because I had all I could do with what I was doing.

Gluck: So you weren't involved with them in the picketing towards the final days?

Butler: No, but they were all my intimate friends. The leading woman picket was one of the first women that was in my first class in public speaking when I came back to Washington after eight years in London. Her name was Mrs. Harvey Wiley. She was the wife of the man who created the U.S. Federal Food & Drug Administration. She helped me start my public-speaking work, that woman did. Then there was Mrs. [William] Kent, the wife of the William Kent who later gave me the money to take the trip [with Carrie Chapman Catt]. They all went into prison (for picketing), you know, and they fasted. They didn't eat anything so they had food pushed down into their stomachs with a hose, so

Butler: they wouldn't die. It was a terrible story.

I was very close to all that. They worked hard to get me involved, but I couldn't earn a living and get involved; they all had husbands then, so they ate. Besides, I was not inclined to go in for as rugged a program as they followed. I liked Mrs. Catt's legislative system better, but I believe they'd have never got woman's suffrage if they had depended only on Mrs. Catt!

Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, who had spent fifty years working for this subject was very much of a statistician and a parliamentarian; she believed that this was the way to get woman's suffrage through proper parliamentary procedure. Her record prior to this scene in Washington goes over many years and in many states.

Alice Paul was one of the younger members of her organization. She had been taught by Mrs. Pankhurst in London; Mrs. Pankhurst was a militant. She was the one, you know, who put oil down the post office boxes and burned letters and did things like this. Alice Paul followed her way of fighting. In the end, Alice Paul took the position that if any man in the Democratic party, for instance, should vote against woman's suffrage, she would then condemn the whole party.

This Mrs. Catt violently disagreed with. She thought the only thing to do was to attack the man and his attitude but not the whole party, and that's why they separated. Always in these great causes, it seems that there are those who are conservative and like to carry on in the conservative way--that was Mrs. Catt's way and her leaders' way--and there was Alice Paul, who like to take the more dramatic action.

Fortunately, Alice Paul had a lot of money given her by Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont. She had a house right on the side of Lafayette Park, in front of the White House. All of us went there, including myself. They had a lovely lunchroom. They kept hoping they could get me lined up with this more radical group. I couldn't, for one thing, because I was still a lobbyist at the Capitol for the National Consumers League. I did get to know many of them, though.

I remember one talented girl, young, beautiful,

Butler: brilliant, and a recent graduate from Vassar. Alice Paul sent her all over the country to speak on woman's suffrage. She was lovely to look at and was a credit to them. I became acquainted with her personally.

I found that she had not only become radical about woman's suffrage, but along with others she thought that it was all right for anyone to have a baby if they wanted and that they could pick the right person to be the father of the baby. This would create a more eugenic role without the marriage tie. She intended to do this, to carry this idea out. She went back home to Montana where she came from to visit her family. While home she announced to them what her plans were. Her mother cried night and day, and holidays, and Sundays, but this reformer couldn't be stopped.

In the end, she did finally get pregnant, whereupon she was fired. Alice Paul wasn't out to create a new family life for people; she was just interested in getting the vote for women. So the future mother secured a job and departed for London. Later there was quite a story about her in London. She was a fine mother. She had four children. She has since become a feminist leader there. She married the man who was the father of her children, a man who became a well-known journalist in England.

This story is about an era when women were struggling for more freedom. It covers a decision that many women at that time thought was sound.

Today, 54 years later, women are again involved in a struggle for greater freedom. Again the world is flooded with new solutions connected with sex and child birth and freedom. Many countries are trying out new ways of coping with these decisions, including our own country.

The solution of these problems probably rests upon what is best for the next generation that is to come.

Maybe it all began with the biblical stories of Isaac, Jacob and Esau and finally Joseph. So now we wonder how humankind will finally reach a sound conclusion and what that conclusion will be.

Gluck: With whose tactics did you agree, Catt's or Alice Paul's?

Butler: By temperament, I was not easily persuaded with the more dramatic way of acting. Yet, in my inner soul, I saw that Alice Paul and her followers were making more of a dent in this issue than Mrs. Catt was with her polite, legislative manner.

Finally, Alice Paul and her group began burning the words of the President in Lafayette Park. Although the stories do not say so, I seem to remember they did finally burn his body in effigy in Lafayette Park. I seem to remember it because I remember thinking at the time how bold it was and yet how disrespectful to the President.

At any rate, the President became very irritated about all this; he hadn't done a thing to help the women get the vote, although World War I was going on and he was giving out noble statements to the world about the rights of freedom of all people. But he didn't include women's rights in his statements.

Anyway, after this drastic attack, he finally decided that he would personally appear before the Senate in courtesy to Mrs. Catt, he specifically made clear--and ask them to vote for the woman's suffrage amendment. I seem to remember that that's the first time any president had ever gone to the Congress to ask for a specific piece of legislation; I don't remember that that had ever been done before. It was a history-making occasion.

My boyfriend, whom I later married, and I received tickets and sat in the balcony of the U.S. Senate the day the President appeared and asked the Senate to vote for woman's suffrage. It was a very historic occasion and a very thrilling experience to be there when that happened.

Very soon after that, the woman's suffrage amendment was passed by the United States Senate. Then, of course, it was necessary to get the ratification of thirty-six states; three-quarters of the United States then had to also vote to make it part of the United States Constitution. So, Mrs. Catt still had

Butler: a long battle ahead of her.

It's interesting to comment on what Alice Paul and her eager followers went through in this fight. There was a law, at that time, that they could not picket at the White House, in front of the White House. They could picket in Lafayette Park and I think at the side, but not at the front. They were told that if they did picket at the front, they would be arrested.

They did picket, they were arrested, they were put in jail and then they went on a hunger strike. The authorities were afraid they'd die there and this would make martyrs of them and make a fool out of everybody; so they forcefully fed the women while they were in jail. Among those women was Mrs. Harvey Wiley, whose husband later created the Food and Drug Administration. She was among the leadership of Alice Paul's group. Mrs. William Kent was another one; her husband was on the Tariff Commission. They were both forcefully fed so they wouldn't die.

It was a very nasty, humiliating, and horrible experience. I don't remember how many women went through that experience. Many of them practically never recovered physically as a result of what they had gone through. In a way, they really did what they felt was absolutely necessary. They let themselves be martyrs at the time.

I don't remember much about the picketing or the marching because, of course, I was earning my own living and having to work at the time. We used to all go and eat over at Alice Paul's restaurant and hear the latest news of what was going on. It was very exciting, really.

Moving from the Periphery to the Center: The Tour for Ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment

Gluck: How did you happen to become involved with Mrs. Catt?

Butler: Well, while the meat-packer's hearings were still going on the suffrage amendment went through, at last. The

Butler: news came out that Carrie Chapman Catt, with her party of speakers, was going to start through the far west to hurry up the ratification of the amendment. They felt that in the West, where a lot of the states already had woman's suffrage and where they were sympathetic to it, ratification could be pressured easily. Now, at last, after fifty years, the bill had passed!

Mrs. Catt's hotel was just across the street from the Munsey Building where I had my office. So I barged into her office one evening about five o'clock congratulating her on her victory and said I had heard she was going west. I told her what I'd been doing on getting the story out on the meat-packing industry and I explained why I was interested in her trip.

"I wish I could go with you on this tour and, instead of talking woman's suffrage, I would tell the story about this meat-packing industry--as one of the great industries women are concerned with as buyers of food. I would talk on that."

Of course, Mrs. Catt's first reaction was against it because she felt that if the big industries thought that the voters were going to stick their noses into something like these monopolies that were still very common, they'd see to it that they still didn't get the vote. So she was uneasy about it.

Being a great diplomat, she said, "Well, Jessie, it would be fun to have you go with us but we couldn't afford to take you." "Well, how much will it cost?" I asked. She replied, "It will cost \$500." "If I can get the \$500, can I go?" "Yes, if you can get \$500," she replied. She probably thought I would never get the \$500 and that she need not worry about the danger.

I went over to William Kent's office on New York Avenue. I knew that he was the cattle man from California who had been responsible for those meat-packer's hearings. I told him about her trip; "She'll be in six states of the West. I'd speak right from the same platform with her and I'd tell this meat-packing story. But, she says I have to have \$500 to go along."

Butler: He just pulled out his checkbook and put it on the desk and wrote out the check for the full amount. In half an hour I was back with the \$500.

Mrs. Catt said, "Well, Jessie, I promised you you could go if you could get the money, so I guess we'd better take you along."

Gluck: Jessie, when you went on the tour then, did you resign from your job with the Washington, D.C. Consumers League or did you keep your job?

Butler: I think that would have been rather brave to resign, don't you?

Gluck: Had you ever met her [Mrs. Catt] before, Jessie, or was that the first time you'd met her?

Butler: That was the first time I'd met her. I'd heard her speak many times and I knew that she was a very great leader. She was a parliamentarian; she didn't believe in getting things done except through the democratic, parliamentary procedure. She didn't think that picketing and burning in effigy and all those things had anything to do with parliamentary procedure; they were the kind of things that revolutionists used and they were not the kinds of things that a democracy should use to get its will done. The only thing it could do was to go through the legislative process and the government process. She believed in that.

That put her in a field antagonistic to Alice Paul and all those other women. She thought they violated our democratic procedure. I agreed with her, painful as it was for all those years.

Gluck: How many states did you go to on that tour, do you remember?

Butler: There was Colorado and Nevada, and California, and-- I don't remember. When we reached California, they had us speak in the state senate room; they were in recess. I spoke from the platform of the California senate. We all did. I talked about the meat-packers investigation. At every state where we were, there was a row of meat-packers' lawyers listening. If I had made one tongue slip that was not on the record in Washington, they would have sued Mrs. Catt for

Butler: misrepresentation.

Mrs. Catt wasn't too comfortable because she didn't want them to kill woman's suffrage after all these years. I can remember at every meeting seeing those men sitting up there in the balcony. Of course, I just spoke from the point of view of the public record that I'd received at the hearings in Washington.

Gluck: What did the other women on the platform usually talk about?

Butler: It was the regular woman's suffrage talk that they'd been doing for years.

Gluck: Everyone else spoke about suffrage; you were the only one who spoke about a different issue?

Butler: Yes. I think, in a way, I was kind of refreshing. It was a different talk and it looked to the future and this was the kind of an issue that the women in the future should technically be interested in as consumers. My future husband gave the right title. When I read him my speech he said, "Your speech is all right, but the title's no good." The title he gave me was "The Government and the Market Basket." That title made excellent publicity.

Gluck: On that trip, when you would go into a city did the local suffrage people arrange the meetings?

Butler: Oh yes. There was tremendous publicity--Mrs. Catt received tremendous publicity. An interesting thing, too, was the smooth way in which she ran her organization. People couldn't do enough for her. They were eager to help and there was this great victorious enthusiasm. At every station where we stopped to go and speak, there were huge crowds there to greet Mrs. Catt. You never saw such adoration and such admiration and faithfulness that the women gave to that great seasoned leader.

I think possibly that Mrs. Catt had the most influence with women and had the greatest effect in joining women to a great cause than any other woman that I've ever heard of. They were all back of her; they were all sacrificing for her. In those

Butler: towns there was lots of money--many of the women were very well off so there was plenty of money around--they always met her at the train and escorted her to her hotel. There was deep adoration. But she had no egotism because she was basically a shy woman.

There was a magnetism about her character that attracted women and made them forget that women through the ages have always fought each other and been jealous. But there was no jealousy in her program; there was just the selfless dedication to a great issue; and lots of love.

Later in life I came to know Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. I watched her closely as she carried on her public duties. She too was a shy woman. She never lost her inferiority complex that came to her in her early childhood from her family background. She too never seemed to suffer from jealousy and envy from other women in public or private life. It was probably her shyness that protected her!

Mrs. Catt's speeches were oratorical. They were profound speeches; they weren't just superficial. They were tied in with the history of government and the theory of democracy and what it all means. It wasn't just a superficial speech about the needs of women but was a whole philosophy of the right of individuals to govern themselves.

I used to think I had never heard better speakers; they were really great orations.

Gluck: Her whole idea was to appeal to the men to put pressure on their local governments to ratify?

Butler: Of course, there weren't a lot of men there. It was the women who had to put the pressure on the men.

Gluck: Most of your audiences were women?

Butler: Yes, of course. It was in the daytime; so all the big meetings and big luncheons were held at noon. Mrs. Catt had to fire up the women to go after their state legislators to endorse the amendment. There was no trouble, of course, in the western states.

Gluck: Was California the only state though in which you were actually able to appear in the legislature itself, or were you able to do that elsewhere?

- Butler: That was the only one. The state legislature was in recess and so they gained permission to have this meeting in the senate room of the state of California. We sat on the platform and made our speeches from there.
- Gluck: Your trip was mainly in the western states, then?
- Butler: I think we went to six states in the West, that was all.
- Gluck: Do you remember what time of the year you went on that tour?
- Butler: We were on the tour over the Christmas holiday. I remember vividly how we stayed at the great hotel in San Bernadino, the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel, for the whole Christmas era. One of the famous women of California who really started the woman's suffrage movement in California was our hostess. At the moment, I can't remember her name, but she was still alive and she lived at the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel for many years afterwards, until she passed on.
- Gluck: So you were on that tour during the Christmas of 1919?
- Butler: Yes, we started on the tour before Christmas. I remember specially--what's the great town in Nevada where they go to gamble?
- Gluck: Las Vegas?
- Butler: Yes, Las Vegas. A fascinating incident occurred in Las Vegas. As we were leaving the hotel one morning to go to where Mrs. Catt was to speak to the high school students, there was one of my intimate friends from Washington.

We had all been very enthusiastic about this girl because she had a fine boyfriend and they had finally decided to get married. What we thought was so exciting was that he was perfectly willing to have her carry on with her job. That was the era when, as soon as you married you just automatically stopped working. But she'd found a man who wanted her to go on with her job--a man who thought it was a great idea. We all thought so too. But to date such a plan was unheard of.

Here she was in Las Vegas. "What are you doing

Butler: out here?" I asked astonished. "I'm getting a divorce."
"WHAT! What's the matter?" I asked. "Well, we got along fine, but then I had a baby. After the baby came, I decided I didn't want to work anymore. I wanted to stay home and take care of the baby. I found it was rather nice not to have to crawl out of bed every morning on cold days and go down on the buses and the streetcars to a job; it was nicer staying home."

"But, you know, he wouldn't put up with it. He said that we had married on the theory that I was to continue work and that as soon as the baby got a little older, I was to get a babysitter and get back to my job. He said he had no intentions of supporting me and the baby. That was the agreement when we were married."

So it occurred to me, at that point in Las Vegas, that we women were getting into hot water on some subjects about the future and some of the women were getting into hot water, too.

Then there was another incident down in Los Angeles when we were there--not Los Angeles, in San Diego. When we arrived on the train that night, across the aisle from me was a woman crying all night. The next morning, I took a step over to her seat. She was a young girl. I asked her what the trouble was. I had noticed that when she arrived on the train there was a very attractive young man saying goodbye to her. There was a great deal of apparent sorrow between them.

Well, the story was that she was still in college and so was he. He had decided that she was to give up her college and get a job so that he could get his legal degree. And that didn't seem to be her idea of marriage, giving up her job and earning the money so that he could get his degree.

So she wrote her mother about it back East. Her mother said, "That's terrible. I never heard of such a dreadful thing. You just leave him at once and come back East and I'll take you on a European trip." So the reason she was crying was that she was leaving him to go back on to the European trip.

Again, I thought, we seemed to be getting into more hot water with some of these new ideas and they didn't seem to be very well thought out. On the side,

Butler: as we were having the trip, I was picking up some very interesting incidents because I'm a philosopher by nature; I like to see what's going on and then try to understand what's going on. I came back from the trip thinking that there was a lot more study we were going to have to be making into the world into which we were now going as soon as we got woman's suffrage.

Gluck: Do you have any other recollections of that trip that you'd like to share?

Butler: Yes, of course the trip was a very thrilling experience for me. I had never gone on a trip like that or experienced those crowds at railway stations as we went along. Mrs. Catt was always driven to one of the big hotels and all of us were there with her. It was great!

Everything was so well thought out. Always they had these beautiful big meetings. I sat back of Mrs. Catt as she spoke. (In fact, she gave me my first lessons on how to speak on those platforms.) I often noticed that she was wringing her hands behind her when she was speaking. So one day I asked her, "Why do you wring your hands behind you?" "Because," she said, "I suffer so when I am speaking: I'm in agony."

I was astonished when I realized that Mrs. Catt was really a shy woman--one of those people who was basically shy. She really did not want to be out in front of an audience. When I asked: "Why then did you choose this kind of a career," her answer was, "I didn't choose it; it chose me and wouldn't let me go."

Later I learned that her first husband whom she had married after resigning as superintendent of schools in Mason City, Iowa, had had an abrupt and tragic death from typhoid fever very soon after their marriage.

One day she met George W. Catt, a former school friend who was now a successful engineer. Soon he proposed that they marry pointing out that they "might form a partnership where each could accomplish better results than either could alone. He could earn the living for both of them and she would render the public service for both." He persuaded her that he had been an advocate of votes for women since the age of eight

Butler: years. So they drew up a written contract wherein it was agreed that she should have two months in the spring and the same in the fall for suffrage speaking and organizing."

I suspect that George Catt had to think up this neat program realizing that his fiance was still grieving over the sudden and tragic end of her first marriage.

I later learned in a biography of Mrs. Catt that George Catt had "enabled his wife to devote her genius as a free gift to her cause, and prolonged his priceless grant after his death by leaving her financially independent" (from Carrie Chapman Catt, A Biography, by Mary Gray Peck).

It was because of George Catt that Mrs. Catt was able later to form the International Woman Suffrage Alliance followed by many trips to nations all over the world where she taught the women how to go after woman suffrage. Several of her dedicated assistants went with her on these world-wide trips.

No wonder that Susan B. Anthony had the wisdom to appoint Carrie Chapman Catt to be her successor. No wonder that I was privileged to have taken this rare journey with her at the end of her struggle.

I saw that it was because of her human and compassionate nature that she had won the devoted, dedicated services of thousands of followers who had helped her to win the battle to give the vote to American women.

THE END OF AN ERA: DISSOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL AMERICAN
WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION AND THE FORMATION OF THE
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

- Gluck: When you came back from your tour, it was the early part of 1920. You stayed on still with the Consumers League, then?
- Butler: No. Very soon after we returned (and I can't remember whether it was six months or how long it was after Tennessee had ratified the woman's suffrage amendment), Mrs. Catt had a meeting of all her following and all her officers to wind up the work of the National Woman's Suffrage Association. She invited me to go with her to St. Louis and sit on the platform. In the process they wound up their organization and put it to bed financially, and then they created the national League of Women Voters.
- Gluck: At the founding convention of the national League of Women Voters, that was the last meeting of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association.
- Butler: Yes, 1920.
- Gluck: Can you describe that meeting a little bit?
- Butler: I was invited to come to that meeting. I sat on the platform when the League of Women Voters was born. It was not a controversial issue; it had all been thought out, as Mrs. Catt always did. Mrs. Catt was a stateswoman; I knew many statesmen in Washington, D.C., so I saw she had what it takes to be a great stateswoman.
- She had the plans all made, and Maude [Wood Park] was appointed the president of the National League of Women Voters. She lived in Boston.

Butler: That whole meeting was all very peaceful and very happy because they were through with suffrage and could now go on to prepare women for the new program ahead. The gathering was very peaceful and very impressive.

Mrs. Catt had that gift of dramatizing things in a human way that was beautiful, and noble; there was a nobility about her and a high spiritual thinking that she put back of what she did. That was the feeling of that meeting; it was uplifting. The big battle they'd fought for so many years was over. Now a new world was coming and they were going to help create that new world. She put a beautiful spirit of imagery, and spirituality, and idealism into the meeting. Everybody was deeply impressed, spiritually, by the way the whole thing was handled.

Gluck: At that meeting, then, the National American Woman's Suffrage Association was disbanded and the National League of Women Voters was created.

Butler: That's right. Then they had a meeting right afterwards and I was appointed the first legislative advocate as they called it.

Gluck: And that was a paid position?

Butler: Yes. It was the highest salary any woman was getting in Washington at that time.

Gluck: Do you remember what you were getting?

Butler: Thirty-five hundred dollars. There wasn't a woman that I'd ever heard of who was getting such a salary.

Gluck: That was almost double what you got with the Consumers League.

Butler: Yes, oh yes--easily. I didn't have to raise the money either as I did with the Consumers League. So we went back to Washington and I was off of the Consumers League and into a big new job for the National League of Women Voters.

Gluck: Do you remember what some of the lobbying was that you worked on then?

Butler: We spent all that summer laying the groundwork for

Butler: the work of the league with the Congress for the next fall. My work, by this time, became somewhat confused because this whole question of marriage had come up again. You can't think about getting married and still be completely sunk in the work of a reform movement like the National League of Women Voters. So I don't think I did so good a job that summer. By December, Hugh and I were married, and off to London.

Gluck: Before we talk about your marriage, I'd like to ask you more about the formation of the League of Women Voters. Was Mrs. Catt's notion that it should remain as a woman's bloc?

Butler: Yes, I think so. I don't know just what she would have liked to have done with it, but maybe not have it so concentrated on the processes of government but more on getting freedom for women in life. I'll never forget on our trip West, when she spoke in the high school in Las Vegas. I remember her talk so well.

She said, "We spent fifty years giving the vote to women and freedom to women. It's going to be your responsibility to decide how you're going to use that freedom. That's going to be the most difficult of all." Here her thoughts were clear. She was not thinking of freedom in government, but freedom in life.

Gluck: How did you feel about these events?

Butler: As soon as the women had the vote, they just quit. I didn't know what to think! It's one of the tragedies of the whole era that a slump took place; women stopped seeking higher degrees in colleges, they stopped trying to be better-educated. Many young women left school for marriage. Many went to work to help husbands secure degrees. Over the years this custom has become commonplace--a strange reaction to the fire and drama of the fight for woman suffrage. The sequence of this custom is sad. Many of those marriages ended in divorce.

Gluck: Do you think that part of that may have been because the women's bloc virtually disappeared? Rather than being interested in women, the League of Women Voters became interested primarily in government. Do you think that was part of it?

Butler: Maybe so. Maybe it was because we needed new issues.

Butler: Mrs. Catt was very disappointed in the League of Women Voters for that reason. She felt that it lost its meaning by just limiting itself to government issues. But not many people agree with that because the League has done great work in this country in getting women better trained with government and how it works; they've been very successful--though conservative--before city councils and state governments. They've taught their members how government works, how to influence government. Personally, I think they've been great. The time was ripe for this type of teaching.

Now, as we look at America, we can see what's happening to women, and women's programs, and women's philosophy. The decisions they're making are utterly unexpected and different from anything Mrs. Catt had ever thought of. How wise those decisions are, we don't know. Time will tell.

Gluck: Once the suffrage amendment was ratified, did the relationship between Alice Paul and Carrie Chapman Catt change?

Butler: Alice Paul was a woman with a one-track mind, and she still is. After Mrs. Catt finally got the amendment passed by the thirty-sixth state of Tennessee, she came on to Washington and we had a great meeting at Palis Theatre to celebrate the Tennessee victory. Alice Paul didn't take any part in that celebration. (Nor was she there on June fourth and fifth, 1919, when the Woman Suffrage Amendment was signed at the Capitol.)

The day after Mrs. Catt's arrival and the day after Tennessee had okayed the woman's suffrage amendment, Alice Paul began to plan to introduce to the Congress the Equal Rights Amendment. This is added proof that Alice Paul is a woman with a profound mind. Although she had helped to secure woman's suffrage, she still believed that woman's suffrage alone was not going to give women everything they wanted and needed.

And she was right! They had only secured the right to vote. The U.S. Supreme Court has now stated that the only status women have today in our government is as voters. Any state today can still pass any law they'd like against women. Women have no recourse except perhaps to vote against them when they pass such laws. Well, that's very complicated; there are now

Butler: a thousand very bad laws on the records of state legislatures against women.

Alice Paul was right. Getting woman's suffrage was not enough, it was just the first step. She's still alive, almost ninety, still fighting for the whole works so that women will be completely equal citizens with men in the United States. She's still alive now, by Jove.

Gluck: What was the relationship like between Alice Paul and Mrs. Catt?

Butler: It was a very fierce relationship because Alice Paul was originally connected with Mrs. Catt's organization. Then this disagreement on how they were to carry on the fight came about. Alice Paul would not give in an inch, any man who voted against woman suffrage caused his entire party to lose her support and that of her followers. Mrs. Catt, on the other hand, continued to support any helpful legislator regardless of his party. So the two organizations, The National American Woman's Suffrage Association and the National Woman's Party would have nothing to do with each other.

To anyone interested in astrology there is another answer to the fierce antagonism between these two women reformers. They were within two days of each other in their birthdays. Alice Paul was born January 11, 1885; Mrs. Catt's birthday was January 9, 1859. To have two Capricorns latched together in a violent historical struggle could hardly be more trying. Each stood for the truth as she saw it; and each in her way has brought about and is bringing about lasting freedom for women equal to that for men.

SUFFRAGE, FEMINISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MEN

Gluck: Jessie, before we close the chapter on suffrage I'd like to go into a few more things. First, when did you begin to consider yourself a suffragist?

Butler: You see, everything completely changed when I left Boston. At that time I was just twenty-five years old. Frankly, I was worried because I wasn't meeting any men. I don't want to go into this, but I had had a rigid rule in college that I would make no dates because I was getting educated, as my mother told me to do. Now, I'm twenty-five years old. At this point, I'm beginning to wonder if I'm ever going to marry-- I hadn't made up my mind to that yet. So I began to be a little soft on red-hot suffragists; I mean, girls who were trying to get married at that time didn't shout their heads off about woman's suffrage, as yet not very popular with men. I did go and hear Mrs. Pankhurst speak in Boston, though. I had never heard such a brilliant speaker. I went to the meetings but I did not work for them. Of course, I was still working for women in the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission.

Although I was a suffragist, I wasn't a frothing-at-the-mouth one until I arrived in Washington, D.C. in 1915 and became acquainted with all those interesting suffrage workers and got close to the whole movement. By that time and place, of course, woman's suffrage was a more popular subject. When I first arrived in Boston, woman's suffrage was a very unpopular subject and anyone interested in getting a man wasn't shouting her head off about woman's suffrage. Even the President of Harvard came out against woman's suffrage during one of Mrs. Catt's visits there. So I didn't develop an interest in all of this until I went to Washington.

Gluck: At that time, would you have called yourself a feminist, do you think--in Boston?

Butler: No, I didn't know what a feminist was. I was a suffragist but I didn't shout about that either. I was ashamed of myself because I wasn't getting out and helping. But at that point in my life, I felt I had something else I had to do--to learn how to get along with men.

Underneath everything else what I really wanted was to have a baby. And that meant I had to get married.

Gluck: When you told me before that you thought you didn't want to get married, that was later, too?

Butler: Yes. Because then I'd landed a tremendous job and a good salary and I had prestige and loved my job. Why get married? That was a different story.

Then, of course, I began knowing all those fine women who were working for woman's suffrage. I also studied the whole system of government in which I was terribly interested. (I always have been, because I have since learned that in a previous life I was in a government position.)

Gluck: Then when you got to Washington is when you would have started calling yourself a feminist, in other words?

Butler: No, I didn't call myself a feminist; because in those days you were just a suffragette. The word feminist was still not used. They didn't use that term as a title and a label as we do now. We say, "Is she a feminist?" now, and that's a concrete thing we're saying. At that time, we did not talk about feminists in that hard-boiled label. We just said, "Is she a suffragette? Does she believe in woman's suffrage?" That was the big issue of the day.

Gluck: Was that the only issue, did you feel? Or did you feel there were broader issues?

Butler: Oh yes, I did. That's why I took up the meat-packer issue. That had to do with the consumer and therefore included women.

Gluck: But I mean specifically related to the woman's role?

Butler: Well, I was in the woman's world for four years copying their payrolls up in Boston in those awful factories. I gained a background of knowledge and information that began to work me up with emotion about the injustice that was going on for women. Also don't forget what happened at the MacMillan Publishing Company on my first job in New York City!

I'd had a very sad family life, my mother dying when I was ten, partly due to the family situation, and then I had two stepmothers. The first one committed suicide later. But I didn't lay that situation to feminism; I laid it to the pioneer age and the crudity of the pioneer life and the background of these women and families.

I didn't label it as due to feminist issues--as I later found out.

Gluck: In Washington, then, is when you really publicly identified yourself as a suffragist?

Butler: Oh yes. I went to all the meetings. Some of the members of my executive committee [of the Washington, D.C. Consumers League] were not feminists and of course I was in their employ so I hadn't a lot of extra time. But I attended every meeting of Mrs. Catt and the famous woman who had been a minister, Ann Howard Shaw--I heard all of her speeches. Everytime they spoke I was there filled with glee but sad because I knew I could never speak like that.

But Mrs. Catt didn't know me personally until I walked into her office and asked to go on the western trip. But she knew about the lobbying in the Congress for the District Consumers League to get a minimum wage law for working women in Washington and about the meat-packers investigation that was going on.

Gluck: As a young girl, when your mother was working for woman's suffrage, do you recall her talking about it?

Butler: Oh yes, I remember there was a lot of talk about Susan B. Anthony's campaign in the mountains, in the mining camps. I remember seeing my mother leaving in the spring wagon to win men's votes. But she did not take me along. I suspect I was left behind to baby sit. She never talked much to me at all--possibly because she was too busy.

Butler: But I was with her all that night that she was dying. Then she told me I was to care for my brother aged eight and sister aged three, because she was going to die. Then she told me that I was a bright girl and that I must get educated. This was news to me. Then she said the Lord's Prayer as I held her hands.

I loved my brother. We were pals. But I never took any interest in other boys. For some reason I felt superior to them intellectually. But I finally did have a boy invite me to the junior prom in high school; my high school teacher got him to do it, I think. He sent me some red carnations. He was a nice boy.

By that time, I was seventeen years old. I didn't know how to talk to boys. I was awkward and ill at ease. That's why I wanted to go to a college where there were no men, and where I would learn to communicate with ease.

Gluck: So by the time you went to New York, you were feeling that you really should think about getting married?

Butler: Washington, not New York.

Gluck: It was in Boston that that started?

Butler: Yes, it was in Boston. Then I began to see that I was in an environment where I'd never meet any attractive men, the kind of men I'd like, you see. In boarding houses and places like that, you don't.

Gluck: Did you feel social pressure on you to get married, or where did that pressure come from, do you think, when you were in Boston? Just because you were unhappy?

Butler: Well, I was lonely. I had no home, and I needed companionship. I liked this Portuguese at a boarding house, he was a handsome fellow. He was the one who aroused me sexually. I was twenty-four years old then. He was very interested in me, really. He taught me how to swim. But on weekends he would go back down to southern Massachusetts where his family lived. He was never with me for weekends because he said his father was a drunkard. He came home and beat up his mother so my friend had to be there to protect her--this was the story he told. So he was never in

Butler: Boston on weekends. He hadn't asked me to marry him, but I think he wanted to. I think he was very interested in me.

Then I had a dream that he had a girl down there that his mother had picked for him to marry. He was a good home boy wanting to do what his family said. He was terribly upset trying to decide what to do. When he came back one Monday I told him about the dream. He never showed up again. I never heard a word from him. That was the end of that, and soon after that I went to Washington. That's how a dream had saved me.

Gluck: At Smith College, did you think that you should get married? Did you feel pressure then?

Butler: No, no, never. But Ethel Lewis, who was a very wealthy girl, lived on Long Island. She had had me there for Christmases. Her father was good to me. He was the editor of a big newspaper, the New York Evening Telegram. He was a brilliant man. Everytime I visited these friends, the father said, "That's one of the finest girls I ever saw." (to my utter surprise).

When I visited Ethel at Christmas, her father gave us a box to the opera and to the theaters. It was my very first theater experiences. Oh, it was wonderful!

There I met Horace Lyon, who was a buddy of her boyfriend. He was a handsome young man, this Horace Lyon, and much more wealthy even than her boyfriend. He's [from] the Lyon's toothpowder [family]. They had a home in New Jersey and a big apartment in New York and one in New England. I knew I'd never get any better chance than that.

He invited me to visit his family for dinner. He was with us at the opera, some of the big operas where the great, famous singers appeared. Wasn't that an experience, though!

But I was still undeveloped emotionally. I was still just like a little girl sixteen years old. I didn't know how to handle the situation. I was terribly immature. A lot of girls that menstruate late are late maturing, and they're the ones who don't get old young; that's why I'm still alive now, maybe!

Butler: Horace Lyon came to Colorado to get me to marry him after I graduated. He was just a perfect darling, very good looking and a very faithful, fine young man, but the trouble was I did not love him. I tried, but it was no good. Within half an hour, I couldn't think of anything to talk about. Imagine that! Well, you can't marry somebody without love-- at least I couldn't.

I knew I'd never get a chance like that again. When he came out to Colorado my family had a fit at the way I treated him.

So at this time, I couldn't have been worrying about feminism, suffrage, and all that, you see.

Gluck: At Smith College, was there a suffrage club on the campus there?

Butler: I doubt it. Smith was reactionary on the feminist movement and always has been, I suspect. They didn't even have good speech classes there.

I get letters (I just had a letter the other day) all the time begging for more money. But no notices about advanced courses for modern women! And always men presidents!

Even so, I am eternally grateful to Smith College. I needed the culture that four years in that rich New England background provided. Then, too, I went on to good positions, always helped by that Smith degree and the tip from Cholmondeley Thornton to go into the business world. Let us add that destiny might have helped along the way!

Don't forget, too, that Gloria Steinem is a Smith graduate. So is Betty Friedan.

Gluck: Jessie, then when you got down to Washington and became involved in this exciting career is that when you decided that you didn't want to marry?

Butler: Well, I was in no hurry, anyway. Then I met Hugh. He didn't want to marry either, he said. So I had a boyfriend, at last. We went out to dinner every night, dutch treat, you know. He came to my office and we had a marvelous companionship, that I needed. I

Butler: never had seen any other man in my life that could give the companionship Hugh could. He helped me with speeches, too, though he had never set a foot into a college. He was just clever.

Gluck: Was it very common in those days for a couple to go to dinner dutch treat?

Butler: Oh, yes, it was a new idea. Women working in offices were new too. If you were working and he was working, oh sure. I think I was getting a bigger salary than he was, or as big. It was just automatic that I always paid for my own dinner and he paid for his.

Gluck: Was it important to you that you pay your own way?

Butler: Yes, it made me feel independent. But, we just never thought about it. If he weren't there, I'd pay; he's there, I pay. There was no issue. It was just natural, utterly natural. After all, we were just pals. I had never seen any boy--I've never seen anybody since--I could be the same companion to.

Gluck: How far back do you think your ideas about women go? When did you start expressing those ideas?

Butler: I remember vaguely the day I saw my mother climb into that spring wagon to go out and do precinct work on woman's suffrage. I was curious where she was going--why didn't she take me with her? All she did to get me to help her in that housework was to wash diadies. Until she died. Then she told me that I was a bright girl.

I was taking things in, alright. Then, of course, there was the question of where babies came from. This question arose when my brother and I were six and seven years old. We had discovered where the kittens came from and where the cows came from. When my little sister came I was seven. So I asked my mother, "Where did she come from?" She said, "The storks brought her." I couldn't wait to get to my brother; we rolled on the floor with glee--what kind of fools did she think we were! I was just seven, but full of curiosity about everything.

I commenced to notice things. Then I remember in

Butler: the eighth grade in the grammar school, I had a teacher named Miss Chase; she was a very good administrator but a dominating type of woman. I remember her looking at me one day and saying, with a sigh, "Jessie Haver! How am I going to survive this year? What am I going to do to stop you talking! You never stop!" Right in front of the whole school.

Of course, if she'd known how to teach public speaking and had given me some nice assignments and a chance to say what I thought, I wouldn't have talked all the time all over the place. Guess What? Three weeks ago, she came to me in my sleep. She just looked at me graciously. Evidently, wherever she is, she now sees that all that talk wasn't exactly a waste of time or nothing but empty gabble. She wanted me to know that she understood. So, you see, I was trying to develop myself against awful odds.

Then you saw the doll that my mother gave me on her last Christmas. She should have known better than that--I never played with dolls. I've never played with that doll. She gave me that doll because she said it was the last year she was going to live. She was probably psychic; she had a lot of ESP in her, all right. There's no doubt of it.

Then I went into high school. I had a wonderful teacher in geometry I loved and to whom I told all my sorrows. Then, of course, as a miracle, a red-haired girl came into that high school class, an English girl. They had that ranch north of Pueblo. He was from a titled family in England.

There I spent many weekends; they knew what I was going through with a stepmother who was really a mental case. They invited me there for weekends. They talked to me as if I were an intelligent human being. The British bring up their girls like that, you know. If they see a girl has a mind, they help her develop it. They don't teach her to be a sweet little placid girl; not knowing anything.

Gluck: All your life as a child, you felt pressure from people that you should behave more like a girl?

Butler: Well, it wasn't that heavy, that I behave like a girl-- just that I be endurable. [Laughter] They tried to

Butler: quiet down my aggressiveness. There was a cousin living near us two years older than I who was always held up to me as an example. "Why couldn't I learn to be like Edna? So good, so quiet, so obedient, so helpful?"

So one day when walking home from the grade school several miles away, suddenly Edna was pushed down onto a cluster of cactus plants. It took several days to get her sit down healed from the thistles.

I think it wasn't until after I was through college that my father said something about, "You'll have to learn how to handle men better or you'll never get married." I think that's the first time I ever heard that.

My mother should have let me get into that kitchen and help with the meals. But she probably didn't have time. Finally, I did join a domestic science class in high school. I adored it. I remember once I made a scalloped cabbage casserole and a lot of dainty things that my mother didn't know how to make. I loved it; I thought it was so exciting. Evidently, my mother's cooking was pretty crude.

But they didn't try to persuade me to learn how to cook. The only thing my mother learned that I did very well was shop. She often gave me money and sent me clear in to Pueblo, a mile and a half across the prairie from that dairy. I had to walk to the streetcar. Soon I did all her buying for her. She found I was clever at that. She had me do that because she couldn't get in there herself.

I don't think the pressure was on me to be a girl, especially; it was to be endurable so they could live with me.

Gluck: It was basically that a lot of these thoughts came out in Washington?

Butler: Yes, when I grew more mature.

Gluck: Do you think it was related to your satisfaction with the job?

Butler: Oh yes, I think that was important. I had an important job. I saw that being like a man had its value,

Butler: instead of being like a woman.

Then also there was this red-haired friend that I visited. I visited her with her three children repeatedly. I thought she was in a horrible position. Her husband had a high position in Yale University. He was a wealthy man. There she was glued to this home and children, and cooking, and everything. I thought, "Thank God! I'm free."

I think it was that visit to her, when I was still in Washington, that made me say, "Boy, I'm not going to get into a boat like that." I think that's when I really made up my mind; it was horrible. I saw, you see, what the demands on her were. She's dead now; she went through an awful time with her husband and her children.

A NEW PATH: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Decision to Marry

Gluck: Jessie, the return from the ratification tour and the decision to marry seemed to signal the end of a period in your life and the beginning of a new one. You had had very definite ideas about marriage before this; then, this abrupt change. Can you tell me more about this?

Butler: I had earlier decided that I was never going to get married, so life was very simple.

Gluck: Why had you decided you weren't going to get married?

Butler: I'd had a perfectly awful childhood and, besides that, I had a very exciting time getting myself trained, learning to earn a living and being free--of not only marriage and children but of my family. I'd never been free before.

I had this gorgeous job in Washington lobbying--which I adored. I had never been so completely happy and so completely using every talent I had, and it was heaven. Then I met Hugh. He didn't want to get married either. So we just had a nice, platonic friendship for four years. We were companions but not future married partners.

Gluck: Why did you finally change your mind, then?

Butler: Finally, I reached the age of thirty-three. As I looked around at the women who hadn't married and were forty on I didn't like the picture very well. They didn't seem very happy. One of the most brilliant

Butler: women in Washington, who'd had a very high position in the government, was now in a mental home for life; I didn't like the looks of that either.

Besides, I'd been eating dinner every night with my platonic pal, Hugh. He secured a job at the American Embassy in London, so I began to wonder who I would be eating dinner with next.

I enjoyed him; he helped me in my work. He loved having me do this kind of work; he was fascinated with it. He gave me titles to my speeches; he was a much more brilliant man, mentally, really, than I was as a woman. He was a Welshman and I was half German, and that's a rather slow-thinking mind. So, whenever I landed into a tight place, this alert Welshman always had the answer.

Gluck: When you thought about marrying, you thought in terms of giving up your career, then?

Butler: Yes, I had a terrible time about it. It was one of the most difficult decisions I ever made in my life; to leave the best Washington job I'd ever had (or anybody ever had) and to give it up and get married--which I never wanted to do. There is a long story in there that I can't tell here of the pressure that was on me not to get married. His mother, that he was very devoted to, came on to Washington to help get him away without me. She told me at the first meeting that he was never going to marry. After all, I was not having her plan out my life for me either. This I explained to her. She couldn't tell me what to do with my life! Then I began to want to get married; a little opposition maybe was a good deal. Meanwhile, I had grown so used to Hugh, I found to my horror I couldn't get along without him. You know what I mean.

Gluck: When you say that you had earlier decided you weren't going to get married, did you agree with Hazel Hunkins and the other women who didn't believe in marriage?

Butler: No, I didn't advertise the fact of what I thought about it. I just wasn't going to get married. But I wasn't going to have babies either--unless I had a very respectable matrimony. I was that conservative.

Then, after a fierce and unbelievable struggle,

Butler: the situation cleared and I went to Colorado to visit my family. December 6, 1920, we were married in New York City by Reverend John Haynes Holmes, the great preacher for the Unitarian organization. We were married by him in his office with his clerk as witness. The opposition of my husband's family to his marriage made him unwilling to have anything but a very simple marriage.

(This was rectified later in London when I had a chance to be presented at the Court of Saint James in 1928. I pointed out that since I hadn't had an elaborate marriage, I would like to go to Court and make up for it. By that time, I guess Hugh felt that I had earned the right to go to Court.)

On December 12, we saw ourselves taking the good ship Aquatania for London, terrified at the idea of leaving America.

Gluck: Jessie, did you ever think though about combining, continuing your career with marriage? Or you felt that when you got married, you knew you were going to have to stop?

Butler: I knew if I was going to get married and go to England, I couldn't carry on my career, as far as I could see. But I thought I'd like to see England. I didn't think I'd ever get there any other way. I'd heard that the British woman, whose husbands were in the diplomatic service, didn't do any cooking; I thought that had its charms. A nice trip to England and no cooking and a lot of the new world to see--I was a philosopher, you know and full of curiosity. I wanted to see what England was like.

Gluck: So this meant an end to your own career?

Butler: No, not a complete end to my career. The decision to marry was made on a deep spiritual basis that I can't go into here; the most difficult and important decision of my life and one that changed my life and improved it. I did not realize that my husband would give me a great experience that would broaden my whole life and my career and everything--invaluable. Marriage is that way.

[Editor's note: What follows is an abbreviated version of the events until her return to a career. This is based on selected segments of the interviews.]

Butler:

We arrived in London just a short time before Christmas. It wasn't long before we had found an apartment in the Hampstead Garden suburb, the first planned community in any English-speaking country. It's interesting to note that the idea of planned communities that started in England was copied later on all over our country.

Later on we bought a house there, the only Americans at the American Embassy to buy a house. An American woman at the American Woman's Club in London guided me in buying enough antique furniture for the eleven-room house. (At the end of World War I the Willis showrooms were filled with antique furniture. Auction sales were going on all over London!)

Soon after our arrival in London, I had discovered the American Woman's Club in a perfectly beautiful mansion in Grosvenor Square. Almost at once I was roped in to start a current-events circle once a week. That current-events circle became one of the most interesting and brilliant affairs that I had ever experienced. There were talented women there from all over the world. I still remember the reporter from Italy whose accounts of Mussolini's beginning activity were so dramatic. Reports from Ireland were pretty lively, too. The only trouble was that few of the women had had training in public speaking so they had to read their reports.

Then I found Madam D'Esterre down on the Chelsea Embankment who had taught public speaking to nine royal princes and many men in the House of Commons and their wives. The British generally took their wives with them to speak on the same platform when running for seats in the House of Commons. I thought that was rather neat. That was a period when our political wives were still kept under cover!

So Madam D'Esterre was persuaded to come to the American Woman's Club to teach their members and

Butler: the women in the current-events circle how to speak. Oh, was that an experience! That was the first time I'd ever had any formal lessons myself! But she was so rough and critical of us--that's the British way of teaching I learned later--that only about twelve of us survived.

Madam D'Esterre was from Ireland. She came to England at the same time that Bernard Shaw came. She wore a Roman-like toga only it was black and she had short hair. She was without doubt one of the plainest women I ever saw. This, too, bothered the American students. But she worshipped the English language--she could certainly teach speech! She held her regular lessons in her own studio where everyone came once a week to speak and to practice.

I loved her classes there. I was a sensation, too, because I was the first American there. They all thought I had a terrible American accent--one of the worst; but my teacher said not to mind. It would take me two years to get rid of that accent and then I would be unpopular when I returned home! "Americans were accustomed to that way of speaking," she said.

Then Lady Walker Smith in the Hampstead Garden suburb advised me to go to Baden-Baden, Germany to secure treatments for the fierce rheumatism I had acquired in that frightful British climate. I think now it was arthritis, but whatever it was, something had to be done.

Dr. Eddie Schacht. Not only did his program in the hot baths and with the Swedish masseur knock out the rheumatism but he laid out a plan for my life that was long absent. The question was how was I to have a baby and still carry on with my interest in public life when we returned to America? By this time it was clear that it was too late for me to turn into a dedicated housewife for the rest of my life.

The doctor advised me to give the intellectual interests a rest for five or six years while starting my family--to get the British to teach me how to find and keep household help. But he said that I must have one day off in seven to continue to pursue my hobbies. "Why, Doctor," I asked. "How can I do that. I thought I could never do that anymore once I had a baby."

Butler: "That's why you had a college education, to think that way out," was the answer.

It was easy to find a good woman to clean our apartment once a week and to do the washing. There was a cooperative dining room in the building for dinners so that problem was settled.

Then another project developed. I found out that all over England in the small villages and in London were free mothers' clinics. I discovered that the cheapest medical costs had to do with childbirth! Thanks to Florence Nightingale most of the nurses in England were also mid-wives. Pregnant women even in the middle classes went to these clinics to learn how to have their babies. Most of the babies were born at home, delivered by mid-wives, for something like one pound (about \$5). Seldom were doctors involved unless there was a need because the pregnant women had been so well-trained at the clinics.

It began to dawn on me that having a baby was not quite the same as being a lobbyist at the Capitol. So I began to visit a huge mothers' clinic in London that was perfectly fascinating. The doctor sat at the head of the room on a platform so we could all hear what he was saying to the mother there with her baby. The death rate of mothers and babies was the lowest of any nation except Denmark. Our nation was still sixteenth on the list and I was on top of the list--I was so scared!

Then I found Dr. Pink's Nursing Home in Blackheath. He had never lost a mother or a baby. He had sent every mother away nursing her baby. That did it!

Our daughter was born in March, 1924 when I was thirty-eight years old. She was breast-fed for nine months. That was the most exciting thing I had ever done--to learn to breast feed a baby.

Most British babies were now breast-fed. Queen Mary had brought Dr. Truby King to England from New Zealand where he had made a science of breast feeding. In London he had established breast-feeding centers all over the city. England had lost so many men in wars so they wanted their babies breast-fed to cut down the early infant death rate--and it was working! They were making

Butler: a science of child birth and child feeding! Our son was born in 1926 and he, too, was breast-fed, though not as long.

Our British home was now established. There was a governess and a cook. The governess had already brought up three sets of children. There was nothing else that she had ever wanted to do. She knew all of the tricks of the trade so every evening she joined me in the dining room to report every incident of the day and what she had done to meet that situation. She had two days off a week and so did the cook, so I was glad to pinch hit during their absence when I found out how free I was the rest of the time.

Also there was another fear that was settled. I was afraid that if I were devoted to child care night and day I would lose the friendship that had been developed with my husband. This friendship between us was very important. I did not want to lose it. Neither did he. That had been one of his fears, also.

So together we explored London: the political meetings of the House of Commons candidates; the musical concerts in the great cathedrals; and then one whole year every Saturday evening we went to that famous series of Shakespearean plays at the Old Vic where many of the prominent actors and actresses participated to freshen up their skills.

For my holiday I went to the Fabian Summer School for two years and sat at the same table with Bernard Shaw. (I have one of Bernard Shaw's books that he dedicated to us both.) I thought I had to have all holidays with my husband but the German doctor had pointed out that he needs a rest from you and you need a rest from him. The doctor was right. Hugh wanted to go to the golf courses in Scotland for his holidays. Those holidays were certainly refreshing to both of us.

At the Fabian Summer School I was invited to give a lecture on Prohibition. The British thought it was a very undemocratic and strange piece of legislation. I had discovered that the British never study American history so while I did not support Prohibition, I was able to hold my own during the question period by telling some American history in the answers to questions. Bernard Shaw supported me

Butler: with glee as he was a tetotaler and vegetarian.

Later on the word spread so quite a number of lectures were given to various audiences in London.

Then, in 1928, I was presented at the Court of St. James. None of the American Embassy had ever gone to Court except the ambassadors' wives. I didn't see any reason why we all shouldn't go; our names were sent in every year to go. Why shouldn't we go?

So Hugh said, "Well, okay. How are we going to afford it." Then this Englishwoman got hold of me and said, "Jessie, don't miss it!" I said, "But, we aren't rich and I haven't any diamonds to wear." She said, "none of the British have any more; we're all poor after this World War I. You put yourself in my hands and it won't cost much." So I did. It cost \$150, the dress, the footman, the limosine, the driver, pictures. Everything came to \$150.

That's the dress you see there in the picture. She took me down to an Eva Zorn store where they sold dresses to actresses. All the American women went to Paris for gowns worth \$2000; my gown cost \$40. The woman who sold it to me wrote out its description. Then when the press came around, I gave them her description. Guess what! I was the only one who hit the New York Times [laughter]--to the anguish of the ambassador's wife and the other ladies whose husbands had the top jobs. I never kept that picture. I guess I was sorry it had worked out that way. It was not my fault.

Well, that's London for you. Then Hugh's boss, Dr. Klein, came over finally and said to us, "You can't stay here any longer. You stay here any longer, you'll never want to go home." I said, "We don't want to go home now. We love this place." Oh, our home was so beautiful, with all those oriental rugs and antique furniture. It took four years to get accustomed to British life and climate.

My husband had brought his organ over. He's a skilled organist, you see. He'd had this organ since he was six years old.

Our home was beautiful. But Dr. Klein said we had

Butler: to go home and he made Hugh head of the Department of Commerce in New England. So we packed up all our antique furniture, and sold our house, and Uncle Sam brought everything back to America, costing us nothing. I came back with the cook and a new Swiss governess.

Return to the United States

Gluck: That was 1929 then when you came back?

Butler: Yes. We came back in 1929 after eight and a half years in England, to Needham, Massachusetts, just outside Boston. We bought a three-story old New England house. Nobody at that time wanted big old houses like that so we got it very reasonably; a great big three-story, old house, right on Bradford Street with the elm trees and everything. We put in our antique furniture. Oh, it was a beautiful home, just beautiful. I rented the top floor to three school teachers and they almost paid the rent for the house. "Why not have a nice home?" was my theory. [Laughter] They loved it up there; I had all this beautiful furniture up there. It was a very sweet place.

Then from 1930 to 1935 I taught thirty-three classes in public speaking, all over New England. I also earned \$3000 a year lecturing on "Pomp and Pageantry at the Court of St. James." All women's clubs--they paid from \$50 to \$150 for that lecture. I had to take the Court dress and put it on at the end of the lecture and then come in and show them how to make the curtsy. [Laughter] It had cost only \$150 to go to Court and I made \$3000 a year for five years for going [laughter].

However, I taught them a lot more about England than court life. Every year they had a big conference of young club women on family life. The women would come and say, "Well, I thought if you were going to tell me I had anything to learn about family life from England, I was going to fix you." I'd say, "How do you feel now?" They'd say, "I'm going home and make some changes." I had really got that over; tacked on to the court story.

Gluck: Did you maintain your feminist position in these talks?

Butler: I didn't have to advertise myself as a feminist; the word wasn't classified as it is now, but I was a pretty good feminist just the same.

Then Hugh suddenly lost his job after the Depression came. Many civil servants, including Hugh, were fired.

Gluck: Was that about 1932; when Roosevelt came in?

Butler: Yes, it was 1932. When Roosevelt came in, Hugh lost his job because Hoover had been his boss in England all that time. [Hugh] was a Democrat, but anyway, Franklin Roosevelt put the father of his secretary into Hugh's position--an utterly inexperienced man.

Everybody told Hugh, "Now, it's time you went into private industry." So he secured a job in a big firm in Worcester, Massachusetts that made grinding wheels. Worcester is a factory town.

Gluck: You stayed in Needham?

Butler: No, but we wanted to stay in New England. We loved the eastern states.

My husband had this magnetic personality. But he was not as good an administrator in private business as in the government. He was given one of the top jobs in this big factory, over a lot of men who'd been there for years.

He didn't know anything about the kind of politics that goes on in such a firm. Within six months, they saw that he wasn't qualified for that kind of job. The men under him saw to it, too.

Meanwhile, we'd taken all that beautiful furniture over to Worcester and rented another three-story house. Innocently, I added to our troubles at once. I instinctively disliked factory towns like Worcester. All those top officials had created a little private school where they sent their children. One's social status was how high the husband's job was in those factories. We did not fit there, socially or culturally.

There were a lot of Catholics there and Catholic

Butler: schools. So the public schools were really inferior because the top people sent their children to this little private school. They didn't care whether the public schools had any money or not. I ignorantly started a P.T.A. to clean up the school situation. That also helped Hugh to lose his job. Women just didn't do things like that in a factory town where the social status was based on where the husband worked. It didn't completely cause his job to go, but it didn't help it any. I was not going to play that kind of game for anybody. Now, do you call that feminism?

Gluck: Absolutely.

Butler: I helped the PTA to start, anyway. Then the man who employed Hugh said, "Hugh, we just feel terrible. We've made a terrible mistake." He was getting a big salary, \$10,000 or \$12,000 a year. "But we'll pay you a half a year's salary when you leave because we made this mistake." By that time, both of us still wanted to stay in New England, more than ever. It's an adorable place, you know. But we found that few people secure high positions in New England who aren't Harvard graduates, and Hugh had never set foot in a college!

Anyway, Hugh began pacing the streets everywhere to secure another job. I feared he was going to have a breakdown. Hugh had never been without a job in his life before. This is a terrible strain on any man, you know. If you read the Reader's Digest on why our men die in middle life, it goes into this. Did you see that article?

Gluck: No.

Butler: Well, you ought to read it. It appeared a few months ago.

One day I said to him, "Come on now. We're going into [Boston] and have a big blow-out." to which his answer was: "Are you crazy? I'm out of a job." I said, "You are getting a big salary for six months. Now we're going into Boston and have some fun."

So we went. We started walking up Tremont Street. There on a building was the sign of an astrologer, and I said, "Come on. Let's go up and see the

Butler: astrologer." To which he said, "I know you're crazy now. Here I am without a job and I'm going to go see an astrologer."

Anyway, up we went. I have something, I know what it is now, a kind of inner wisdom. I've since found out what it is, and where I got it, and everything. Anyway, we went in and there was a reception room with nothing but some cheap chairs in it, and then a door. I looked in and there at a kitchen table in the middle of the room sat an old woman. And she wasn't busy. I said, "Could we come in?"

We both went in. She had the most beautiful face and eyes I ever saw. I said, "We'd like an interview." I asked how much it was and she said it was two dollars. So we sat down and she asked Hugh the date of his birth and all that. She started right in and she said, "You are one of the few most gifted men, gifted for public work, that I've ever seen. That's your destiny."

Hugh said, "Well, maybe it was once but it's gone now." She said, "It's coming back; there's nothing else for you but that. And there are too few who have that gift of doing public work." She went on about this. We had just walked in there, you see. She had no way of knowing about us. Then she said, "It's a funny thing, but do you know anything about ships?" Hugh said, "I've been across the Atlantic about twelve times." He had had to come home for business trips and all. "Well," she said, "I see ships all around you. I see them everywhere." Then she said, "Meanwhile, you go back into public work." And she talked some more about this to this gifted man.

Finally, with that we left, and Hugh said, "Well, that settles it!" We had a big fish dinner at the wharves in Boston then we went right back to Worcester. Hugh packed his bag and left for Washington that night or the next day.

There I was left in that beautiful house with all that beautiful furniture and everything. Within two weeks, Hugh landed a job on the ground floor of the Social Security Administration.

RETURN TO WASHINGTON, D.C.: THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A NEW CAREER

Teacher and Author--Public Speaking for Women

Gluck: So that was 1932 or 1933?

Butler: 1935. That was under former-Governor Winant of New Hampshire; he helped start the Social Security Administration. Hugh has worked with him in the Boston office of the N.R.A.; Hugh had put the N.R.A. over in New England and Winant was Governor of New Hampshire at the time. Winant put Hugh right in that Social Security Administration at the same salary that he had when we were married. But it was a salary, after all!

In due order, I packed myself and the belongings and moved to Washington. We later bought a beautiful house in Fox Hall Village, outside of Washington. It had a top floor that I rented to four medical students. Then all the antique furniture was installed and Hugh had his organ there. It was a lovely home! Overlooking a deep park. But, no ships, yet!

Hugh went on with the Social Security Administration and then later World War II started and he was made head of one of those big agencies that had to do with coal. It had half Englishmen and half Americans. He was a great success there.

Gluck: During this period in Washington, what were you doing?

Butler: Before we bought that house, and after Hugh was safely started, I planted the children away. Our son went to Florida for a year with a lovely family that wanted to

Butler: take him with them and I sent our daughter to a beautiful private school in Colorado on the edge of the Garden of the Gods. My family still lived in Colorado, you see, so they could keep her with them during the holidays.

I stored the furniture, and Hugh and I went into a boarding house near Dupont Circle in Washington for two years. We were then free to struggle with our problems; to help Hugh back into the civil service in the United States government where he belonged. I didn't know then what I was going to get back into.

At this point, I had a bright idea, "Now's my chance to study public speaking officially and to get some college credits." Luckily, there at George Washington Univeristy, was Professor W. Hayes Yeager, head of the Chauncey Depew Department of Public Speaking. It had been endowed by Chauncey M. Depew. Professor W. Hayes Yeager was one of the leading speech teachers of America. Imagine that! And I'm now in a boarding house with no housework to do!

I went to the George Washington University for two years. I took every course in speech there. I had never in my life been so happy. You know, after you have been married a long time and had children and had problems, and then you get to be forty-five, which I was, and you go back to school-- if ever anything is heaven, that is!

Gluck: Did you go every day?

Butler: Every single day except Saturday. I had nothing to do but prepare those very tough speech lessons. Learning to speak is one of the toughest subjects there is. I spent six and eight hours a day on those lessons in the beautiful library there. So I came out from Professor Yeager's class with one of the first A's he'd ever given anybody.

I was in a class of forty young people. They were very bored with this old woman in the class. To their minds, I was old even then. They were all just in regular college courses, seventeen, eighteen and so on. The first two months or three months, they did nothing but giggle at every speech I made. But I eventually discovered the skill of getting the ears of

Butler: that type of audience--which didn't do me any harm either.

Professor Yeager had been worked up about the skill in speech and its difficulty. Chauncey Depew spent ten years learning to be the greatest orator of America. It's a terribly difficult subject. That's because your personality is involved; your audience is involved; everything you know is involved.

You know what the perfect speech is? The perfect speech is the speech that puts over a definite effective point. How are you going to get over to your audience an effective speech, one that accomplishes the purpose that you've got to accomplish? It isn't just opening your mouth and letting words flow out like a river or a creek; you've got to have the right words flow out that will accomplish the purpose of the speech.

Gluck: Did you have a clear idea of what it was you would want to speak about at that point?

Butler: No, Professor Yeager gave me my program.

At the end of two years, I was within three points of the Master's degree, but they had no program there that would give me the M.A. I took every course they had. Professor Yeager advised me not to take any more courses. Of course, I was an older woman; I wasn't just a student in a college. He said don't go after a doctorate but get out into the woman's movement where leadership is developing--there's where you want to do your speaking. That was what gave me my goal.

Immediately, I found Mrs. McGill Kiefer, who was the most beautiful singing teacher of Washington. She was also the paid musical singer for the big Christian Science church there. I knew Mrs. McGill Kiefer. "Where can I start this speech class?" I asked. She said, "in my studio."

Gluck: This was about 1935 then, Jessie?

Butler: Yes, about '35 and '36. So we sent out a lot of invitations on cards and I think something like twenty women came. One of them was Mrs. Harvey Wiley who had been very active in woman's suffrage in the Woman's Party. She'd been the legislative agent and

Butler: was now the legislative agent of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, a huge national organization. She was skilled in legislation from working with the woman's movement, but she couldn't speak without anxiety; she had never had any lessons.

Gluck: Were you still in the boarding house at that point?

Butler: Yes. Still in the boarding house, thank goodness. No housework to do. It was a lovely boarding house. A wonderful woman ran it--had been running it for years. We had marvelous meals. We had a great big, huge, lovely room at the front of the house, it was in one of the old spacious houses of Washington.

Gluck: When you started your first class, then, you were still in the boarding house.

Butler: Yes, we were still in the boarding house.

As soon as I started this teaching, I seemed to have great success with it and I loved doing it. I conducted classes in the morning and by lunchtime or soon after, I was back home. Later classes coincided well with household duties to do this.

Gluck: When did your children come back to Washington? Right after you finished school there?

Butler: The children returned to Washington after we bought our new home in Fox Hall Village. Soon I found Dora Bailey, a Negro housekeeper who ran our home for over six years. Oh, you never saw anything like it! She was priceless!

From 1935 to 1950 there were fifteen successful years of teaching. The beginning was a small class. From there I went over to the Democratic headquarters where they had a large Democratic Woman's Club and had classes there. Then the Republicans took me up, and I taught classes at their headquarters twice. I also held classes at the Junior League. I finally taught Pearl Mesta, and Mrs. William Fulbright, and most of the leading women in Washington before I left in 1950.

It was Baroness Von Schoen who offered to help me. She said that this teaching was so interesting that it should become a social must in Washington.

Butler: And that's what happened--it did.

It was Eleanor Roosevelt, then in the White House, who eventually put this teaching on the map. She came to the opening sessions of the course three years in succession, beginning January, 1939. She urged wives of members of Congress and diplomats' wives to learn to speak so they could share with their constituents what they had learned in Washington and in the United States. Later testimonies poured back into Washington about the successes of these brilliant students.

In a class for the Junior League there was the wife of an army general who was also president of the Alumnae Association of the Georgetown Visitation Convent. Her name was Mrs. Frank A. Allen, Jr.. When the convent learned that she was studying public speaking they asked her to take a trip to visit other Convent Alumnae Associations to help raise money for a much-needed gymnasium. Something like a million dollars was soon raised. When Mrs. Allen returned Mother Margaret Mary asked her what they could do for her to repay her for her splendid success.

"Please, Mother Mary, invite Jessie Haver Butler to come to the convent and teach the high school and junior college students how to speak. I never want any student to graduate from here as ignorant of speaking as I was."

So I was sent for, though a Protestant. Over a period of nine years five hundred students in high school and the junior college learned to speak in a semester course. I will never forget the round table the college class put on before the entire school on the subject of whether married women should take jobs outside the home. The panel of speakers--half Catholic and half Protestant--in their caps and robes resembled the United State Supreme Court as they had the American Home under consideration. It was a most brilliant affair. The nuns were pleased and the students thoroughly stirred up by the discussion.

Then Mrs. John Cabot, whose husband was a diplomat, came to me in trouble. Our diplomats all over the world, she said, were untrained speakers. Could I do something about it?

Butler: World War II was on so I was afraid that it would be difficult to get State Department men burdened with the pressures of war to come for speech lessons. Mrs. Cabot had a beautiful home with a large drawing room so she invited about thirty leading diplomats to come one evening for a musical.

They all came looking very pleased but were less pleased when I was introduced. At the end of the evening they all reluctantly signed up for the eight-lesson course. Alan Cranston, now our senator was just back from Europe and he was in that class.

It is interesting to note that almost every man in that class later became an ambassador. It's too bad that Madam D'Esterre of London, whom I had copied in my teaching, was no longer living to hear of this success!

Gluck: What sort of income did you derive from teaching?

Butler: A very good one. I received \$35 for eight lessons from each pupil, plus a text-book to each student. The course was offered in the fall, again in the winter, and often in the spring. The convent classes were in the mornings.

Gluck: So you began to have an independent income again.

Butler: It was never as large as Hugh's civil service salary, of course. But that didn't bother me. I couldn't work full time. Classes were generally in the morning so that by four o'clock I was free to shop and see the children come in and so on.

Don't forget, too, the four students on the top floor took a lot of time and planning. But they practically wiped out the house payments. That helped, too!

Gluck: What made you decide to write the speech book and when did you decide to write it? [Time to Speak Up, A Speakers Handbook for Women]

Butler: Very soon after I started teaching these classes. There was a drastic need for a textbook for women. At one of the annual meetings of the Speech Association of America at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington I

Butler: encountered William Norwood Brigance, who had founded the Speech Association of America and was then the president of it. He had written many books on speech. He taught at Wabash College and was the highest-paid speech teacher in America.

I accosted him at the annual meeting and said, "Where could we find a suitable speech book for these women's classes?" Most of the men's books that they used in the colleges were too intellectual and too biased from the man's point of view and they were not good books for women.

"Well, Mrs. Butler," was his answer, "why don't you write the book for yourself?" I never felt such a cold chill of fear in all my life! The idea of sitting down and writing a book! I said, "How could I do it?" He said, "Write down what you've been teaching, exactly as you are teaching it. Such a book is very much needed for women. You ought to write a book that's slanted toward women's use. They need many things in that book that the men don't need. I'll tell you what--I'll give you a deadline of June first" (And this was in the middle of the winter.) "June first I want the first three chapters of that book."

Gluck: What year was that, Jessie?

Butler: The book was published in '46 so it must have been about '44. All anyone has to do with me is to give me a deadline and I'm sunk; I'll do anything to meet that deadline. I don't know why; I just can't miss a deadline!

Well, we had this little hideout in the Shenandoah Mountains. For twelve years we had left Washington Friday nights and didn't come back till Sunday. That's why my husband is still alive, I believe. We went up into that hideout, relaxing, looking at those mountains, the sweetest little spot.

It was right in the midst of a lot of hill-billy farmers and their families. They shared their fresh vegetables with us. They seemed to like us because we brought a new world into that place.

They were all people that President Roosevelt had moved out of the mountains when he set up the beautiful

Butler: Skyline Drive as a public reservation. They were farm families and had lived for generations in the mountains. Some didn't even have boards on the floors or screens on the windows.

The Resettlement Administration built some ninety-six lovely little frame houses with porches, window screens, barns--modern little houses. We bought one of those extra houses for our hideout--right in the midst of these farmers.

So, following this conversation at the Speech meeting in 1944, at the end of May--as soon as school was out--we retired to our hideout up in the Shenandoah Mountains. I took my typewriter along. I knew I had to get those first three chapters done by June first. I put it off every day. I kept thinking of everything else that I could do that would put off starting that writing. I was really scared. I had never written a textbook; I didn't know how to start it.

Every day I'd say, "Tomorrow I'll start." Then my husband would come up for the weekend and I had a good excuse for not starting.

Gluck: You were going to stay there all summer by yourself?

Butler: I always did stay there all summer.

Gluck: Were your children with you?

Butler: They came and went. They were older and they did all sorts of things, as teenagers do when holidays come. Of course, I invented all kinds of things for them to do. Some of the time they were there and sometime they weren't. (I am against these long school holidays. They are a waste of valuable time.)

Anyway, I remember well the Monday morning when I got up at seven and said, "I am starting that book today." I had a bedroom up in the top of the little barn that I used while Hugh was away; the air was so nice up there and the view was beautiful and it was cool. I remember climbing down out of that barn and going into the kitchen. I set up my typewriter in the living room and I said, "I have to start now."

I went in and sat down at the typewriter. By the time I had written one sentence, I was off with

Butler: a bang. I never had to struggle again. I just wrote one sentence; that morning at seven I started and I didn't stop until one. I had the whole first chapter done on the "Conquest of Fear." Professor Brigrance told me later no one had ever written a chapter like that, in a speech book. I asked, "Don't the men get scared too?" "Oh, yes, the men get scared also, but they don't admit it. They don't write down they're scared, but that's a great chapter."

Of course, I'd had had so many years of study in psychology in London that I felt I had a marvelous psychological background for that chapter particularly. It was the one thing my Professor Yeager lacked. I doubt if he had ever studied psychology so his oral criticisms in class were so awkward that he usually wrote out his criticisms.

As soon as I started writing that chapter, I felt qualified to go into this whole question of the conquest of fear.

Gluck: Did you write the book all that summer?

Butler: Yes, I wrote every day that summer. By September I had the book written. Then I had a funny thing happen. Number one, I wrote to a man at Harper's whom I had known in Boston very well. We had had that little Fabian Society in Boston that I'd been secretary of and this man was in that society.

I wrote to him about this book and asked would he like to see it. I had the extreme joy of having him write back at once. He wanted to see the book; it was accepted at once. This is something that happens to very few people who write books. It was heaven.

In the end, the book was published by 1946. Mrs. Roosevelt wrote an expression of gratitude for it and Lady Astor did a testimony that went on the back. It didn't create a howling sensation because everybody said that women didn't want to speak in public; they were too shy, too sweet and not that aggressive. The feeling was that this was a little bit premature.

To get it published, of course, spoiled me because I thought I'd be able to get it into a paperback just as easy, but I haven't found anyone yet to help me. But the hard cover was published right away. I

Butler: revised it twice. I still hold both revisions.

Then I became the speech coach for the General Federation of Women's Clubs and was on their board. They had five million members. For eight years, either eight or ten years, I went to their annual meetings all over the United States and put on four speech workshops early every morning during the conventions.

I'll never forget the first one, in St. Louis. The president had told me nobody would come. They already know how to speak. She did have a workshop for parliamentary procedure led by a woman who'd been doing this for years and years. So I was going to be in competition with this experienced teacher, you see.

I remember that morning how I kept reminding myself of the few people who had come to my first course in Washington. I just said, as I started down the hall, "Now you just be calm and don't get excited. Maybe there'll just be three people there; you just teach the three people and then next year there'll be more people."

But as I approached the ballroom, I heard this enormous buzz. When I reached the door, the ballroom was jammed with people. I was so un-horsed, it took a little bit of time for me to gather myself together with my usual poise. Soon that first class for the General Federation of Women's Clubs Convention was started.

The Federation used to have annual meetings of some three thousand women. Sometimes four hundred delegates came to the speech workshops. Often as many as two hundred endorsed text-books were sold.

The workshops were a great success. The women would greet me, saying, "I've got my clock; I'm going to be down there for that workshop at quarter to eight in the morning." So they just packed the place. It was delightful, because it was needed.

In the end, I travelled around to a lot of their states, as you saw in my record. I just loved that teaching. It was inspiring because the minute the

Butler: women were trained as speakers they seemed to find themselves. Of course, they were already gifted leaders or they would not have been sent to these conventions.

Few men can equal such trained speakers. They know it. That's why they like to discourage women from taking speech lessons.

NEW ROOTS: CALIFORNIA

Gluck: Then you came out to California in 1950?

Butler: Yes, My husband's job with the Maritime Commission ended. He was showing signs of weariness that I didn't like. My career was at its height, but I decided that I preferred a husband to a career. Our biochemist lived in Los Angeles, so we beat it to her office. She said that within a week he would have had a severe stroke; she had just caught him in time.

Then he had the idea that we should go down to Mexico for a while. I didn't want to go to Mexico. I thought I didn't like the sound of it. My sister got hold of him and said, "Now, look, Hugh. You go down to Mexico by yourself; you'll never have a minute's peace with Jessie down there." I couldn't speak Mexican and I'd go crazy. She said, "You get down there and relax and rest and get back to your organ," that is what he needed, you see.

He was still a colonel in the army, so Uncle Sam paid his hotel bill and his teacher's bill [to study the organ] and he stayed a year. He came back completely healed after watching the Mexicans practice mañana.

Gluck: What did you do up here?

Butler: Evidently we both needed a change. I wrote a book about my life.

Gluck: You wrote another book?

Butler: That book is somewhere. I wrote the whole autobiography of my life. I hadn't looked at it for a long time. It

Butler: was sent to two or three publishers, but since then I've done better writing. Yesterday I went through my cupboard out there, and that book's there. So what I must do now as soon as I can is to get that book out. It's all written.

I wrote another book, Adam's Other Wife. Now Adam's other wife is the wife that Adam wants, a companion. When Adam marries, he doesn't want a cook. He wants a companion. But the American woman, the minute she gets a baby, never pays anymore attention to Adam, see. She says, "I love my baby."

The Englishman won't put up with that. He says to his wife, "Now, you get a governess. I married you for a companion. When I come home, I want you fresh and rested to give your time to me. I want that companionship." He's right. He's got to have it, a man has. A wife can have the baby two days a week, but he says, "The rest of the time I want you for my companion."

That's what's wrong with America. The minute a woman gets a baby, she forgets he's around. Then he has to turn to his secretary or anybody for companionship. You can't take care of a baby twenty-four hours a day and continue to be a good companion to your husband, can you? No, you can't do it.

Gluck: You wrote two books in that year, then?

Butler: No. I wrote the autobiography in 1950 while Hugh was in Mexico. Adam's Other Wife I wrote in 1967. It's a fifty thousand-word book and it's well-written. I rewrote it five times. I worked hard on that book. But I just couldn't get anybody interested in publishing it. My creative-writing teacher is begging me to let her see it.

Of course, while my husband was around and losing his mind, I hadn't been able to give a lot of time to it. Now that he's [in the rest home] where he is, I must fall to now and do something about that autobiography and about that book Adam's Other Wife. Don't you think that's a cute title?

Gluck: Now, after you came out to California, did you continue to teach public speaking to women?

Butler: Yes. I finally began teaching at Mount Sac (Mount

Butler: San Antonio College) one night a week. The classes were large; men and women in public life came. I did a good job and a lot of prominent people came. I was ruled out, after seven years, because of my age.

But the Federated Club Women out here killed my book and my career. How long have you lived in California?

Gluck: Since 1954.

Butler: Where'd you come from?

Gluck: Chicago.

Butler: Well there you are.

Californians don't like people with careers to come out here and tell about their careers and how famous they are and what they want to do. They dislike that thoroughly.

I had been out here with our national president [of GFWC] and had put on a speech class. I thought when I came back I'd just carry right on. I didn't know that this state's women were as different as they are. Although back East the General Federation had warned me--"We get few good leaders from California; we don't understand it." They watch their leaders because their leaders from the states are the ones they're going to put into the national organization.

I was a babe in arms. I just plunged in. I'd never even voted before, you don't vote in Washington, D.C. So I just plunged in, you know. Boy, those girls just killed my book and killed my whole teaching and everything. I didn't realize that you have to start all over again from the bottom in California.

Gluck: So most of your career after you came out to California revolved around your own writing, then?

Butler: That writing, and two other things happened. One was, I found Vic Tanney. [The Vic Tanney gyms] You know who Vic Tanney was? Well, for four years, I went three times a week and completely strengthened my body. I'd never given any time to my body. It was flabby; my legs were flabby. I thought, "Well,

Butler: to heck with it. If I can't do my teaching and all, I'll just go to Vic Tanney." So I worked on my body, and you wouldn't believe how I revolutionized it.

Gluck: How old were you when you started going to Vic Tanney?

Butler: How old do you suppose I was? Let me see now--what were those years?

Gluck: Somewhere in your sixties.

Butler: I was living in Pomona. Let's see, I left Pomona in 1966 and I think it was '64, and three from 64 is 61.

Gluck: So you were in your seventies, then, when you started going to Vic Tanney's?!

Butler: Yes, in my seventies. That isn't anything. What's seventy? [Laughter] I'm in my eighties now. But you know what? When I was forty-nine in Washington, I began saying, "My goodness, here I'm getting up to fifty years old. Isn't this terrible!" And a woman came to speak to the press women in Washington, who was the editor of McCall's, who was over eighty. She gave this down-to-earth, practical woman's talk. I said, "Well I didn't know you could talk like that on a public platform, over eighty." And they never heard another word from me about my age. I thought, "I'll fix her; I'll get to be eighty-two and I'm never going to talk about it."

My sister had bought a ticket to Vic Tanney and didn't use it, so she turned it over to me. I went three times a week and I worked on those machines. Later they had a swimming pool. I adore swimming. Then Hugh and I swam all summer in Puddingstone Dam [County Park], too. We did this summer even. Boy, did I build up my body! That was smart, at seventy. That's when they all commence to deteriorate in here [gesture], you see.

The other thing I did, I found a new religion for the new age! And boy, I found a great religion. My husband and I went over twice a week to Glendale. The leader is a very great woman from Florida. Did you ever read Many Mansions?

Gluck: No.

Butler: Well, read Many Mansions. You'll get an idea what it's about. She teaches a religion tied to the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, plus dream interpretation, reincarnation, night flights, healing; all the modern things that can go with a religion, and it's a new religion for the new age. So, the dear California Federation of Women's Clubs did me a favor when they kicked me out. Instead I went into this new religion.

Several years ago, I felt I was going to die and I knew it. So I prayed for a spiritual leader. I said, "I'm not ready to die; there are more things I need to know." I found her apparently by accident; she had just come to California from Florida. She saved my life, healed me, and I'm still here. She thinks I'm going to last quite awhile yet. Maybe I'll get some of these books printed. Or get Time to Speak Up into a paper back version.

FULL CIRCLE: THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Joining the Movement

Gluck: When and how did you get involved in the current women's movement?

Butler: Well, some woman, I don't remember her name, from Pittsburgh came out to start the women's movement here and spoke in a hall on the college campus. I had already read the Feminine Mystique and sent \$50 the weekend they organized N.O.W. in Washington.

Gluck: Where was that meeting?

Butler: In Claremont.

At that meeting was Judy Meuli [from the Los Angeles National Organization for Women]. I began talking to her at the end of the meeting. I said, "You must have some classes in public speaking to develop your leaders." She said, "My goodness, we ought to do it right away." She went back and stirred them up. They got in touch with me and asked me if I'd give them a class.

Of course, they didn't have any money. I said, "I won't give a class unless people pay for it. Otherwise, they'll come and they won't finish it. But I'll give the money back to you to start your Speakers Bureau."

So they had that class at the home of a woman in Hollywood. I think there were twenty or twenty-five there. Jean Stapleton was in it and Virginia Carter

- Butler: was in it (Los Angeles N.O.W. figures). I've got the list of all those people. Many of them later became leaders.
- Gluck: How did you happen to go to the August 26 big celebration in 1970? [On August 26, 1970, there were rallies in cities around the country, including Los Angeles, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the ratification of the Woman's Suffrage Amendment.]
- Butler: When that came off they were looking for some woman, and they wanted to know if I had a speech on that. I said, "Yes. I do, about Tennessee." So they asked me to come in. I've never gotten any money for any of that, of course. All the work you do for them--they don't believe in volunteer work--except for them!
- Gluck: How did you happen to go to that very first meeting in Claremont?
- Butler: We just heard this woman was going to come out and talk about women. Ganell Baker tipped me off on it, and I went. We didn't like the talk at all; it was an awful messy talk.
- Gluck: Had you been reading before this? For example, you say that you had read Betty Friedan's book which came out in 1966?
- Butler: You bet I did. Yes sir, I read that book as soon as it came out. I think that's one reason I got to that meeting. All through those years, although I wasn't teaching or anything, I was reading everything I could get my fingers on that had to do with the woman's movement. I considered Betty Friedan's book the greatest book I had ever read. When the history of this era is over, that book is the thing that's going to stand out as the leading book of this era, above everything else that's been written. I'm just as sure of that as anything.

A lot of people don't agree with that, but she's got the deadly facts there--the whole woman's movement is covered, and what needs to be done about it. There's never been such a book written. I don't know how she ever wrote it. I've even heard people pretend that somebody else had written it because they couldn't

Butler: understand that Betty Friedan, as she is now, was capable of writing such a book. I don't care who wrote it or where it came from.

In the ages ahead of us, we'll look back on this era, and that's the book that's changed the history of the world for women. I know that's so.

Gluck: Did you immediately become involved then, or it wasn't until that meeting?

Butler: As soon as I could, I did. I joined immediately after they had that caucus in Washington, D.C.. I joined the National Organization [for Women] at once. I've belonged to it ever since. I was so excited.

Gluck: So you joined back in 1966 then?

Butler: Yes! I never did get back there, but I did send them \$50 at once and I would have sent more if I'd had it because I knew they had started something that was perfectly tremendous. The more I know about it, the more that's got to be done.

I've just been two whole days in Los Angeles at those hearings of the Status of Women Commission for the state of California. I've never heard such brilliant speeches or such brilliant presentations of the issues that involve women in this state as I heard at those hearings. It was marvelous. Beautifully handled. Brilliant speakers--and you know I'm very particular. (They didn't all enunciate quite loud enough; it was sometimes hard to hear them.)

Those women brought facts and material, well-substantiated, and presented their causes and told that Status of Women Commission what they must do for their particular cause. It was a great hearing, those two days. It's a revolution, there's no doubt about it.

We're in for a revolution. Since it took seventy-two years just to get the vote, you can figure out for yourself just how long it's going to take to solve this revolution that involves every part of women's lives.

Considering the Needs of Women

Gluck: How do you see the revolution, Jessie?

Butler: Two things, I think, have got to be done. One, women have got to learn to work together better. Do you know why they don't work together? I'm going to write an article on this if I get time. The reason is that since the beginning of this eternity, women have been in competition for the same thing--married life and security. So, they have formed an ego of competition. Every woman they meet is an antagonist. It's a terrible situation.

I know exactly how to correct it. It's got to be done. I've got it all worked out, but I don't want to tell you here because this is going to be my next program, to work on this.

Another thing: the women have got to learn how to run better homes. The reasons why men are cashing out on the homes are that the homes are chaotic! No Englishman would stay in a home like the American home.

It's badly organized: There's a wrong theory, a pioneer theory, that the woman must do everything, bear all the children, do all the cooking, cleaning, and everything. It's a crazy idea and performance. The British have licked that. They're two thousand years old, and we're just two hundred years old. I found out from the British the answer to that: we've got to have better-run homes.

Third, we've got to have mothers' clinics to teach women how to bear children and take care of children. England has made a science of child care. Our girls are marrying in ignorance; absolutely ignorant of anything about having children, bringing them up and caring for them. We've got to set up a free nationwide program on the subject of the care of little children.

This is a terrible country for a little child to be born in. They don't have a gambler's chance of growing into normal human beings--and they aren't growing into normal human beings. Last year ten thousand damaged children were brought into the hospitals, nearly dead, damaged by their parents. Not in the poverty

Butler: area, either, but from middle class, cultured people. They're not trained to handle children, don't know how to handle them.

Another ten thousand died in their cribs in crib deaths because they're not being breast-fed. Cow's milk is not the milk for little children. It chokes them to death in the first three months. We've got to do something about that, too.

Gluck: Jessie, what do you see as the goals for women? What do you think should happen? What kind of changes?

Butler: I don't think the women yet know what their goals are. They're unhappy. They're getting divorces on the slightest excuse; running out of their homes. They're so unhappy, untrained, unequal to meet the problems they've got. They haven't found their destinies yet. The first thing we've got to do, I think, is to help the girls. I've been in a high school all day today, the biggest high school in Ontario, Chafey High: beautiful young people there, just beautiful, but they haven't the faintest idea of how to make plans for their lives, to get a goal for their lives and how to work it out. They think to solve everything is to quick, quick, run away from home and get married--get out from the homes where they're unhappy and get married.

Nothing could be worse. Marriage is a terribly difficult prospect, a terribly difficult job. There's no more difficult job in the world than to make a marriage go--and the most worthwhile job. Nothing else will bring as much comfort and satisfaction as a good marriage, but it's got to be worked at.

These girls get married. This young man I've just been talking to is going to get married next month. He's no more fit for a marriage than a jack rabbit. Nor is the girl, who just wants to get away from home. What does she know?! He hasn't even found his job, he hasn't found his skill, he doesn't know how he's going to earn a living. He doesn't like what he's doing now. He hasn't found himself.

Neither has the girl found herself. How could you make such a marriage a success? They aren't making it a success. They're getting divorces all over the place.

Butler: They're failures. A lot of girls are so eager to get married that they quit school and earn the living while the husband gets his education. Do you know what happens? Half of the husbands leave them the minute they get their degree.

One family I know very well. I went to their wedding. She stopped school in the middle; stopped her education so as to finance the boy to finish his. The day he got his degree, he walked in and said, "Thank you very much. Goodbye. I'm glad to have known you." That's going on all over this country; girls stopping their educations to carry the boys until they get educated. Crazy idea!

We haven't found ourselves any plan, any program, any vision, any issue or any way of working out our lives. Who's suffering? The little babies that come into these messy homes, badly run, badly planned. What chance have those babies to grow up into normal citizens to ever be useful to this country? All these things must be straightened out or our country is doomed.

Fifty percent of the marriages right now are falling on the rocks. Any country whose family life deteriorates is doomed. You cannot bring up citizens and people in family lives if they are failures. How can you do such a thing?

All these girls that go to welfare to get money when the men leave them! And the men leave them because they're so unhappy in their awful homes.

Gluck: Jessie, what differences do you see between the women's movement now and the women's movement in the beginning of the century?

Butler: The whole woman's movement now is utterly carried on by untrained, unskilled women; they're just trying to find themselves. This consciousness [-raising] groups--I haven't gone to any of these consciousness [-raising] meetings. The Ms magazine this month describes the consciousness [-raising] meetings the men are having. They're finding out; the men are having to begin to find themselves. They, too, are in terrible trouble, just as much trouble as the women are. We're all in trouble in this country.

Butler: Two hundred years. What's two hundred years to learn to live in a country that built itself up in just two hundred years from the Atlantic to the Pacific? Our roads, our houses, our schools, our buildings and everything have been miraculous! But that isn't enough to make the human side of life right.

Now we are going into the Aquarian Age, which is the humanitarian age. The women need to be freed to help us in that age. Because they are basically humane, women are, though untrained.

I see the work of the National Organization for Women. I want to help them all I can. They're still very amateurish, very ill-advised, and it's going to take a long time to work out these issues.

Gluck: Do you think that the earlier woman's movement had a better sense of its own direction than the current woman's movement?

Butler: Yes, they did; but the early movement was simpler. I think they're finding their direction today. They're making headway everyday. Heide's [Wilma Scott Heide, President of NOW] last letter before she went off to this annual meeting is a masterpiece. But she has nothing in it about the things I'm talking to you about; about babies, and homes, and mothers, and training people for home life and family life. There's nothing in there about that. All she's talking about is getting better jobs for the better women.

Now we know that the figures are that within six years, all but eight percent of the women who get annuities when their husband's die are bankrupt. Bankrupt! Why? Because women don't know how to handle money; they've never been trained. A woman's husband dies in middle life, as many do--many men die in middle life--and leaves her \$100,000. At five percent, that narrows down to about \$400 a month. Supposing she's got a lot of children. How can she educate and run a home on \$400 a month?

So what does she do with \$100,000? She feels rich. So Aunt Mary needs help, and Uncle Joe needs help, and she's generous. All but six percent are bankrupt within eight years. Then what happens to them?

Butler: They go to welfare--bankrupt!

We had a testimony at this Commission hearing, the Status of Women Commission about educated, college women going to welfare--starving to death because they've lost all their money that they got in their annuities. They don't know how to handle money.

One woman I know in this area. Her husband was sick a long time. It was obvious he was going to die, and he finally did die. He left a great deal of money. She'd never even written a check. How's a woman like that going to know how to hang on to her money for the rest of her life, so she'll have something to eat? She won't know how to do it. She won't know how to think it out.

So I think that, gradually, issue after issue is going to come up and different women will arise who have leadership abilities and skill in that issue, as they did at this Commission hearing.

Men and Women Must Work Together to Solve the Issues

Gluck: How do you think that the current women's movement compares to the suffrage struggle?

Butler: It isn't comparable in any respect. Suffrage just had one thing to do--to get women and men educated to go out and give women the right to vote. But that wasn't anything like the depth of all these issues. They didn't go into these deep issues of their family lives or homes or children and all that. They just said, "We want to vote; we want to get good people in government. We have a right to vote because we're citizens." It was a simple little story, and it took them seventy-two years to get that over.

What do you think--how are you going to get over these deep discussions, deep issues that we're in the midst of now! It's a revolution.

And the men need it. They're in just as bad shape as we are; they're beginning to see that. In their consciousness [-raising] meetings these men are

Butler: beginning to start in talking as they always have about their jobs and superficial things. Now they're beginning to get down to brass tacks about themselves. They're saying, "We hate to admit it, but we're learning something from the women on this."

I think the men and women are going to join hands and work together to work this thing out. We can't do it without the men to help us. They'll want to help us; there are a lot of fine men, even in the Congress of the United States. Look at the two tough men I had to deal with, Congressmen Ben Johnson and Senator Reed Smoot, two of the toughest men in the United States Congress. Yet both of them helped me get that bill through once they saw the issue. We've got to have the help of the men along with the women; we can't do it alone without their help.

Even to get Woodrow Wilson to understand woman's suffrage took four or five years. And then, in the end, what did he do? When they finally won, he wrote them a letter saying it was the finest thing he'd done since he'd been in the White House.

So women can get the men sooner or later. They must make them understand what the issue is. Few can be a success without a nice home and family. Families are stabilizers.

Gluck: How do you think we can begin to reach the women? All the women who really aren't involved in the women's movement--how do you think they can be reached?

Butler: I don't think we're going to reach all those women, only the ones who are unhappy. And, there are plenty of them. They're getting more and more unhappy. The Women's Club here in Claremont where I am a life member are just so smooth and happy; they don't want to talk about the Equal Rights Amendment even. They don't even know what it is. Yet, one by one, every now and then, they're suddenly getting a jolt because the only thing that keeps them from that welfare is one little man, there. When he dies, often suddenly, then where are you going to go, see? Then they find out. Very few of them know how to conserve insurance endowments.

Gradually, more and more of them will begin to

Butler: wake up to what's going on; then, all of a sudden, they'll come to some of our meetings or read a newspaper and hear about the rest of us who've had a lot of trouble, see? I'm personally in a neat position because I have had a fascinating career and a gorgeous education before ever I was married. Then I had a most amazing husband and another amazing career. I went right on developing myself as a writer, a teacher, a speaker, but first as a mother and a housekeeper. That took some doing also! But it was fun to have that change!

I was successful because I was in an environment where I received training to carry on all those activities. I've been blessed. I've had a long, and complete, and successful life doing everything I wanted to do and everything turned out fine.

Gluck: Jessie, you're one of the few women--not even of your age--of over sixty even who is involved in the women's movement. How do the younger women relate to you?

Gluck: Well, I've just been all day with one of them. A perfectly darling girl. She was having an awful fight with her father; she had decided to move out of her home next month and go and live with a boy she hardly knows at all but [with whom she] just had what she calls a platonic friendship. I've been all day with her.

Well, sir, I was able to interest her in my life. Then I went over there with her to that high school. She has tremendous status in that school. She's a very bright and talented girl. She's talking about going to the Human Engineering Laboratory to find out whether she should be an architect or a musician.

She's a talented musician, but now she's gone into the drafting class, against the advice of her counselor. "What do you want to learn drafting for? I'm against it." I said to her, "I know why you need to learn drafting," and she said, "Why?" I said, "We need a lot of women architects to reorganize; the building of houses that are going up all over. There are very few women architects. If drafting is something you can do, you might grow into an architect and then you could have your music as your outside interest." She hasn't decided yet. It's better though to take

Gluck: up architecture and science. Drafting can be a dead end occupation.

Anyway, I said, "A brilliant girl like you, with this record in this school--you hang on to that home until you get educated. You can be the sweetest, loveliest child in that home you ever saw." So nobody can make you mad. Do everything they ask you to do."

Gluck: She's involved in the NOW chapter that you're in?

Butler: Yes she is; she's been helping them write those releases and she helps them send them out. It just shows.

Gluck: So you're really accepted by the other women in the movement?

Butler: Well, no, not exactly. It took them a long time. At first they thought I was a farce, that I was just putting on a show and that I had nothing real at all. Valerie Elliott told me they all thought that I was just a make-believe, that I was just trying to convince somebody I was something when I wasn't. They're beginning to see that that isn't so.

Gradually, slowly, I'm digging in. I believe I have something to share with California. Remember, I wanted to carry on in California where I left off in Washington. I did not realize that newcomers to California have to start all over again at the very bottom to find a place to serve.

Child Care Centers

Gluck: Jessie, we have just a few minutes and we should try to end now with your current work in child care.

Butler: You remember what I did in the meat-packers industry. I have somehow had the vision to do something about this child care program. The men and women in the Washington Congress sent a bill to the president of millions of dollars to start child welfare centers. In the past we didn't start things like that. When our great farms were started, the government didn't buy all the farms and start running them; they let the farmers own the farms and they sent out teachers to teach them how to make these farms work. That's why we

Butler: have the big Department of Agriculture and why we've been the greatest industrial farming country in the world. It's from that.

So, maybe we have to do the same with children. The thought came to me--with these tracts, and apartment complexes, that's the place to start your child care centers. You're still going to need them in the centers of the cities for the poverty areas, financed by city governments.

But the middle class, cultured people need child care centers. There's where the leaders of this country come from, from the middle classes mostly. So the idea came that we must go to these tracts, as they're built, and put in child care centers right at their back doors so that the mothers can take the babies to the centers, close to where they live and then get them at night.

How to pay for it? The people who build the tracts must build the child care center. As a lure to people to buy houses. When you say to people, "We have a child care center in our tract," then they're going to buy those houses because the women are crazy for child care centers. Forty-six percent of the women in America today are working outside their homes, and they're going to go right on doing that. There's no use telling them to stop it. They aren't going to stop it.

Anyway, I started talking to the people in Pomona where that great Phillips Ranch is developing. They've now built fifty-five houses up there and they're soon going to build eighty-eight more houses. The thing to do is to get a good child care center started right in this beautiful area, up on those beautiful hills--get it going and get the firms that are building the houses to build the center.

But the first program had to be endorsed by the Pomona Planning Commission. The head of the Status of Women Commission, Carolyn Heine, informed me that the commission had already endorsed this type of child care center. The mothers who put their children in the centers would pay for the teachers who run the center--instead of paying for baby sitters. So there's no expense to the state. The center would be close to the homes.

Butler: Everybody at once thought this was a good way to get child care centers started in suburbs. In this state, in the next year, they're going to build two thousand tracts. They must have child care centers in every tract, and a playground. Up on the Phillips Ranch they don't need a playground because they have those great high hills where the children can romp.

Adrian Wright, a member of the Pomona City Council, who is a close friend of mine and Hugh's and lives on the edge of this big Phillips Ranch is enthusiastic about this plan. Gerry Shepard, a black man who is a teacher in Chino where all those delinquent boys are, has now been made chairman of the Planning Commission.

Pomona has a new mayor, Ray Lepire. He was once the head of the Planning Commission and he appointed Gerry Shepard to be the new chairman. Gerry Shepard was thrilled with the idea. First I called Heine in Sacramento and she reiterated the endorsement of the Status of Women Commission for child care centers in tracts.

Of course, they will still need centers in poverty areas. The state will have to build those centers to help the working people, the mothers who are on welfare, to secure jobs and have a place to leave their pre-school children. Local businesses also should construct centers as part of their facilities to help women employees with children.

[Editor's note: The following is a revised version of the original tape. The interviewee wished to have the material up-dated.]

Butler: We had the first hearing in this area on June 27, 1973, in the Council Chambers of Pomona City Hall. It was to persuade the builders of the Phillips Ranch to include a child care center to serve the families in that tract; it was an historical occasion.

To our surprise eleven Junior and Senior Women's Clubs, eleven Business and Professional Women's clubs, the YWCA of Greater Pomona, and six other women's groups endorsed the idea of having child care centers in tracts, mobile homes and apartment complexes.

Butler:

Also we received written endorsements from Senator Alan Cranston of the U. S. Senate; Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, congresswoman in Washington, D.C.; March Fong from the California state legislature; the Woman's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor; The California Commission on the Status of Women; and Wilson Riles, head of the California State Department of Education.

To our surprise, there was not a single word of opposition to the idea, though many personal interviews were needed to explain the idea to members of the Planning Commission.

At the hearing there were representatives from the American Association of University Women; the Unitarian Church of Pomona Valley; the YWCA of Greater Pomona; a kindergarten teacher; a director of nurses at the Olive Medical Center; and the president of the Pomona Valley chapter of the National Organization for Women. [See Appendix for the Resolution unanimously passed by the Pomona Planning Commission].

The month before this hearing, I was appointed chairman of the Task Force for Child Care Centers of Pomona Valley of N.O.W. by Susanne Hughes, then present of the Pomona Valley chapter. Both she and her professor husband were keen on getting this idea started. Fortunately for us there was a successful child care center in a large mobile home tract in Ontario; there are fifty-five children aged two to six with seven teachers carrying on. Several of us visited the Ontario Mobile Home Park to see for ourselves what such a child care center was like in operation. "Looking was believing." Both the director and the assistant director of this center were proof that this was a practical idea for both mothers and pre-school children. The builder was pleased that he had had the wisdom to incorporate this center into the original plans for his Mobile Home Park. The center has been especially popular with single mothers who work.

The Pomona hearing was followed by hearings in La Verne, Claremont, and San Dimas. It was gratifying to have the La Verne City Council endorse almost the same resolution passed by Pomona--the first city council to accept this resolution. The present mayor hopes to make the resolution mandatory.

Butler: At the moment because of the present industrial crisis in America, much of the building of tracts has been halted. Within two years, when building will start again, we believe that the groundwork laid in the Planning Commissions of this area will have an effect. The builders need it to attract buyers to their homes; at the same time, families need it to achieve more stable family life for all members. By that time we believe that child care centers will have become as vital to families with pre-school children as public schools are to school-age children.

I am proud that our National Organization for Women in the Pomona Valley had the vision to see the importance of getting these centers into tracts, mobile homes, and apartment complexes for the middle class family. They have set an example to suburban communities.

We hope that soon one of the new local tracts or mobile homes in this area will add a child care center to their building project as was done by the builder of the Ontario Mobile Home Park; it led to an immediate business success of this project. We shall certainly pass the news around when it happens through the sixty other N O W chapters in California.

Gluck: Jessie, before we close, do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share with me?

Butler: I did want to add one more thing. That is, in a strange way, from the time I've been a little girl, I've wanted to help women, and I really have done it. When I worked four years in Massachusetts with that Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission, I had to go out and copy payrolls in candy factories, brush factories--horrible places! That was to help women, to find out what was going on with women that were being exploited like that.

I just love women. I've loved working with them and I've loved teaching them. I know how to teach them, and I can forget the fact that I'm critical with women. I see the wealth in those women, the virtue, the character, the goodness. I want to spend the rest of my life helping women to find themselves.

SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

[Editor's Note: Jessie Haver Butler, after reviewing the transcript, added the following section.]

Butler: I have a sort of summation I'd like to make. Destiny has been good to me. During a long life between the date of my birth in 1886 and today in 1974--a period of great growth for the United States, but less for women--it has been possible to have lived a life of complete fulfillment. And this, before many women in the United States had even found themselves.

Thanks to my family, an AB degree was earned at Smith College and followed later on by graduate study at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Incidentally, in those days I was the only "old lady" in the classes of young students! While in London for eight and one-half years when my husband was a diplomat for the U.S. government, I furthered my education during the four years spent with Dr. James J. Hadfield, the first leading Jungian psycho-therapist in London.

Before marriage to Hugh D. Butler in 1920, when thirty-three years old, I had had a fascinating career as a statistician and investigator for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and became the first lobbyist for women at the U.S. Capitol before the vote had been won. While living in London I was also inspired to make a study of family management and child care, to find out why England had one of the lowest records of child deaths during the first years of life and our country was still sixteenth on the list. I found out but the New York publishers will not publish my

Butler: book because they claim, "America has nothing to learn from England's household management."

It was because of what I had learned in England that I was able later to have a further career as a writer, speaker, and teacher, in addition to being a home-maker and a mother.

So when I leave this world I hope I will have a feeling of completeness and gratitude for the satisfying life that has been led. To this I must add the greatest gratitude of all for the twenty years that my husband and I spent with Ann Ree Colton in Glendale as students of a new religion for the new age. Without her wise guidance and teaching we would never have survived into the eightieth year bracket of old age. Both of us have always needed the inspiration and support of a satisfying spiritual faith.

For the future for women for whom I have always worked I will add the following words spoken by Betty Friedan when she was celebrating the tenth anniversary edition of her book, The Feminine Mystique, a book that started women on their new way into the future. "We want to transcend the old definitions, not just react against them. That is the real affirmation. I would never go back--it is scary to realize how far we have gone."*

Then she admitted she was "not sure" what lies ahead but affirmed she is more and more confident of women's "ability to handle it."

*The Christian Science Monitor. Monday April 1, 1974.

UTLER

RESOLUTION NO. 3501

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF POMONA,
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA.

WHEREAS the concerned women of the community represented by the Pomona Valley Chapter of the National Organization for Women, and several other women's organizations, have brought to the attention of the Planning Commission much information about the needs of children, the needs of mothers and benefits to children and their families, as well as the community, through the establishment of Day Care Centers as an integral part of residential developments,

BE IT RESOLVED that it shall be the policy of the Planning Commission to support and encourage the development of facilities for Child Day Care Centers in conjunction with all new residential projects where the homes or apartments are planned for families with children.

AYES: Romo, Gaulding, Nabarrete, Vlietstra, Kawa, Hagstrom
NOES: None
ABSTENTIONS: Stephens

APPROVED AND PASSED THIS 25th day of July, 1973.



PLANNING COMMISSION CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:



PLANNING COMMISSION SECRETARY



2751 Mountain View Drive - Apt. E
 La Verne, California 91750
 Dec. 17, 1974

Dear Friends of Many Years:

We have so much to be thankful for in spite of some seemingly incurable difficulties.

Hugh: Its sad that Hugh can no longer be with me here in Hillcrest Homes yet he is physically well and happy! His eyes and his hearing is perfect.

He still walks in that graceful manner. He is well cared for at the Olive Medical Center in Pomona where I visit him every Friday afternoon. He often plays the piano there; goes swimming every week where he is the star performer. His snow white hair has beautiful curls in the rear that makes him look more and more like Franz Liszt only he is even more handsome than that great pianist ever was. His love for me is more affectionate and closer than ever. This makes me very happy. He will be famous in his next life says our Metaphysical teacher. We have agreed that we want to be together again in the next life. How about that! None of our four Insurance policies cover his expenses but we get along with the help of Rosemary and Richard.

Jessie: I have had a fantastic handling of the diabetes problem which was beginning to creep up on me. It was done thru diet only, losing 25 pounds while ruling out sugars, fruits, white flours, pies, ice cream, most carbohydrates with lots of fresh vegetables, cooked and raw plus many vitamins and minerals. I am down to blood count 105 from 153. 120 is normal. I feel and look better than ever before. So its good to reach 88 safely thanks to a father and grand father who lived into the 90s. My brother died from Diabetes and now I remember that our father had it but it was never found out. Last week a doctor said I had a hernia but two other doctors said he was wrong. Goody! 3 years ago I had a killer called Emphasemia. Rosemary helped me to track it down. Now its given up. Death is having a hard time to catch me! The Chiropractor to whom I have gone for ten years has been a great help. He is now inexpensive thanks to Medicare and Blue Cross. He says I have still some years to go. I go to the free Jacuzzi baths here twice a week and to the YMCA once a week where I swim 5 times the length of the long pool. Swimming is priceless for me and Hugh too.

Our Children and Grand Children:

Rosemary and her husband, George Wohlhieter, have sold their little farm and moved to La Verne near their Brethren Church where Rosemary sings in the choir and plays in the Recorder Group. She still teaches the 3rd grade in the Bonita Schools System. George is a technician in the General Dynamics in Pomona and for 20 years has been head of the Labor Movement in that huge firm. He is a darling husband skilled in the process of helping Rosemary to save their two beautiful children, Adrienne and Bob, in the throes of modern teenage problems that we all pray will soon get settled. I am grateful that Hugh and I escaped this era that so many parents are going thru tday.

Richard living in a lovely home in Fairfax, Virginia, is head of a large Computer Department for Uncle Sam. He has a wonderful wife and and two darling little girls so life is good for them.

- 2 -

Extra-Curricular Activities of a Senior Citizen.

Two new causes are going strong: one is of course Modern Nutrition and the fight to keep the American Medical Association from destroying this wonderful system of health. The second cause is to get my text-book on Public Speaking For Women into a paper back and into Smith College where there is for the first time a new WOMAN PRESIDENT. Now and then I am invited to address college audiences. They seem to enjoy getting some of the ideas from an oldfaldy aged 88. Recently the LA Aerospace Corporation sent out a limousine and chauffeur to take me in for a lecture to 300 men and women which was also well financed. It was fun! I am surprised that audiences seem to want to hear some of the anecdotes from the long life of a feminist.

Some of the Joys of Growing Old.

I never realized before that growing old could be so interesting and for this discovery I am grateful. Of course the struggle to keep one's health never ends. In this beautiful home there are no responsibilities so there is time in life to carry on with what one likes best to do. That keeps me more busy than ever before. Our noon dinner is unbelievably wonderful! The 86 Oldsmobile still carries me safely to see Hugh and to go to our Nescience church in Glendale every week in 40 minutes where my darling friends of 24 years of association join together in the beautiful services.

Twenty-two years of spiritual teaching to create a new religion based on the Bible and the teaching of Jesus all led by Rev. Ann Ree Colton and supported by her 14 books of inspired writings has played a vital part in helping to maintain this long life. Let me know if ever you would like to see the list of books. I often think of Sigmund Rehwoldt; that great man who created the Lutheran Churches in Nebraska and I wonder if he would be glad to know of what Hugh and I have done to help this new religion for the new age to begin.

Conclusion. So there you have our story of the year of 1974. What's ahead sometimes seems alarming but my faith in our country and its people will never end. We have come thru trying times from the pioneer age until now - yet we have always survived and constructed another new age of development. I am sure we will do this once more.

With Best Christmas Greetings to Everyone

LOVINGLY YOURS,

Jessie Haver Butler
Jessie Haver Butler

Mrs. Jessie Haver Butler
2751 Mountain View Dr. Apt E
La Verne, Cal. 91750
Phone: 714-393-1741

EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND HOUSEWIFE RECORD
Jessie Haver Butler (Mrs. Hugh D. Butler)
La Verne Claremont, California

Educational

Graduate of Central High School, Pueblo, Colorado
AB Smith College, Northampton, Mass. 1909
Studied Public Speaking under Parliamentary Coach and
Lectured to British Audiences during 8 years residence in
London. Also researched British Household Management. **
Graduate Work - Geo. Washington University, Psychology
and Public Speaking - 12 hours.
Counseling Workshop - American Institute of Family Relations
Dr. Paul Popenoe, Director; Los Angeles, Cal.
Two year course in Creative Writing, Maran Elwood College -
Hollywood, Cal.

Background

**Secretarial
Administrative
Research and
Investigation
Lobbyist**

Assistant to Head of College Text Book Department
The Macmillan Company, New York City
Sec. to Director and Asst. Director, Pulitzer School of
Journalism, Columbia University - Two years.
Statistical Clerk and Investigator, Mass. Minimum Wage
Commission, Boston, Mass. Four years.
Investigator, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Cost of
Living, Washington, D.C. Two years.
Legislative Agent and Lobbyist at the Capitol. National
Consumer's League; National League of Women Voters.

Professional

Teacher

Speaker

Conducted Public Speaking Classes for hundreds of men and
women in Congress, the Embassies, State Dept. Women's
Clubs, Junior Leagues, DC League of Women Voters, Business
and Professional Women's Clubs, Scout Leaders, etc.
Conducted Public Speaking Classes at Georgetown Junior
College and High School - 9 years. Only Protestant
on the faculty.
Conducted Workshops on Public Speaking for General Federation
Women's Clubs Annual Meetings in all sections of the
U.S. for eight years.
Conducted Evening College Classes at Mt. San Antonia College
Walnut, California. Five years.
Conducted Public Speaking Workshops for women's Clubs in
North and South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Utah,
Arizona, Wyoming, and California.
Delivered 74 Lectures on The Human Engineering Laboratory to
Service Clubs in Southern California.

Author

Published TIME TO SPEAK UP - A Speaker's Handbook for Women
(Harpers) Revised 1950 and 1957. Used in Workshops all
over the United States.
Wrote Articles for the General Federation Club Woman; the
Quarterly Journal of Speech.

Wife, Mother
Home Maker for
53 years.
Husband still
Living!

Daughter born in London when 38 years old. Breast fed for
nine months - as taught by the British.
Son born in London when 40 years old - also breast fed for
six months. (The proudest achievement of all)

- ** 4 years of psychotherapy with Dr. James J. Hadfield of
London, England (A Jung practitioner)
1970. Taught A class in Public Speaking for new leaders
of the National Organization for Women in Los Angeles.
1973. Organized hearings for Child Care Centers in the Tracts.

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Feminist History Research Project
P.O. Box 1156
Topanga, California 90290

Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Suffragists Oral History Project

Miriam Allen deFord

IN THE STREETS

An Interview Conducted by
Sherna Gluck



Miriam Allen deFord
1965

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Miriam Allen deFord is a frail-appearing, yet vigorous woman. At eighty-five and despite a serious illness and several accidents in the past three years, she is still a disciplined and prolific writer, following her craft of some seventy-odd years.

The Feminist History Research Project first learned of Miriam Allen deFord when she sent to the Women's History Library in Berkeley two photographs of Philadelphia suffrage activities, circa 1910, in which she appeared. Because I was developing a project on suffrage, I made contact with her to arrange an interview during one of my periodic trips to Northern California.

At that time, I knew only that Miriam Allen deFord was a writer and had worked in suffrage campaigns. In an exchange of letters, I learned of her involvement in the radical political activities in the San Francisco Bay Area beginning in 1920.

She was married to Maynard Shipley, the well-known science writer and lecturer, and California socialist. Both with him and independently, she played an active role in the major radical causes of the day: she was a correspondent for the Federated Press, the labor wire service; helped Maynard Shipley organize the Science League of America during the anti-evolution fights of the 1920s; knew people involved in the Tom Mooney and McNamara cases; knew and was associated with many Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World), Eugene Debs, Harry Bridges, and others active in socialist and radical politics during the first three decades of the century.

I taped two interviews with Miriam Allen deFord in March 1973, shortly after her surgery for stomach cancer. In those two sessions we recorded some three and one-half hours of dialogue. In August, we recorded another two hours. In the interim between March and August, Miriam broke her shoulder and pelvis and was more frail than she had been in March. She had been concerned about interviewing because she is almost totally deaf, but only on a few occasions did this present a problem--more so in the August interviews--as is sometimes apparent in the manuscript.

The three interviews were conducted in Miriam's suite of rooms at the Ambassador Hotel in San Francisco. She moved into this hotel in 1937 after the death of Maynard Shipley, and has

lived there alone since. In 1937 the Ambassador was a respectable hotel, but has gradually fallen into disrepair and disrepute. The neighborhood in which it is located, the tenderloin district, is now populated largely by "derelicts" of various kinds and "porno" movie houses. Several rooms on her floor were gutted by fire several years ago (and again one month ago), but they remain unrepaired. Boarded up, they occasionally invite an enterprising homeless soul to sneak into the hotel and find rent-free shelter.

Notwithstanding the general environment and the atmosphere of the hotel, Miriam Allen deFord maintains her own existence in a self-defined world which she describes as her "oasis in the desert." Her suite is maintained at her own expense and, indeed, is "an oasis in the desert." Her living room, a small corner room, is crowded with books: old feminist and radical books, her own published writings, reference books on crime and criminals--some of them too large for her slight and frail frame to handle. At one of her desks is a Royal typewriter, vintage 1935, on which she works from six to eighteen hours a day.

The material which follows represents only a portion of the five and one-half to six hours of my interviews with Miriam Allen deFord and relates specifically to the subjects of suffrage and feminism. Although some decisions were necessarily made in the initial choices of the portions to be transcribed for this volume, there were very few problems with continuity.

Only minor changes were made before the transcript was sent to Miriam Allen deFord for review. I anticipated that, as a writer, she would not be satisfied with the informality of the verbatim transcription, and would make many changes. Much to my surprise, her deletions and additions were minimal. In reviewing the changes together, she commented that she "always respects the editor." The material contained herein is, therefore, an almost verbatim transcription of those selected portions of the three interviews with Miriam Allen deFord.

Sherna Gluck
Interviewer-Editor

January 1974

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Personal Biography

Born to Frances Allen and Moise deFord, August 21, 1888
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Married: Armistead Collier, February 14, 1915, divorced, 1920
Maynard Shipley, April 16, 1921, widowed, 1934

Education

Wellesley, 1907-1908
Temple University, A.B., 1911
University of Pennsylvania, 1911-1912

Career

Author, 1907 to present
Staff writer, Philadelphia North American, 1906-1907, 1908-1911
Staff writer, Associated Advertising, Boston, 1912-1913
Reporter, Ford Hall Open Forum, 1912-1915
Public Stenographer, San Diego, 1915-1916
Writer and assistant editor, house organs, Los Angeles, 1916-1917
Editor, house organ, Baltimore, 1917
Insurance claims adjuster, Baltimore, Chicago, San Francisco,
1918-1923
Staff correspondent, Federated Press, 1921-1956
Writer, Writer's Project, Guide to California Cities, 1936-1938
Reporter, Labor's Daily, 1956-1958
Reporter, San Jose Reporter, 1959

Professional Associations

Fellow, American Humanist Association
Member, Mystery Writers of America
Board member, Science Fiction Writers of America
Member, Rationalist Press Association
Member, Author's Guild

Published Writings

Regularly published poetry and verse beginning 1907 in Scribners,
Woman Voter, Birth Control Review, Harpers, New Masses.

Love Children (biography) 1931
Children of Sun (poems) 1939

Biographical Data (con't)

Published Writings (con't)

Who Was When? A Dictionary of Contemporaries, revised edition, 1949

They Were San Franciscans (biography), revised edition, 1947

Shaken with the Wind (novel) 1942

Psychologist Unretired: Lillian J. Martin (biography) 1948

Up-hill All the Way: Maynard Shipley (biography), 1956

The Overbury Affair (Edgar Award, Mystery Writers of America), 1956

Penultimates (poems), 1962

Stone Walls: Prisons from Fetters to Furloughs, 1964

Murderers Sane and Mad (Award, Mystery Writers of America), 1965

The Theme is Murder (stories), 1967

Thomas Moore, 1967

The Real Bonnie and Clyde, 1968

Xenogenesis (science fiction), 1969

On Being Concerned (biography), 1969

The Real Ma Barker, 1970

Elsewhere, Elsewhen, Elsehow (science fiction), 1971

Contributor of stories, articles and verse to magazines
Represented by stories in O'Henry Memorial Prize Volumes,
"The Silver Knight," 1930; "Pride," 1934

Verse in over fifty anthologies

Humorous short stories in anthologies

Editor, anthology, Space, Time and Crime, 1964

Book reviews, San Francisco Chronicle, 1971 to 1974

From San Francisco Chronicle, 5 January 1973

The City's 'Most Remarkable' Writer

By Mitchell Thomas

THE YEAR is 2251 A.D. and earth is threatened with destruction by the Antareans until a female geneticist saves the day in a denouement which offers a tasteful suggestion of sex and a wry little women's liberation twist.

Back in 1973, in her tiny living - work room in the decaying Ambassador Hotel here, the author of that tale tells an interviewer:

"Oh God, - I hope this isn't going to be one of those she's - so - old - isn't - it - wonderful - she's - still - writing things."

Miriam Allen deFord is 84 years old. It's wonderful.

A recent newsletter of the Northern California Chapter, Mystery Writers of America, called her San Francisco's "most distinguished and remarkable writer" and "the first lady of western letters."

As evidence, the newsletter listed more than half a dozen of Miss deFord's recent works, all appearing or about to appear in magazines and anthologies. They range from the Antarean fantasy, published in the December issue of *Analog*, a science fiction magazine, to a mystery story picked for the new Alfred Hitchcock collection.

The stories, essays, sociological studies and reference works pour endlessly out of a 50-year-old Royal portable on a desk in the two-room suite at the Ambassador, which Miss deFord has occupied since 1936.

It is hardly anyone's idea of a literary hotel. Once a solid middle-class establishment, it stands at the corner of Mason and Eddy streets, now the crossroads of the Tenderloin.

"I'm not about to move," Miss deFord declares. "Where else could I get two comfortable rooms with daily maid service for a very moderate rent?"

"My chief problem here is that I haven't room for books."

The books fill every nook and cranny. Among them are her own—18 of them—from "The Real Bonnie and Clyde" to a work on Thomas Moore, the Irish poet; from "Love Children: A Book of Illustrious Illegitimates" to "They Were San Franciscans," a collection of early San Franciscana that still brings in royalties.

Atop a bookcase stands a little ceramic bust of Edgar Allan Poe. It is the Edgar, the mystery writers' Oscar, awarded to Miss deFord in 1960 for "The Overbury Affair," a book about "the murder trial that rocked the court of King James I."

It is one of many prizes won by Miss deFord over the years for everything from poetry to an essay on U.S. economic problems.

Seated among her books, a small figure in a checked wool dress, Miss deFord brightens when her visitor asks permission to smoke.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" she replies, reaching for a box containing several brands of cigarettes and happily lighting up.

"My doctor told me to quit, but I won't. At my age, there are few vices left."

She talks lightly about her "ghastly trouble with my physique" during the past few years — a broken back, an operation for stomach cancer, a bout with pneumonia, failing eyesight. Miss deFord finds her age a bore.

"I can't remember when I started to write," she says, but her first story was published when she was 12. "I don't remember where, but I got a dollar and spent it on a silver napkin ring."

That was in her hometown, Philadelphia, where she became involved early in some of the social causes that were to give her a reputation as something of a radical.

"At 14, I was on a soapbox, campaigning for women's rights."

She attended Wellesley, got a bachelor's degree at Temple, and did graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania before coming west in 1918. She played bit parts in early Hollywood films, worked as possibly the world's first woman insurance claims adjuster and held various other jobs, always writing — and selling — on the side.

Not long after she came to San Francisco, Miss deFord married Maynard Shipley, the socialist writer-scientist with whom she campaigned against the anti-evolutionists in the 1920s. He died in 1934. A handsome photograph of him stands on one of her bookcases, and the Ambassador's management still knows her as Mrs. Shipley.

Among the Shipley's friends, besides the likes of Jack London and poet George Sterling, were labor organizers Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings, whose convictions in the San Francisco Preparedness Day bombing in 1916 became an international cause celebre.

Miss deFord, who put in many years as a correspondent for labor papers and news services, was asked by Mooney to write his biography. She visited him regularly at San Quentin and completed a manuscript which Mooney, who died in 1942, eventually decided against publishing.

Billings, who was released from prison in 1939, was a frequent visitor to Miss deFord's suite at the Ambassador until his final illness. He died last September.

"Everybody in the Federated Press (a labor news service she worked for) was supposed to be a Communist," Miss deFord says, "but it wasn't true."

During all those years, she was producing, in addition to



Miriam deFord and Maynard Shipley in 1921



Miriam deFord today at 84

**At 14
she was on
a soapbox
for women's
rights**

her books, a flood of stories, poems and essays. "I couldn't begin to tell you how many. Hundreds and hundreds."

Nowadays, she spends her mornings shopping, running errands, taking care of her correspondence. She starts working in the afternoon, frequently writes until midnight or later.

"I always try to keep about half a dozen stories in the mail," she says. "I have a book lying around, but I never discuss books until the contract's signed."

The interviewer found her working on a new, revised edition — the third — of "Who Was When? A Dictionary of Contemporaries," a reference work first published in 1940 and still used in libraries throughout the country.

"That has been taking up most of my leisure time," Miss deFord says.

She confesses that she runs out of ideas "regularly" but something always turns up.

"Just the other day I was reading a newspaper story and I started thinking 'What if . . . ?' In science fiction, that's where you start."

From San Francisco Chronicle, 24 March 1975

18 Books in Long Life

Miriam deFord, S.F. Writer, Dies

Miriam Allen deFord, noted San Francisco mystery writer, died Saturday night in Kaiser Hospital at the age of 86.

An author of 18 books, Miss deFord was acclaimed in 1972 by the local chapter of the Mystery Writers of America as San Francisco's "most distinguished and remarkable writer" and "the first lady of Western letters."

She had resided since 1936 in the Ambassador Hotel on Mason and Eddy streets. She was known there as Mrs. Shipley from her marriage to socialist writer and scientist Maynard Shipley, who died in 1934.

A native of Philadelphia, Miss deFord attended Wellesley college and earned a bachelor's degree from Temple University.

In 1918 she left the East for Hollywood where she worked playing bit parts in films and as an insurance claims adjuster. After moving to San Francisco she put in many years as a correspondent for labor papers and news services.

She counted among her friends writer Jack London, poet George Sterling and labor organizers Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings.

Among her best known works are "The Real Bonnie



MIRIAM deFORD
Death at 86

and Clyde," "Love Children: A Book of Illustrious Illegitimates," "They Were Called San Franciscans," and "The Overbury Affair."

The last volume, "a book about the murder trial that rocked the court of King James I," as she called it, earned her the Edgar award, an Oscar for mystery writers.

In addition to her books, she produced a flood of stories, poems and essays.

No funeral services will be held. Donations may be made to the Friends of the San Francisco Public Library.

From San Francisco Chronicle, 27 March 1975

World of Books



A Letter From Miriam deFord

William Hogan

SHE LIVED a rich, full life — if not always a happy one. And she was an enormously gallant lady up to the end. Miriam Allen deFord, the distinguished San Francisco writer and critic, was crippled and unable to write when she died at 86 the other day. Yet within the month she called this office offering to DICTATE a review of a true crime book we had assigned her.

Miriam Allen deFord Shipley, the widow of the socialist writer Maynard Shipley who died in 1934, was the author of 18 books and countless articles. She specialized in true crime ("The Real Bonnie and Clyde," etc.) A year or so ago a member of our staff asked her why she chose this specialty. Her answer was revealing.

★ ★ ★

"**F**ROM 1920 to 1956, when it expired, I was with a labor wire service," she wrote. "That was the period when many leftwingers, including some of my own friends, were being sent to prison on charges of 'criminal syndicalism.'

"They were not criminals, but were in San Quentin and I visited them there and wrote constantly about their cases. Then through an article I had published, I met, by correspondence, several inmates of San Quentin of another stripe. One, who became a well-known writer of the period but never stopped being a robber,

became my friend after his release . . . I had for years been writing crime and detective fiction for the pulps, and I became interested in criminology as well.

"There were two other influences: I knew Ethel D. Turner, the late writer, and her brother (then Warden) Clinton Duffy. And my husband did an enormous amount of pioneer work (now in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley) under the aegis of Stanford University. As I tell in my biography of Maynard Shipley, 'Up Hill All the Way,' as a boy of 15 his father had him committed to a Maryland reform school as 'incurable.'

★ ★ ★

"**T**HERE WAS another thing: when we lived in Sausalito we became acquainted with a San Quentin guard and often visited him and his wife in their home and met other correctional officers there. One was the guard who got \$25 extra for a hanging. His pretty daughter was at a party I attended, very sore because a hanging had been postponed, and her father had promised her the \$25 to buy new evening slippers.

"So you can see how I got into this field. Recently I had a visit from a subject (now out on parole) of my collection 'Murders Sane and Mad.' I was never more scared, but we parted amicably . . . Best wishes, Miriam."

THE FEMINIST ROOTS
(First interview March 6, 1973)

Family Background

Gluck: Let's begin with your background.

de Ford: Well, as I suppose you know, I was born in Philadelphia. I graduated from the Girls' High School there and never left Philadelphia until I went to college. My parents were both doctors in a heavy industrial part of northeast Philadelphia. My father graduated from medical college a year before my mother, and they started in a neighborhood of shipyards and textile factories. I don't think there were many who could read or write in the neighborhood except the few doctors and their families, after the workers changed from Englishmen to Poles.

I went to kindergarten in that section, but by the time I was ready to go to primary school, they sent me down to live with my grandmother in a more respectable part of the city, where my aunt was a public school principal.

Gluck: Had your mother pursued her medical profession after she was married? Was she in medical school when they met?

de Ford: As I told you, she had to stop in her sixties because she became deaf; until then she practised right along.

Gluck: Was she in medical school when they met?

de Ford: No. She went to Women's Medical [Women's Medical College of Philadelphia] and he went to Jefferson Medical College. My father's parents were both born in France, and although he was born in Philadelphia, it was in a section of the city that was then entirely French. He and his brother didn't speak English until they went to school.

He worked his way through high school and college and medical college. One of the things he did was teach French. That's how my mother met him -- she went to his French class. My mother was eight years older than my father. Actually, she always seemed younger though she was prematurely grey; I never saw her without grey hair.

Gluck: What kind of family background did she have that she went to medical school?

de Ford: She came from a family that had been in Philadelphia for about seven generations, I guess. They were born and brought up in a part of the city that now is slums; then it was mostly Quaker. All her early friends were Quakers.

Gluck: Was she a Quaker?

de Ford: No. I was brought up in - I suppose you'd call it - a kind of generalized semi-rationalist atmosphere.

Gluck: Was your mother's mother a feminist?

de Ford: No. My mother's mother was proud of the fact that she never in her life had crossed the street alone. When she was a child, her father took her, then her brothers; then, her husband and her sons. When my brother was too young to take her across the street, she had to have her daughters take her.

Gluck: How did your mother happen to go to medical school?

de Ford: Well, I suppose she'd had sort of vague interests and yearnings about it for a long time. Then, after she met my father and after they became engaged - they were engaged for four years - he persuaded her that it was possible. I don't think my mother's family were at all pleased, but they had to reconcile themselves to it.

de Ford: When my father was in his second year, she started. She was a year behind him.

Gluck: That was rather unusual in those days for a woman.

de Ford: She graduated in 1887 and he graduated in 1886.

Gluck: He must have been a feminist, then?

de Ford: To a certain extent, I suppose. I remember he refused to march in a parade once. He thought it would be too embarrassing to be one of the few men. But he certainly put nothing in our way and he was for women suffrage. If it had been a question of voting, he would have voted for it. But he had no particular connection with it otherwise.

Ever since I can remember, my mother was for "votes for women" - which was the thing then. When I was fourteen she sent me down to suffrage headquarters to stuff envelopes.

Gluck: Was she herself actively involved?

de Ford: Not very. After all, my mother was a very small, slight woman who practised medicine and ran a house and even mended clothes. Before she became deaf, she had sung in church choirs and she was very musical. She was a terrible cook. Fortunately, she never cooked except when we were out of cooks. But she did have all that she could possibly handle without doing anything very active. I don't think she'd have been physically able to march in parades or that kind of thing.

Gluck: She took care of the household herself as well as working?

de Ford: Oh yes. As far back as I can remember, we did manage to somehow have what was then called a "girl"; cook and houseworker. When we were small, we had nurses who were usually Welsh coal miners' daughters from the coal mines in Pennsylvania. In fact, the first time I can remember thinking about -- well, I didn't even know the word "feminism" then.

We had a Welsh nurse and an Irish cook and the cook got married. It's the only formal wedding I'd ever seen, though I've been a witness at lots of

de Ford: marriages. This was a Roman Catholic wedding. The nurse took us to it. I think I was about six or seven and my sister was two years younger.

The happy couple adjourned to the little row house on a back street that was going to be their home, and Gwinnie kept us standing at the door, not going in. Of course, you can imagine what it was; they were all grown people and we were the only children around. I know now that everybody had had plenty to drink at the reception, but of course I had no idea of it then. The bride was all in white satin, with a veil.

Some kind of argument came up. The bridegroom had to express his machismo somehow. One of his friends said, "Don't let her answer you back. Start your marriage right." So he promptly knocked her flat on the floor. Gwinnie hurried us away. I was just wild with indignation, and I remember saying, "He knocked her down because she wasn't as strong as he was. If I ever get strong enough, I'll get up and fight back."

Gluck: How old were you then?

de Ford: I think I was around six or seven. I don't remember which. From that time on, I was very much against most men and very much for most women.

Gluck: So your attitude applied generally to men? It wasn't as if you thought this was a specific man.

de Ford: I thought he knocked her down because she was a woman.

Gluck: And you thought this was how men behaved toward women?

de Ford: I was terribly indignant. Of course. I was used to a household where my mother practically ran everything and my father did as he was told - at least domestically. That was the first time I'd ever seen the old-fashioned male dominance, and it made me very, very angry.

Gluck: Did you generalize it toward all men?

de Ford: Yes, I did. I remember telling my mother about it and saying that he'd knocked her down because she was a woman. My mother didn't like to tell a child that age that probably everybody was drunk [laughter] so she just said, "Well, that's the way people of that kind act."

Gluck: What kind of feminist was your mother?

de Ford: As I say -- remember, this is all back in the 1890s, and as far as anybody was, she was all in favor of what we would now call women's lib. Of course, as a doctor she got the same pay that a man would get, so we never had that question in the house; of women doing the same work and getting less for it. I'm lucky because I'm in one of the few professions where they don't ask you your sex or your age or your ancestry but just whether you produce.

Gluck: It was rather unusual in those days for a woman to both work and to have a career. Did she have problems?

de Ford: It was unusual for a woman to have a professional career, yes. Of course, that was before women were in offices; stenographers were all men. But in the working class -- our wash woman was married and sometimes when a cook got married, she came back.

I can remember once. We had one of those backyard privvies that the maid was supposed to use. One of our "girls" who had come back after marriage somehow managed to lose her wedding ring down it. She had hysterics because she said her husband would beat her when she got home. We had to call the professionals at night - I can see them still with the lanterns - and dig down and find her wedding ring to get her home again. [Laughter]

I remember the little old washwoman - I've forgotten her name, a German name - tiny little woman with her face covered with smallpox scars; that was very common in those days. When she came Monday, she usually was bruised all over. Her husband got drunk every weekend and beat her up. She took it philosophically; she expected it; that was what married life was like.

All those things, you know, as I found out about them, made me feel more and more the way I'd started to feel.

Gluck: Was that before the incident at the wedding?

de Ford: No, that was afterwards. That was when I was, I suppose, nine or ten or something like that. I just stayed down a year with my grandmother. Then we moved to another part of the city and I was brought home

de Ford: and sent to school near where I lived.

Gluck: In your childhood, though, your mother worked the entire time; she just took off time right around the birth of the children?

de Ford: How do you mean?

Gluck: How many children were there in the family?

de Ford: Three and I was the oldest. I had a sister two years younger and a brother five years younger.

Gluck: When other children were born, did she continue to work and just take off a few months?

de Ford: Well, of course, when my sister was born, I was only twenty-two months old, so I don't remember much about it. But when my brother was born I was five. I can remember that they thought then I was too old to leave around the house; I wasn't supposed to know about those things, so I was sent to my grandmother's again. I never saw my mother until after my brother was born.

But, as I remember, she never nursed any of us - she never could. As soon as the baby was old enough to be left - by that time, I think she did very little home visiting. Her patients came to her. So, it was easy enough to handle a baby and work at the same time. In our house that we'd moved to in the northwestern part of the city, what was other people's parlor downstairs was the office and waiting room. My father, in later years, had an office downtown, but my mother never did; she always had her patients at the house. Both their brass signs were outside the front windows.

Gluck: So they practised together, then?

de Ford: Not together, because my mother, I think, did most work in gynecology. And my father first was a general practitioner but became a genito-urinary specialist. That would be something my mother wouldn't be likely to do.

Gluck: I see. She must have been among the very early women gynecologists.

de Ford: People always say that. She was the second generation.

- de Ford: Her professors in medical college were the first generation. The Woman's Medical College was founded in 1857, when my mother was two years old.
- Gluck: Right. They would be the Elizabeth Blackwell generation.
- de Ford: She told us a lot of stories about her years in medical school that also added to my feminism. First, there were some courses that they had to go to at one of the men's medical colleges -- I forget which one, whether it was Jefferson or Medico-Chirurgical or maybe University of Pennsylvania, I don't remember. Anyway, when they demonstrated an operation, they had all the students observe from rows of seats like a theater balcony. The girls had to sit at the very back. One day, one impatient girl got up and walked right over people's heads down to the front and sat there. They made things so unpleasant for her that she never tried it again. My mother said the male students used to yell after them in the street; I don't know what they yelled.
- de Ford: The men resented very much having women study medicine with them.
- Gluck: Then when you were growing up, did you think that you would go into a professional career? Did you expect that?
- de Ford: It was taken for granted that I was going to study medicine and inherit both my parents' practices. But, you know the younger generation; the one thing I would never do would be to study medicine. Besides, from the time I was twelve, I knew I was going to be a writer and I'd started even being published; there was no question of my doing anything else.
- Gluck: So from a very early age, you knew you would go into a profession, and then quite young decided on writing?
- de Ford: Oh yes. It was taken for granted that we all would earn our living. My sister became a teacher and ended up as a supervisor of industrial arts in the Philadelphia schools.
- Gluck: Was it assumed that you would be a professional as well as being married, or it didn't matter?

de Ford: Well, I don't think the question ever came up. As far as that goes, my sister never did marry. I think my family were a bit surprised when I married twice. I never remember any discussion on that point at all. It was taken for granted that whatever I did I would keep on doing.

Gluck: If you were married or not?

de Ford: I suppose so, but nobody ever said anything. Remember, this was still the Victorian age. My mother was a doctor but she never mentioned any question about sex. Nobody ever told me anything. I found out by reading my parents' medical books. When I was eight years old, I had read so many of them - especially my mother's gynecological works - that I gave my sister a long, detailed account of just how one handles pregnancy and childbirth. I think I was eight then. She said, "Well, what I don't understand is how the baby gets there." I said, "That's the part I haven't found out yet, but it isn't important." [Laughter]

I can remember very well when I was a little older, sitting on the floor in the waiting room in my parents' office when there was nobody else there and reading Kraft-Ebing [Psychopathia Sexualis]. If I heard a footstep, I'd get up and consult the dictionary quickly. After my father died, my sister sent me the Kraft-Ebing and I never saw such a boring, dull book in my life. [Laughter] I still have it somewhere.

Gluck: Were your parents part of any kind of radical tradition themselves?

de Ford: No. As far as politics goes, we were Democrats in a Republican city; and a very corrupt Republican city where kids would jeer "Democrat" at you down the street. We took The Record, which was a democratic paper. Of course every respectable person in Philadelphia then took The Public Ledger, but we also took The Record. I suppose we were the only Democrats I knew.

My father considered himself something of a liberal; I think he once voted for Debs. Of course, my mother couldn't vote.

I do remember - and I can't remember how young I was but I was quite young - when Cleveland was elected the second time. I remember my mother saying,

de Ford: "I thought I'd die without seeing a Democratic president again. I'm so happy.

Gluck: Her feminism didn't come out of a radical past?

de Ford: No. My mother never had any radical connections, and my father was horrified when I became a real radical. He wrote me long, long letters about how superior his mind was and how he'd been all through this and how it was just youthful exuberance and I'd get over it.

An Early Introduction to Suffrage

Gluck: Do you recall when you first went down at fourteen to the suffrage headquarters if there were other young girls; or were you quite unusual?

de Ford: I don't remember anybody my age. There were young people. Of course, to me at fourteen they seemed grown up. As I say, good Lord, fourteen -- it was 1902. I have a very vague memory; I don't even know where the office was anymore.

Gluck: How did the women there treat you?

de Ford: They were very nice to me. They made a kind of pet of me because I was so young.

Gluck: So it was rather unusual for somebody that young?

de Ford: I suppose. I would never have thought of it. It was my mother who sent me down. She had no time to do anything so I was her surrogate.

Besides, my parents taught us to be independent. I was sent downtown alone by trolley car to run errands for them when I was nine or ten. At thirteen I had my own latchkey. (Of course, that didn't keep them from worrying - and punishing us - if we came home late).

Gluck: Besides the incident where your mother sent you down to the suffrage headquarters, were you associated when you were quite young with the suffragists at all?

de Ford: No, I can't remember. We had very few social contacts - my parents were too busy - but I recall a medical classmate of my mother's who was a suffragist.

Of course, when I was fourteen I went down to headquarters and from that time on I got to know all the people down there. The woman - then young - who was in charge of headquarters was a very nice woman named Caroline Katzenstein. I remember her. I remember vaguely some of the other people there; a French woman who'd lived in England for years and then moved to America, and a few others.

By the time I was eighteen, I was really working for them. I don't think I'd done any writing for them yet. By that time - between high school and college - I was on the Philadelphia North American and I was also doing I suppose what we'd call public relations work.

Then, when we had the parades - New York would be the national one - I always went up.

Have you any connection with this Women's History Library? [A discussion of the relationship between the Library and Feminist History Research Project occurred off tape.]

Gluck: I saw the pictures you sent to the Women's History Library; of the Philadelphia headquarters, and a parade.

de Ford: Yes, as I remember, one picture is of the staff at the Philadelphia headquarters. I think that must be in 1910 or so. And then there's one in 1907 or something like that of the Philadelphia contingent at the national parade in New York.

Gluck: You didn't go to those parades, did you?

de Ford: Yes, I'm holding on to the banner. [Laughter]

Gluck: How old would you have been then?

de Ford: Well, I don't remember just which year it was. If it was 1907 I was already working on a paper. I would have been nineteen years old.

Gluck: Did you go on your own?



Women's Suffrage Parade, New York City, ca. 1910. The Pennsylvania delegates assembling. Arrow points to Miriam Allen deFord.



*Women's Suffrage Headquarters
Philadelphia, 1906*

*From left to right - Mrs. Anna M. Orme, Mrs. Mary C. Morgan,
Miss Caroline Katzenstein, Mrs. Arthur Lowenberg and
Mrs. M. Allen deFord*

de Ford: Yes. My mother didn't have time. I was the representative of the family. My father was all for woman's suffrage but he would have been ashamed and embarrassed to have been--there usually were about--oh say, out of several hundred women in a parade, there would be a contingent or maybe half a dozen men, and they always looked sort of beaten as if their wives had said, "You go or else!"
[Laughter]

Gluck: In that 1907 picture --

de Ford: I think it is, I can't remember exactly. But the dates are on it anyway.

Gluck: That was actually in New York, though.

de Ford: Well, what they did was -- I don't know how far it went; I don't know how far south or how far north. But I know that Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania were at the parade in New York. I don't remember whether it was Labor Day or what the occasion was. It was an annual thing. I think that time in the picture was when the whole parade was led by Inez Mulholland, who was a beautiful woman, and she was dressed in armor and mounted on a white horse.

Gluck: I always thought that was a later one -- 1913 or so.

de Ford: Well, that might have been later. I was at that parade too, but I don't remember just when that was. I know she died of pernicious anemia because they didn't have any cure for it then. Now, she'd have recovered.

Gluck: You would go to the parade every year?

de Ford: As long as I lived in the East, yes. Every city would have its own contingent with a banner in front giving our locale. I think this picture was taken by some news photographer when we were forming before we started to march.

We got a lot of jeering from the sidelines, but we didn't retort. There was never any violence, if that's what you mean. Nobody threw anything or anything like that; they just laughed and made fun of us. Just as when we used to pass around the petitions after soapbox talks. A lot of people would sign with phony names, you know, like "Luke McGluck" or "Gyp the Blood," and that kind of thing.

Gluck: Were there speeches at the end of the parade. Was there any sort of rally or anything?

de Ford: I think probably, but I don't remember. For one thing, we weren't at the head of the parade; we were somewhere way back. All New York went first, because New York was always the largest contingent.

Gluck: Do you remember parades in Philadelphia itself, too?

de Ford: I don't remember. We must have had parades, and if we had, I'd have been in them.

Gluck: Did you write any of the literature of that group in Philadelphia?

de Ford: I doubt it very much. For one thing, I left Philadelphia in 1911 and then came back for a year and did graduate work at Pennsylvania. I never lived in Philadelphia after 1912. And before that I was just the youthful kid around the office, and all I did was just fold things and stuff them into envelopes and that kind of thing -- run errands to the post office.

Gluck: But from that very early involvement, you remained continuously involved until you left Philadelphia.

de Ford: Yes, from that time on I always had some kind of connection. I got to know all these people, you see, and they would know other people.

High School Education: Three Generations

Gluck: You went to a girls' high school, you say?

de Ford: Yes. It's now called the Philadelphia High School for Girls and is in an entirely different part of the city. Usually, the principal of the school was a man. All the teachers were women. It was a very large high school. At that time it was the only high school for girls; the other one, the Central High School, was only for boys.

Gluck: The high schools were separate?

de Ford: There were no coeducational high schools then.

Gluck: Was that just true in Philadelphia or was that generally true?

de Ford: No, it was everywhere. I don't think anybody had ever heard of a coeducational high school when I went to high school in 1902. My grandmother told me that when she was high school age (she was born, I think, in 1833 or something like that), the only way a girl could go to high school was that they had classes on Saturday morning for girls - as a special favor. She went to a private school. I asked her what she learned. She learned some French and to play the piano after a fashion and things like dancing and etiquette and that sort of thing.

Then when my mother went to high school, she went to the same high school I did; they had it five days a week by then. But she had to drop out because her father died and she was the oldest girl and, of course, the girl has to look after the little ones.

Gluck: Was this run by the city, this school, or was this private?

de Ford: Oh no. It was the public high school. I think the Quakers had a coeducational school in Germantown, but I don't know; I don't know anybody that went to it.

Gluck: Was the curriculum different than the one in the boys' school?

de Ford: Well, in our high school, we were divided into three sections. One was what they called the General course; most of those girls just finished their education in high school or they went on to what was then called the normal school and became elementary school teachers. Then there was the Classical course; that was college preparatory. You had four years of Latin and you took two or three other languages - either Greek, French or German. As evidence of a little snobbery, we considered the Greek classes just a little above the French and German ones.

Then my course - I was in the first one - the other college preparatory course; we called that Latin Scientific. In those days, science was all German. We had four years of Latin and four years of German. Though my father was French, I never learned any French until I went to college.

Gluck: That was, in effect, because they were planning on your going to --

de Ford: That course was college preparatory for people who were more scientific minded. I wasn't particularly interested in science then and I don't know now how I got into that thing. There was only one section of us all through the four years. Now, I don't know how they have it arranged -- probably very differently.

Gluck: By that point, you decided though you weren't going to be a doctor?

de Ford: No, but I also think what I wanted was lots and lots of English; I got more English in the Latin Scientific than I would have got in the Classical.

Gluck: I see. So it wasn't because you were still thinking about taking up --

de Ford: Oh, no. I wasn't interested in science at all.

Gluck: When did you reject the idea of going and taking over your parents' medical practice. Do you recall?

de Ford: I don't think I so much rejected it as just ignored it and let it drop. [Laughter] They didn't insist because they probably decided I wasn't going to be a very good doctor if I did; if you do a thing against your will, you're not likely to be very good at it.

Gluck: You say you were writing by the age of twelve?

de Ford: Well, that of course is rather facetious. I had a story published somewhere in some paper - I can't remember which - and I got a dollar for it. Actually, I started being published at about eighteen.

After I got out of high school, I had a scholarship at Wellesley; but that was just for tuition. My parents couldn't pay for the difference, and so my father treated me to six weeks in a business college during my vacation after I graduated from high school.

"Girl on a Big-City Newspaper"

de Ford: Then, for a year I worked on the Philadelphian North American, and I went back to it later.

Gluck: What was that exactly?

de Ford: It was one of the biggest newspapers in the city then.

Gluck: It was a daily paper?

de Ford: Yes. It's defunct. It was owned by John Wanamaker's brother, Thomas. I was in the Sunday department.

Gluck: How did you happen to get that job?

de Ford: That's a long story. There was a section called the Women's Section; eight pages on Sunday. It had, among other things, a department run by a then well-known novelist who called herself Marion Harland; she was Albert Payson Terhune's [the writer] mother and her real name was Mary Virginia Terhune.

One of the things she had on her page - besides answering questions and all - was a sort of club, by correspondence. I've forgotten -- girls, you know, who corresponded with each other on various things. Then somebody in Philadelphia (the paper was syndicated, and had eight other papers all over the county) decided to make a real club of it and have meetings.

So we did. I belonged to it from the very beginning. Then this woman who was appointed editor of the section, for some reason -- I suppose just a matter of publicity -- came to one of our meetings. It was just when I was getting through business college. She decided that I was just the person she was looking for. It was a combination, I suppose, of typing all the letters, and feature writing.

Gluck: I see. What kind of articles did they have?

de Ford: When I went back later [after a year at Wellesley] I did nothing but writing; we had another stenographer.

Gluck: What were the articles that they had? What kind of articles were these features?

de Ford: For a while I ran a health and beauty column. [Laughter] Also, I did some of "Marion Harland's" work for her; answering letters. (She was in New York and mailed in her copy.) One thing I'll never forget. I opened all the letters and some were sent on to her that I couldn't answer and some I took care of. A good many of them were commonplace things to which we just sent some kind of

- de Ford: printed material. But I remember once a photograph came out of the envelope of a nurse in uniform, a registered nurse, and a letter saying, "Will you please look at this picture before you read any more of my letter. Then, if you've looked at it, will you please tell by looking at me whether you can tell I'm illegitimate."
- Gluck: Was that printed?
- de Ford: No, it was not. I wrote her and told her that it was utterly impossible to tell from anybody's appearance. [Laughter]
- Gluck: In other words, a social question like that was not very usual then?
- de Ford: I don't know. I got plenty of others in that line. Some of them my superiors in the office took away from me because they didn't think an eighteen-year-old-girl ought to answer them.
- Gluck: In this club that you were in, before you got the job --
- de Ford: We just had meetings and we went to picnics in the summer. It was a social club, but it got me a job. Unfortunately, my to-be editor had already engaged somebody she didn't like and was trying to get rid of. So she'd keep writing me all that summer. I was working then. I got a job with the people who published the theater programs, you know, the regular --
- Gluck: Was that connected with Edward Bok, the later editor of the Ladies Home Journal?
- de Ford: No, I never knew Bok. I knew nothing about the Ladies Home Journal; anymore than the Saturday Evening Post.

But finally, she got rid of this woman. On Thanksgiving Day - I remember we were at the table having Thanksgiving dinner - she phoned me and said, "Come right down. You've got the job." I deserted the turkey and went straight down to the North American and started working; we didn't have holidays in those days on newspapers. [Laughter]

- Gluck: Was your idea then to go into newspaper work, or was it just a complete accident?
- de Ford: I hadn't thought about it until I met her, but it was a chance to write and be published and that's all I was interested in. After I'd been there a few months, I wrote a long series of articles for a Baptist magazine (I forget its name) called "A Girl on a Big City Newspaper" - using up my material as fast as I could. [Laughter] From that time on, I wrote everywhere, especially poetry. In those days, I think I must have had hundreds of poems published.
- Gluck: So it was primarily the poetry?
- de Ford: No. I wrote a short-short story a week for our section, besides a long series in verse about an old lady and her canary; she gathered advice from its chirps.
- Gluck: Were the feature articles ever related to the feminist issues.
- de Ford: No, of course not - never.
- Gluck: That never would have been published?
- de Ford: No. We just took that for granted. As I remember, none of my editors on the North American were married, the women. There was a woman photographer on the paper, which is very unusual in those days. She photographed for the society section. She was divorced.

The College Years

- de Ford: I did my freshman year at Wellesley and then, as I said, my scholarship gave out and I had no more money so I had to do something else. What I did was come back and live at home and enroll in Temple University; it was then very different from the enormous place it is now.

Our classes were all in the evenings or on Saturday and the students were mostly teachers. The College of Liberal Arts was very small. But I made up my mind that I would graduate the same year as my

- de Ford: Wellesley class. In the summer I made arrangements with the paper and went to the summer school of the University of Pennsylvania and then had it credited to Temple, to give me enough credits.
- Gluck: I see. How long did you work on the paper before you went to Wellesley?
- de Ford: From November to the next September.
- Gluck: And then you went to Wellesley for a year?
- de Ford: And then I went to Wellesley. But then a short time after I came back, this Ernestine Allen called on me. Of course, I had to get a job right away. I can't remember now - I've had so many jobs I can't remember. I think I was then a secretary to a doctor, an eye specialist.

Anyway, she came to see me and asked me to come back. They'd sent her up. I was too shy and timid to ask what my salary would be, but it was raised a little [laughter] to \$15 a week. I went back and I was with them then for three years. Then we had a stenographer and I was just an assistant editor.

- Gluck: For this women's section?
- de Ford: Yes.
- Gluck: Women journalists were rather frequent in those days, weren't they?
- de Ford: There were very few women regular reporters; there were one or two, I think, but not on my paper. This was all long before the days of the Newspaper Guild. I remember Van Valkenburg, our editor-in-chief, used to say that the North American turned out the best reporters in the United States. He told that to one man he was in the process of firing. The reporter said, "Yes, they sure turn them out - to walk." [Laughter]

Everything was on a very definite slave basis. One man I knew got fired because he went up in the elevator with the editor-in-chief and didn't take his hat off.

- Gluck: Were the women on the newspaper staff paid less than

Gluck: the men?

de Ford: I'm pretty sure they were. But these things are relative. As my husband used to say, "Whatever happens, you get your hay and oats." When we paid thirty-five dollars for the rent of a three-story house, for instance.

My first year on the North American, I got ten dollars a week; the second year I got fifteen. Our Sunday editor, who was quite high up in the hierarchy, got fifty a week. I know that. My editor, Myron Wybrant Smith, who also became my very good friend, got twenty-three. Whether people doing the same work got the same pay, I wouldn't know; I don't think there were any women doing the same sort of thing as any of the men.

Gluck: Generally, the women did very different work than the men?

de Ford: I don't think there were any women doing the same kind of work. There may have been on one or two New York papers, but there weren't on ours. I did have two editors before Myra who had been reporters on a Chicago paper. They always wore hats with veils in the office; they said when they were reporters they had to show they were ready for instant assignments, just like a man.

Gluck: What kind of subjects did you pursue when you were at Wellesley for that year?

de Ford: What kind of what?

Gluck: What plan of study did you pursue?

de Ford: Languages are the things that interest me. I took French and Greek and advanced English; I took three English courses. I had more German later at Temple. I took lots of Latin all the way through graduate school, but English was my major. Unfortunately, at that time, Wellesley made you take freshman math. The part of the brain that thinks mathematically was left out of me. Three days before I was to graduate from Temple with high honors and a graduate scholarship at the University of Pennsylvania, I still had to pass off a freshman algebra condition; I'd taken the

de Ford: examination three times and failed. (I've never taken any math again, of course, and I've completely forgotten all I knew.)

I was simply desperate. We had examination books you bought in the bookstore. I got mine in advance and I pencilled very lightly little things like the binomial theorem. [Laughter] I somehow got through the examination.

The mathematics professor who conducted it -- I'd never forget him -- his name was Napoleon Bonaparte Heller. He looked over my paper, and I said, "Did I pass?" He looked at me with a peculiar expression and said, "Well, let's say so." So that's how I got to graduate school.

Gluck: When you were going to college, were you hoping to use your education to aid in your writing?

de Ford: I don't think I ever thought about it; everybody got educated, you had to go to school as a matter of course. In the college preparatory courses in high school, most American girls from the Classical course went to nearby Bryn Mawr. Most of us in the Latin Scientific course wanted to get farther away from home. One of my friends in high school went to Goucher, two of them went to Bucknell, two to Cornell, and so on. One - later an M.D. - went with me to Wellesley.

I was a year behind my high school class in college because I'd had that year out.

Gluck: What sort of experiences did you have at Wellesley in terms of the role that women expected to play?

de Ford: None; it was a woman's college. I think, the way I was brought up, I just took it for granted that anything I wanted to do, I could do. I don't think I ever thought about pay, because everybody's pay was so bad.

I can remember when I lived in Boston, working in an office. I first went up there in the summer after I had seen my former class graduate in Wellesley. I stayed up the rest of summer and worked in various offices as substitute for girls on vacation.

In this place the office manager called me aside

de Ford: and said, "Don't tell any of the other girls what you make because you're a college graduate and you get more than anybody." I was getting seven and a half a week. They were getting seven.

Gluck: You were making more than that on the newspaper, weren't you?

de Ford: As I say, I got ten dollars at first and then fifteen. I never got above that on the North American.

Gluck: Were most of your professors at Wellesley women?

de Ford: Most of them were then. There were men but I never happened to have any. Now, I think almost half of them are men.

Gluck: Do you recall if they were primarily single women?

de Ford: Most of them were, yes. I don't remember if any of them were actually married, some were widows. In high school, my freshman algebra teacher was an old friend of our family who was a widow, but I don't think there were any women teaching who were still married.

Gluck: If they were going to get married, they usually quit then?

de Ford: I suppose so. They just took it for granted that when you got married you left your job. Of course, a great many girls take that for granted now.

Gluck: Did you have that attitude, or did you not think about it?

de Ford: Oh no. I would never have given up my work for the sake of being married - hardly!

I remember a few years ago, a girl I knew - in fact, one of my editors in a publishing house - write me that she was leaving because she was getting married. So I wrote back and said, "What about your fiance. Is he leaving his job because he's getting married?" She never answered. [Laughter]

Gluck: Most of the girls you went to school with, for instance at Wellesley, had that same attitude?

de Ford: It's a large college, so you can't say "most" of them. In my own group, most of them didn't marry; most of them became teachers. I had twin chums all through grammar and high school, twin sisters. One of them became a teacher, an elementary teacher, and then left to get married; she had four children. Then, times got hard and she went back to teaching while her husband was still alive. That happened sometimes.

Most of the girls I knew, if they got married didn't work anymore. Of course, some of them - even the ones who didn't get married - didn't take jobs. They lived at home and took care of aged parents, that kind of thing. I hear occasionally from one of my classmates still who never married; she just took care of her parents till they died.

Gluck: She didn't pursue any career?

de Ford: She never worked.

Gluck: When you then left Wellesley and went to Temple, that was then a coeducational school, wasn't it?

de Ford: Oh yes, it always had been. I suppose there were more men than women in all my classes, but there were plenty of women.

Gluck: How did you feel about that educational experience and being with men as compared to Wellesley?

de Ford: I was very unhappy that I had to. When I was twenty, I had one Saturday evening a month to myself. You know, you never get to be twenty again. My life was made up entirely of work and study. I'd usually do most of my homework on the streetcar going to and from work.

I suppose most of the teachers at Temple in those days were not so distinguished as the ones at Wellesley, but they had very high standards. I got exactly the same kind of teaching as at Wellesley. Afterwards, I had one or two rather distinguished teachers at the University of Pennsylvania, but I can't say that they were any better as teachers.

Gluck: You were back at the newspaper then, while you were going to Temple?

de Ford: Yes. Most of that time. I think all the time I was

de Ford: going to Temple, I was working on the North American.
I had other jobs - such as medical secretary - but I'm
confused as to the dates. I know I was four years
altogether on the paper.

THE BOSTON YEARS

- de Ford: Then I left them [The North American] to go up to Boston to live. Like most young people, I wanted to get away from home.
- Gluck: So you worked on the paper for about three years then?
- de Ford: No. I'd say about four years, counting six months before college. Then when I went up to Boston, among all the numerous kinds of jobs, I started doing occasional feature stuff for the Boston Post.
- Gluck: As a free lancer, though?
- de Ford: Yes. From that time on, I was free lancing. Not until about, oh I suppose, thirty years ago at the best, was I able to earn my living simply by writing; very few writers can.
- Gluck: You were always doing something else.
- de Ford: I was an insurance claim adjuster for five years, for instance. I've had all kinds of jobs.
- Gluck: But the whole time, you were always writing.
- de Ford: Yes. I was writing all the time - and selling; but not selling enough to live on.
- Gluck: But you didn't go to another newspaper, then, in Boston?
- de Ford: No, I didn't go on a paper. In fact, I think I made one or two inquiries but there just weren't any jobs.
- Gluck: Did you have any sense of the kind of career you could pursue that would let you write and earn enough money?

de Ford: No. The only thing was to get any kind of job that would pay my living expenses and then write in the time I had left. But there were no jobs [writing]. Oh, I did later on. For instance, I was on the staff of Associated Advertising, which was the organ of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the world.

Then later, in Baltimore, I edited a house organ for an olive oil company; I suppose that's a vague connection with writing. For a while, in Boston, I did public relations work for two or three organizations.

So it's hard to say. I'd always prefer something where I could do some writing, but if worse came to worst, I'd work for anybody - I've worked for a fire hydrant company, a lumber company and a piano company here in San Francisco, for instance. In San Diego, during my first marriage, I was a public stenographer; in Los Angeles I doubled as secretary and assistant house organ editor for a big oil company.

Gluck: It was primarily in a clerical sort of position?

de Ford: I was sort of what they then called a stenographer and what they now call a secretary.

Gluck: But you didn't see going into the newspaper field as an alternative to being a writer?

de Ford: No, I didn't, largely because - you may think it peculiar - I was a very shy, timid person. The way I got jobs was having somebody tell me about them and recommend me. I never had the nerve -- As a matter of fact, whenever I had to go to an interview, I always got violent diarrhea. I simply couldn't face people down, and I was always glad for a job where I could be alone and do my work and not have people around me.

Gluck: I see. How many women were there working in these places? Weren't they just beginning to get into those positions?

de Ford: Oh yes. By that time, women worked in all the offices. As a matter of fact, it was getting close to the time when a man stenographer was unusual, unless he was a court reporter. I think on all the many, many jobs I had, both substitute and permanent, I never saw a man

de Ford: in the office except as the boss. Oh yes. The bookkeepers used to be men usually.

Gluck: I see. Were you ever involved in that Bookkeepers and Stenographers Union?

de Ford: I never took bookkeeping - not with my attitude toward arithmetic! All I studied was typewriting and shorthand.

Soapboxing for Suffrage

Gluck: Did you become involved in radical politics at this time?

de Ford: No, I never was until my first marriage; until I met the man who was my first husband. Well, in a sense, I suppose you'd say I was always open to that kind of thing. By that time, I was soapboxing for suffrage around Boston.

Gluck: Tell me about that.

de Ford: In the evening we'd stand on a soapbox on the corner and talk.

Gluck: What year was that?

de Ford: Let's see -- I lived in Boston the second time from 1912 to 1915. One thing I did. I became the official reporter for the Ford Hall Open Forum, and we had all kinds of speakers: That's the first time I ever did hear any radical speakers.

Then we also had what we called the Town Meeting in which I was the clerk. There (it was an imitation of a New England Town Meeting) people would bring up all kinds of "bills" and we would argue and discuss them and that sort of thing.

When I finally met the man I married - he was a sort of combination of southern aristocrat and anarchist - he converted me all the way over very quickly.

Gluck: Was the suffrage activity connected with this Town Hall, or were you in a separate suffrage group?

de Ford: It had nothing to do with the Town Hall Meetings. The Ford Hall Open Forum was a big public thing; hundreds and hundreds of people at the Sunday evening meetings, and very well known speakers always. The Town Hall was just made up of regular tenants of Ford Hall, and we met in its headquarters. I had a regular position to be - not as clerk of the Town Meeting but - as reporter for it. We got out a weekly -- I don't know if you'd call it a paper --

Gluck: A newsletter.

de Ford: What I did was take down the speech in shorthand. Then we had all sorts of departments and I wrote in some of them.

Gluck: I see. What was the suffrage group that you went out soapboxing for?

de Ford: It was the Massachusetts Woman's Suffrage Society. I lived in Boston in what was called a "home for self supporting women," The Hemenway, in a very bad part of the city - worse even than this [meaning the San Francisco Tenderloin]. The College Settlement was right across the street from us. We had two old four-story houses thrown into one. For a very small fee, we got a room - usually with a roommate, but I was nearly always alone - and breakfast and dinner.

The head of it was a lady named Bertha Hazard who was from Alabama, but had lived many years in Boston and was a very active suffragist. She was a graduate of Vassar. It was probably through her that I became connected with the suffrage workers. Every state and every large city had a suffrage league. Maude Wood Park, I know, was the head in Boston, but it's too long ago.*

Gluck: Did many of the girls living in this place become involved?

de Ford: No, I think I was the only one. Oh, there may have

*Maude Wood Park was associated with the National American Women's Suffrage Association and after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment and the formation of the League of Women Voters, became president of the L.W.V.

de Ford: been one or two social workers who were more or less interested. But nearly all the girls were devout Roman Catholics and their whole outside interest was in the church. Boston, you know, is a highly Irish city. Most of the Hemenway residents were factory workers; a few were office workers. I was the only one, I'm sure, that took any active part.

Gluck: Did this suffrage group have regular meetings?

de Ford: I don't remember any meetings; they must have had. They got out all kinds of literature and they had these evenings-- In those days, every evening in every city, the downtown street corners were all occupied by soapboxes - literally sometimes; sometimes we just called them that and they were little platforms with a flag.

Later on, in Spokane and in Los Angeles when I was speaking there for some of the radical martyrs and victims, I can remember there'd be a religious meeting at the other side, and I'd get up and yell, "You people that are listening to fellow-worker Jesus, come over and hear something about the real workers' movement."
[Laughter]

Gluck: What kind of experiences did you have when you were soapboxing for suffrage?

de Ford: We always passed out petitions; there was always some bill in the Legislature. When we went over them later we would find all sorts of facetious phony names. But we always got a certain number of actual voters -- all men, of course.

Gluck: How would you go about starting this meeting exactly?

de Ford: You mean how would you start it?

Gluck: Yes.

de Ford: There was usually somebody from headquarters who would get up and make an opening talk, in the manner of the soapboxing for socialism all over the Pacific Coast. Then, whoever it was would introduce the speaker. You would know you were going to speak that night and you'd have some kind of subject to talk about besides the general one. You'd talk for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes and then you'd ask for questions and

- de Ford: try to answer them.
- Gluck: How large a group did you usually have gathering?
- de Ford: Just people going along the street. I suppose there were people who spent every evening going from one place to another, just like Hyde Park in London.
- Gluck: Was it primarily men who would be your observers and listeners?
- de Ford: I don't know --
- Gluck: Were they couples, or just men in your audience?
- de Ford: You mean in the audience? They were just the same kind of people you'd find if you had an auto accident on the corner. People were going by and they stopped to listen; if they were interested they stayed, if they weren't they left. Some of them went from one to another just to spend an evening listening to conversation.
- Gluck: Were the women harrassed?
- de Ford: No, we never had any actual - that I can remember - any physical violence. Of course, we got jeers and cat calls; in those days, you didn't use four-letter words, so nobody called us thirteen-letter words or anything like that. But we'd be interrupted, of course, and heckled. But that was part of it. You expected that and learned how to handle it.
- Gluck: Were there women soapboxing on other issues or only suffrage?
- de Ford: I don't remember. By the time I was soapboxing out West, there were other women, yes. But in those early days, I don't remember if there were any. I think most of the other soapboxers - except for the ones on some special issue that might be coming up about housing or something, were religious. They were missionaries of one kind or another; they were either promoting the Bible or criticizing it.
- Gluck: How did they, the religious people, respond to you, to the suffrage women?
- de Ford: They didn't pay any attention. We all had our own audiences. Of course, we preferred to have a larger audience than anybody else, but you couldn't

- de Ford: hold them if they wanted to go; you had to keep them entertained. [Laughter]
- Gluck: So each of you would take a turn soapboxing, then? Is that it?
- de Ford: As I remember. Oh, they would say, "What evenings do you have free next week?" or something like that, and make a schedule for the week. I'd usually speak once or twice a week.
- Gluck: This went on every evening, then -- someone spoke?
- de Ford: Yes. They had volunteers to speak. A great many people didn't like to speak in public, especially to this shifting audience of strangers on the street.
- Gluck: Then did you hand out literature afterwards?
- de Ford: Then somebody else from headquarters would be passing things around.
- Gluck: Did you talk only about suffrage, or did you talk about feminism generally?
- de Ford: I think it was mostly about suffrage. Of course, we also talked about the right of a woman to have control of her own earnings. Those were the days when the married woman who worked -- her husband could take all her money. He decided where they should live, and if they separated he got the children. A lot of women stayed in very unhappy marriages because they didn't want to lose their children.

I suppose we talked about the peripheral subjects, but it was primarily that the way to help women was to give them the vote so they could be citizens, too.

I knew from my own experiences how my brother felt. From the time he was twenty-one until he died at seventy in Washington, D.C. (they didn't get the vote until after he was dead) around election time, when he'd write me, he'd always start his letter, "Dear Citizen:"

I never voted until I came to San Diego, in 1915. The whole country didn't have suffrage yet, but California did. I voted first in 1916 in Los Angeles.

- Gluck: You stayed in Boston until 1915 then?

- de Ford: Yes. My fiance went to San Diego. When he got a house, he let me know and I went out from Boston to San Diego in February, 1915.
- Gluck: But then after the soapboxing experiences in Boston, that was really the end of your specific suffrage activity?
- de Ford: Well, I also soapboxed in Spokane, Washington, in 1917, but not for suffrage. I think that's the last time I've spoken on the street.
- Gluck: Now that was for Mooney though, wasn't it?
- de Ford: Yes, and for other "labor martyrs." I think the whole idea of soapboxing had died down by then. I've never heard of it in recent years.
- Gluck: So that was sort of the end of your suffrage activities?
- de Ford: Women got the vote soon after that.

Transition: Relationship and Attitude Towards Men

- Gluck: You met your first husband in Boston?
- de Ford: I met him in Boston, though he came from Memphis.
- Gluck: And he was involved in some of the anarchist circles?
- de Ford: I never knew any socialists until several years later; most of the people I met through him were anarchists, what they called "philosophical anarchists."

When I met him in 1914, I was secretary to the secretary of a very well-known lecturer. She (the lecturer's secretary) became a very good friend of mine. I met him through her.

There was a rival to the Ford Hall called, not the School of Social Science but something like that, and that was where they did get all kinds of radical audiences. Mabel used to go to it occasionally and she met him there.

- de Ford: I remember the first time she mentioned him. She said, "Did you ever meet that anarchist that gets up and talks?" I said, "No, I don't want to meet him; if you have a normal man for me to meet, I'll be glad to meet him." [Laughter] That was the beginning of my first marriage.
- Gluck: What was your attitude towards men at this time; you'd had your earlier experiences.
- de Ford: I remember saying to my father, when I was down on a holiday in Philadelphia, when I was living in Boston, "Thank goodness, I never see a man in Boston except the janitor." My father was horrified, I suppose. He was afraid I was turning into a Lesbian! I wasn't. I was simply uninterested. [Laughter]
- Gluck: Did he mention it in those terms?
- de Ford: Oh no, of course not. Good Lord, no. He'd have died before he'd have said a word like that. [Laughter]
- Gluck: Wasn't it very unusual in those days to even talk about something like that?
- de Ford: I don't remember ever discussing sex with anybody. My mother was extremely Victorian, very prudish, even though she was an M.D., and considered herself very liberal. I knew, from reading the medical books, about menstruation and all that kind of thing; she never mentioned it to me. I think she said once in a shame-faced sort of way when I was obviously developing, "You know what's going to happen, don't you?" I said hastily, "Oh certainly." She said, "That's good; I don't have to say anything." Then she handed me some birds-eye cloth napkins to hem; they used that instead of Kotex in those days.
- Gluck: What was it?
- de Ford: They called it birds-eye; it was a thick, heavy thing like a diaper, and they all had to be hemmed by hand and washed by hand.
- Gluck: Even as a gynecologist, this wasn't something she would discuss with her women patients?
- de Ford: Well, I suppose she did with her patients - she had to. If she had somebody with cancer of the cervix, she'd certainly have to tell her so. But at home and in private life, she wouldn't think of mentioning anything like that.

de Ford: I can remember once. I had a bad habit in my childhood. I couldn't get to sleep at night and I had a terrible time waking up in the morning; I was always late. But I used to sneak out of bed and listen in from the top of the stairs. My father would have evening calls and then he'd come home maybe about ten or half past. I had a firm belief in my childhood that the whole world changed at ten o'clock; it was the grown ups world and it was a completely different place. I was very eager to know what it was like.

I would get out and sit at the top of the stairs where I could hear my father and mother talking downstairs. I remember once - I can't remember what it was - my father must have told my mother a slightly dirty story. She laughed a little and said, "Oh, you shouldn't have told me that one." [Laughter]

Gluck: Up until the time you met your husband, you still didn't have much use for men?

de Ford: I just didn't know any then. Oh I did. Yes, through Ford Hall, but that was all shortly before I met Armistead Collier. I'd known some of my classmates in Temple, of course. Two of them used to call on me; one was a divinity student. I used to entertain him by writing sonnets with him! I was in love with one of my married professors, but of course he never knew it. Two of the men from Ford Hall fell in love with me, but I didn't even know it till Mabel told me. One asked me to marry him and I just laughed.

I remember that summer, we had what they called the Sagamore Sociological Conference on the seashore near Boston. I was there, of course, because it was run by Ford Hall. I think it lasted about a week. We'd have talks every day and concerts - the first time Roland Hayes, the famous Negro tenor, ever sang in public.

There was a young Unitarian minister whose name I've completely forgotten; it was a three-barrel name, George something. He was kind of taken with me. A group of us were at the beach.

I can't remember what had happened, but there was something we had to get from some house nearby and he went with me to help carry it. When we got inside the

de Ford: house, he kissed me and I slapped his face. That was my first kiss from any man except my father, and I was twenty-four! He said, "Why did you do that? That isn't a way to treat a man." I said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," and he said, "Why? If I like you." I said, "Why, you're a minister."

SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON FEMINISM
(Second Interview, August 23, 1973)

Feminism, Old and New

[The following portion of the interview began with an untranscribed discussion on birth control.]

de Ford: You see, the whole suffrage movement after its earliest days was divided into two camps, a conservative camp and a liberal camp. And as far as I know, the very conservative suffragists were interested in nothing else. They weren't feminists really. I mean, they didn't care much about working conditions or birth control or anything of that sort; they were just after the vote.

I should say that the liberal camp was more or less favorable at least [to the birth control movement], but nobody active or prominent in the woman's suffrage movement ever endorsed abortion or anything of that sort. That would have been fatal. Even if they believed in it personally, they wouldn't do a thing in it. It would have ruined the whole movement, besides themselves.

Gluck: Of the women that you know that you referred to this abortionist, did any of them have harmful after effects?

de Ford: You mean people who did it themselves?

Gluck: No, of the women that you referred to this man you knew here in San Francisco.

de Ford: Well, I don't know, because the word seemed to get around that I knew somebody, and people that I didn't

- de Ford: know would come around and ask me for the address and I'd never hear from them again. But, nobody who was very close to me -- they were people I just knew casually. But as far as I knew, they were all alive and kicking afterwards. This man was a regular doctor and he was a good one. I don't know whether -- He did charge fifty dollars, as I said, which was an enormous price in those days, but he -- So he wasn't doing it out of --
- Gluck: Good will.
- de Ford: -- love for human-kind or anything. But he was reliable. He was at least scientific and sanitary, which is more than most of them were.
- Gluck: One of the interesting things that I've been coming across is the number of women in your age range who've had hysterectomies, some of which seem to have been related to very botched up abortions.
- de Ford: Well, I'd never heard that before.
- Gluck: You yourself never had a hysterectomy?
- de Ford: No, I never had to.
- Gluck: Because it seems it was fairly common in those days.
- de Ford: Oh, I wouldn't wonder. In later years, in the late 1920s, I knew a woman who'd had seven abortions, and one of them a seventh month, which is frightful. She was, as far as I could see, healthy and active, young-looking. She'd had her first one, I think, when she was sixteen. But she didn't bother with any kind of birth control. When she got pregnant she went and had an abortion.
- Gluck: I can think of better ways.
- de Ford: Well, I can too. She finally decided in one of her marriages - she married several times - to have a child; she had it, and the child was born dead and she blamed the doctor. So after that she refused to have any more.
- Gluck: Going back to the split in the feminist movement between the more conservative and the more radical, did the more radical group use the word "feminism," do you know?

de Ford: Well, to begin with, they were not a radical group; they were liberal. They were only left as compared with the extreme right. And don't ask me to name any names because I don't remember who was the head of which. But, no, I would -- Well, yes, I have known women all my life who were life-long feminists. For instance, Congressman [William] Kent 's widow [an active suffragist], who gave Muir Woods to the country, was an oldtime feminist from way back.

I remember going up to her house and making a speech once to a little group of oldtime feminists.

Gluck: When was that?

de Ford: Let's see, that was about -- It was the day our house caught on fire. I think it was about 1929 or '30. [Laughter]

Gluck: And most of them have still identified as feminists?

de Ford: Oh yes, and an old lady ninety-three years old drove me back and told me about her fight for feminism back seventy years before.

But let's say they were extremely few.

Gluck: And they would use the word "feminism" to identify themselves?

de Ford: Oh yes, absolutely. But there were a great many people who were suffragists who were not interested, or at least not talking, about anything else. The oldtime feminists go way back - keep on going back to the 1840s. And usually they believed in a lot of other things that the more respectable didn't - like free love, for example. And a good many of them were actually anarchists. Of course, Emma Goldman lectured regularly on birth control. Margaret Sanger was an anarchist in her early days.

Gluck: Now, I'm very interested in someone like yourself, who was a feminist and lived through all that and who remained a feminist all your life. What do you think happened? After the vote, why did things get so much worse for women?

de Ford: Well, one reason was that women expected too much from the vote. You know, politics was going to be purified

de Ford: and everything was going to be lovely as soon as women got the vote - which was pure nonsense! My argument always was that we're human beings and citizens, and we have a right to the vote. I never expected to see -- I never thought that women legislators would be any less corruptible than men [laughter], because we're all human together, and we have all kinds. But I think that is one of the chief reasons, that a good many people who had worked hard for suffrage gave up in disgust and despair when they found that they weren't entering into an elysium.

Then of course, we've had two world wars since then and two private wars. During World War I was the time that "Rosie the Riveter" appeared. I imagine a great many of those people who had never been interested in anything except their own private lives, when at the end of a war they'd be turned out summarily and a man would get their job, I imagine a good many of them began to think about women as women. But I don't know that I have any definitive answer at all to why, except that you know how people are: they get tired, they get bored, and then they get out.

Gluck: Why do you think that among the more liberal, the ones who identified as feminists and not just suffragists because these had a much broader ideological --

de Ford: Well, I think in the minds of a great many people who were, who would have called themselves liberal, feminism was a fighting word. It belonged too far to the left. They weren't radicals politically. And it was the political radicals who were also feminists. I think that's probably the fundamental reason. A great many people who wanted the vote didn't want anything else, and when they got the vote they were satisfied.

Gluck: But for instance, these feminists that you want to speak to. After the vote, what did they do? Did they still fight for -- ?

de Ford: They were all very old people and they weren't doing much of anything. I don't think there were more than half a dozen at that meeting. But occasionally I can remember at my husband's [Maynard Shipley's] lectures there used to be an old lady who came up from Palo Alto (and I don't remember her name) who had been a

de Ford: lifetime feminist; in the question period she always managed, no matter what the scientific subject - astronomy or anything, to get it around somehow to women.

Until the new modern women's lib movement, you never heard the word feminism. I don't think most people would have understood what it was. And then I think one thing is, that as the more permissive era arrived, too many of the older women who had thought of themselves as being pretty liberal, began worrying for fear that only lesbians were -- [laughter]. Oh yes, I think that has a great deal to do with it. I think a great many people scuttled out in a hurry in a fear that they might be considered lesbians.

Gluck: And that would be in the twenties?

de Ford: Oh, not in the twenties. Later than that. No, in the twenties, unless you read French, you hardly knew what a lesbian was, or unless you read Sappho in Greek. I remember my Latin professor in college introducing me to the novels of Pierre Louys in French; a novel called "Aphrodite," about Greek lesbians. That was the first I ever heard of them.

No, the very first I heard was on my first [news] paper, where a woman in the advertising department was called by everybody "Brother." I never could understand why. She asked to use our office phone to call up her girlfriend, and she'd say, "Darling, did you like the ring?" [Laughter] She lived right around the corner from me and invited me over. She was the person who taught me to smoke when I was eighteen. The funny thing was that when I first moved out here in 1918, to my immense astonishment, I met her on the street; she'd moved out here too. She was living with some woman on Lake Street, but I never saw her again.

Gluck: Well, when was this period when you're saying that the women who would still identify themselves as feminists were afraid of the lesbian --

de Ford: Well, I think that's a -- I should say that was just before the women's lib movement started, the most recent movement.

I went out to a NOW affair [National Organization for Women] in the courtyard of the First Unitarian

de Ford: Church about three years ago. There were all kinds of stands, you know, with literature and things. There was one girl who had made elaborate printed poems, big plaques printed by hand. And I'd never seen anything quite so vicious as one of them she had posted up there - very anti-man. They were these horrible creatures all women should avoid. So I went up to her and I said -- I may have told you this before --

Gluck: No.

de Ford: I went up to her and I said, "Look, we don't hate all men. We hate male chauvinist pigs." She said, "They're all male chauvinist pigs."

So, I think there were too many respectable middle-aged women who had always thought of themselves as feminists, but when they got that kind of thing they got scared and beat it.

Gluck: Was the anti-man stand as strong in the early feminist movement, do you think?

de Ford: I think that's a question of the individual. There were women like that. But after all, most of the really early leading feminists in this country were married, and often their husbands were very strong for women and were their associates. People like Alice Stone Blackwell or Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Gluck: For instance, when you were in Boston and were involved with that suffrage group, do you recall -- ?

de Ford: No, the suffrage movement in Boston was very mild and very conservative. Mrs. Park couldn't have been more respectable and more conservative. She was a sweet little woman. She'd been married six months when her husband died, and she wore mourning for him the rest of her life. So you can see. It sounds very radical to get out on a soapbox and stand on a street corner, but everybody did it. I mean quite conservative political candidates would; that was the day of the soapbox. Every evening when you went downtown every corner was occupied.

Gluck: Now, in that group would other women besides yourself talk about feminist issues, or was it only suffrage?

de Ford: They never talked about anything except "What's a good corner?" and "Who will circulate the petitions tonight?" I never knew any of them personally. I just went down and offered my services and I had had some experience in public speaking, so they took me on.

Miss Bertha Hazard, who was the head of our Home for Self-Supporting Women, Hemenway, was one of the (conservative) women's suffrage people, though she came from Alabama; that was unusual in those days. The South was very, very reactionary. Though I think she was the one that first suggested that I offer my services to speak in the evenings. She, herself, would never have dreamed of doing it. I don't think she even marched in a parade. She was very much a lady. She did once try to register to vote as a demonstration.

That was one of the things they did, you know. Different women would go down when it was time to register and try to register and be turned down and get some publicity for the cause over there.

Gluck: Had you done that ever?

de Ford: I never did, no. For one thing, when I first started I was a minor. And then I got into some of the other things. I don't think I lived long enough in Massachusetts to be registered, for one thing.

As I said, I first voted when I came out to San Diego because California then had the vote. It was before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed.

That was one of the things the girls who interviewed from KQED couldn't understand. They wanted to know if everybody voted when I first voted in 1916. They didn't know that Wyoming was the first state to have women suffrage and they wanted to know why. I told them women were precious and valuable as pioneers, at least. [Laughter] Of course, they [the younger women] hardly can think of us as human beings. They're always surprised when they find something happened before they were thought of. [Laughter]

Gluck: Do you recall when you first would have used the word "feminist," as opposed to "suffragist?"

de Ford: I couldn't tell you. It's too far back. I have no idea.

de Ford: Probably I found it in my voluminous reading on the subject. I remember in my grandmother's house there was a book translated from the French by Michelet, who was a well known historian of the nineteenth century, and I think it was called Woman. I can remember some of the things in it still, the patronizing tone -- you know, "Woman is the lesser man," and "All thy passions matched with mine/Are as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine." [Tennyson: "Locksley Hall"] That was the general feeling. I can remember he talked about being kind to your wife because she's at your mercy - you can make her pregnant. Most people thought of pregnancy as a disease that some people recovered from.

Many women died in childbirth. In those days half the children died in infancy. My grandmother was one of fifteen, all of whom - remarkably - grew up; and all but one of whom were married and had children. My mother had one hundred first cousins.

Gluck: One hundred!

de Ford: One hundred exactly, because her father was one of eight, and they too all married and had children. But on the other hand, my grandmother herself had eight children, of whom only five grew up. Three died as small children. And that was the common thing.

You'd meet a woman and say, "How many children do you have, and she'd tell you," and then you'd say, "How many times did you have a child," and it would be maybe twice that number.

Gluck: Was your sister also a feminist?

de Ford: Well, not actively, but she was certainly -- she was very active in her union. She was a supervisor of Industrial Art in the Philadelphia public schools, and she was for years secretary of her local union. She served in France during World War I as what they called a "reconstruction aide," teaching new crafts to soldiers who had been wounded or something and who couldn't go on with their former work. (She came back from France engaged to a medical officer but the engagement was broken and she never married.) And she always had the right attitude. But I don't think she ever did anything very active. She never worked in the suffrage movement or anything like that.

de Ford: Of course, she was two years younger than I and she was still quite young when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed.

Gluck: But for instance, when your mother sent you down to suffrage headquarters, she never sent --

de Ford: I don't think anybody ever suggested that Alice do anything she didn't want to do! If she had asked, I think they'd have been glad to have her, but she was very busy with other things. She was always the aggressive person in our family, and I was the timid one that hung back and had to be pushed into things.

Gluck: How do you feel about the current women's movement?

de Ford: You mean the so-called women's lib movement?

Gluck: Yes.

de Ford: Well, I certainly don't like some of the more extreme manifestations. I mean, they seem foolish. The ostentatious anti-man business and some of the demonstrations seem to me to be a trifle exaggerated, but I'm all for it, naturally. In fact, I'm a member of NOW; have been from the beginning.

Gluck: Do you see it as being very different from the movement of the nineteen-teens?

de Ford: I think it's very different. To begin with, it has a much better background atmosphere. People are much more receptive than they used to be. It used to be just a grinding fight and male chauvinism was practically universal. In fact, there was even a lot of female chauvinism. "I'm perfectly happy, and Nora didn't bang the door," and all that. [Laughter]

I don't think there's much doubt that this is a much more permissive age and people talk about things that they never used to talk about.

I said to a young man the other day who was giving me his very, very adolescent opinions on things, "You people think you invented sex. We did all the things you talk about. We just didn't talk about them."

Gluck: Do you think that the current women's movement has a more political -- ?

- de Ford: I think it has a lunatic fringe, as every movement has. But on the whole I think it's a good, solid, useful movement and I certainly hope it's not going to attenuate or die out. I'm always afraid that with every movement you get that first enthusiasm, and then you accomplish a few things and then you get tired. That's true of every political movement.
- Gluck: Do you think that the current movement is more political generally than the earlier one?
- de Ford: Oh, much more, yes, because there are many more opportunities to be. What could we do? All we could do was talk. But they can actually form political blocs and influence elections and all that sort of thing, while we were powerless.
- Gluck: What happened to feminists after the early movement died? Did you feel an extreme kind of isolation, for instance?
- de Ford: Well, I don't know what you mean by the early movement. The early movement was back in 1845 and I wouldn't know.
- Gluck: I guess I view that as part of a continuous one, actually.
- de Ford: I suppose in individual instances that have come to my attention, I would feel that we have been let down, but I don't remember any particular -- I always realize that there's a great deal still to be done and that we had to keep on doing it.
- I still don't know why this sudden recrudescence in recent years. I mean there was no one event, unless it was the fact of the two big wars and that women for the first time did things they had never done before and didn't want to give them up.
- Gluck: Well, I also do think the involvement of women in radical politics and discovering that they were being treated rather poorly had a great deal of --
- de Ford: As far as I know, every political radical I've ever heard of, no matter what he was -- Socialist, Anarchist, Communist, or anything -- has always taken feminism for granted. I don't think there's ever been any sex discrimination in any such movement.

Gluck: But do you think that their feminism in reality was --

de Ford: I don't think it was the most important thing to them, but if you'd asked them, they would have always said, "Yes, they agree." But very few of them would do anything in that particular line because they had plenty of other things that they were fighting about.

Gluck: But within the movements, how did they treat the women, for instance?

de Ford: That varies according to the situation. I mean, I've known -- well, some of these communes now, you know the girls apparently end up in the kitchen. And that would be true of -- Well, there's always a tendency in any group that if there's domestic work to be done, the women do it. If you'd call it to their attention, then they'd be embarrassed and they'd wash the dishes.

But in general, the idea is that women's work is never done and it was subservient to men's work which is important.

Gluck: Do you think that the women themselves in the radical movements in the early days accepted that idea too?

de Ford: You can't answer that yes or no. Some of them did and some of them didn't. Some of them flatly refused to be relegated to the sidelines. And then of course, you must remember people like Emma Goldman, for instance, who were leaders in their particular group. I can't imagine Emma's retiring from public life to wash the dishes. If I'd been a man, I don't think I would have wanted to marry Emma. She was a very aggressive person. And as far as I knew, both [Ben] Reitman and [Alexander] Berkman, knuckled under and did as they were told. They were very respectful.

Feminist as Writer; Writer as Feminist

Gluck: Do you feel, from what we talked about last time and from the things that you're saying now, that very young you were aware of what it meant to be a woman. How do you think this affected your writing throughout your life?

de Ford: Well, the only thing I can say is -- the KQED people

de Ford: made me read to them an excerpt from one of the stories in my collection, "Xenogenesis," which is all science fiction about matrimony, reproduction and sex on other planets and in the future. And I should say that every one of those stories is oriented towards feminism. I read them also from my introduction, in which I said that in the early days women never appeared in science fiction except as somebody to be captured by a bug-eyed monster and rescued or something of that sort; they were passive and acquiescent.

But the particular one there they had me read from was called "Superior Sexed" and it was distinctly a feminist story.

But except for that and the fact that, through my mystery stories, just as often I have the woman an active criminal or murderer as a man, I've not dealt specifically with feminism in my fiction. I've never written the kind of thing that would particularly need to take an attitude one way or the other or even to consider it.

I did at one time ask a publisher's representative whom I knew here about doing a book on the subject. It was about the time that women's lib began. I think it was at the time Betty Friedan's book came out. I had an idea for a book and he was very much interested in it, but New York finally said "No, they didn't think there was enough interest." Afterwards there was a terrible flood of such books, and I was busy doing other things, so I just dropped it.

I've written a number of magazine articles, mostly for magazines now extinct, like Scribner's, on subjects dealing more or less with feminism. I had one in some farm journal in the Middle West on "Do Women Want Children?" in which I said that there was no such thing as the maternal instinct. And I remember having one in some magazine now defunct, whose name I've forgotten, called "Half Past Sex O'Clock." I've always written -- where there was an occasion to mention it at all -- from that viewpoint. But I never wrote particularly on it.

I got very early involved in political and economic subjects. I was a labor journalist for thirty-five years.

- Gluck: But your early poetry, for instance, did any of that ever deal with how you felt about being a woman?
- de Ford: Yes, well, that's another thing they [a KQED crew doing a program on suffragists] had me read: two of my very early poems. One of the girls said, "Is that one of your best poems?" I said, "No, it's one of my worst ones, but that's the subject that you wanted." I've written very little, but I have a few feminist poems, yes.
- Gluck: Of your very early ones?
- de Ford: Yes, very early ones. Actually, if you want them, I'll be glad to copy them for you, but they're not particularly good poems. One of them was published and I think one of them wasn't. There were only two I could remember from --
- Gluck: When were those published?
- de Ford: Oh, this would have been back in the teens, I don't remember exactly. Some time before 1915.
- Gluck: Well, I think it would be interesting if we ever do a transcript to show that as a very early work where that --
- de Ford: Well, I can almost date one or two of those things. One I think was called "Woman to Man" and the other one I think was about Medea. Making Medea into a heroine is quite a job! [Laughter] I was surprised when I came across that.
- Gluck: So actually there has been a thread from your very early writing up to now in terms of --
- de Ford: Well, I can't remember. I think I told you, and I certainly told them, that I became a feminist at the age of six, and ever since then, I was always on the side of the girl against the boy.

WOMEN TO MEN
(in The Woman Voter, around 1912)

We are they that wept at Babylon,
And still are they that weep;
We have watched the cradles of the world,
And hushed its sick to sleep;
We have served your folly and desire,
And drunk your cruel will;
You have smiled on us with far contempt--
Are you smiling still?

We are slaves most fit for Solomon
Who now can call you kin;
It was strength of heart and many years
That changed us so within--
The strength of those you killed with scron,
The years you could not kill:
Steep were the stairs to climb, and hard--
Are you smiling still?

We have shared your salt of loyalty
And eaten of its bread;
We have died with you for freedom's sake,
And gained it--being dead:
You have drawn from out our breasts your life,
That life you use so ill:
We are they that bore you in the night--
Are you smiling still?

Miriam Allen de Ford

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University of California, Berkeley

Suffragists Oral History Project

Laura Ellsworth Seiler

ON THE SOAPBOX

An Interview Conducted by
Sherna Gluck



Laura Ellsworth Seiler
1974

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Laura Ellsworth Seiler was introduced to The Feminist History Research Project through Jessie Haver Butler, another suffragist/interviewee. The two of them were active in the Claremont Women's Club, though their knowledge of each other actually dates back to their suffrage days. While a lobbyist for the Washington, D.C. Consumers League in 1918, Jessie Haver Butler was one of several young professionals who shared a communal house. One of the other women living in this house was a friend of Laura Seiler. When in 1961, Laura Seiler moved to California, she and Jessie Butler finally became acquainted.

We taped the first interview in October 1973, shortly after Mrs. Seiler moved to Claremont Manor, a retirement facility in Claremont, California. She had just sold her cottage home at Mount San Antonio Gardens, because, after three years in a hospital, it became obvious that her husband's incapacity would be permanent. A second interview, in June 1974, like the first, was recorded in her room at the Manor, a small complex of rather austere, brick buildings on pleasantly landscaped grounds.

Though 82, Laura Seiler appears to be twenty years younger. She is an attractive, rather proper and business-like woman who still maintains an active interest in general world affairs and in the current women's movement. Reflecting her own long-time career as an account executive in an advertising agency, she is especially interested in questions of vocational choices and opportunities for women. Her interest in and attitudes toward the women's movement represent quite a departure from the other inhabitants of her living community. Like many other suffragists, she represents an older woman whose understanding and support of the current movement is an obvious extension of her own life.

Because of Laura Seiler's own interest in the possible publication of material relating to her business life, it was agreed that the focus of the interviews would be primarily on her participation in the suffrage movement, with enough on her family background and career to understand both the continuities and

discontinuities in feminist thought and activity. The first interview provided a broad outline of her life as well as some specific suffrage anecdotes. The second interview explored her childhood background in greater detail, her career, and the influences which shaped her suffrage commitment. However, since neither interview was discrete, it was necessary to combine the two interviews in a manner which would provide for a more coherent development of the subjects discussed. After Mrs. Seiler looked over the edited transcript, we reviewed it together, making minor revisions.

The difference between the spoken and the transcribed word is, perhaps, nowhere as evident among the interviews in this volume, as in the Laura Seiler interviews. As a trained and accomplished public speaker, her story-telling abilities are well honed. Her marvelous renditions of the accounts of the suffrage tour with her Victorian mother, the caper in New York harbor, and the speech from atop a horse on Wall Street, cannot be fully captured on paper. From the standpoint of the material itself, however, the Laura Seiler interviews add another dimension to the suffrage story--that of the bold and dramatic act, perhaps similar to the guerilla theater tactics used today.

Sherna Gluck
Interviewer-Editor

December 1974

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Personal Biography

Born to Lucy Hawley Ellsworth and Charles B. Cook, October 31, 1891, Buffalo, New York

Marriages: Dale B. Carson, 1913-1928
Erwin Vierling Seiler, 1929

Children: Daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Ellsworth Gardner

Education

High School, Ithaca, New York, 1903-1907
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1909-1913, B.A. Modern Languages. Phi Beta Kappa

Career

1914-1915 Macy's Department Store, New York Copywriter

1917-1948 Federal Advertising Agency, New York Copywriter,
Account Executive, Vice-President and member of
Board of Directors

1948-1954 First retirement

1954-1958 J. B. Rundle Inc., New York Account Executive

1958- Retirement
European travels; Move to California, 1961

Writings

Vocational articles for various publications (while still
in business)

BACKGROUND: THE EARLY YEARS

Seiler: All of my ancestors, so far as I know, were in America before 1700. So it's a straight New England background until the generation in which I was born. I always thought of my family as New Englanders in exile because it seemed to me they bore down more heavily on New England traditions than if they'd still been living in New England.

I grew up in Ithaca, New York, in my grandfather's house, and went to Cornell University. I was the youngest of three children. My elder sister, who is seven years older than I, and my brother, who was five years older, also went to Cornell.

My father had been a Cornell man, and it was a family joke with us that grandfather, who had had a period of retirement because of a breakdown in health, decided to settle and practice law again in Ithaca because they had just opened a college and he had four daughters. So it was a family joke that he moved to Ithaca--to marry them off.

Gluck: Did the daughters all attend Cornell?

Seiler: No, none of them. Two of them married Cornell men. One of them didn't marry - her sister having married the man she was in love with, an Ithaca man but not a Cornellian.

Gluck: Okay, going back a bit -- you lived in your maternal grandfather's household.

Seiler: Yes, I grew up in his household, in Ithaca.

Gluck: What was the house like? Who lived in the house with you?

Seiler: It was a very large house. That was the day, of course,

Seiler: when you still had sleep-in servants. My grandfather had been a judge; he was always called Judge Ellsworth. I don't think he was anything very important in the way of a judge. He was still a practicing lawyer when we went to live with him.

The house had a large basement, one of these half-way ones. Down in the basement with the half windows was the dining room, a large pantry, a huge kitchen and what was always called the maid's sitting room because it was furnished so that they could have fun there.

Then there was an enormous cellar beyond that. There was an outside entrance to the maid's sitting room so that their guests could come and go, and that's where deliveries were made too.

The next floor had a big central hall, a music room, a library, front and back parlors, a very large bed-sitting room and bath for my grandfather and grandmother. On the other side, another bedroom with a room off it which was as big as the bedroom but was used for storage.

Then, up on the next floor, there were one, two, three bedrooms and a bath in the front of the house, and what was then called the sewing room. Then, you went down a flight of steps to a door, and there were one or two rooms for servants (I've forgotten whether there were one or two), and a big storage room, out of which came the most peculiar things when we had to break up the house (among others, a straw frame for hoop skirts.) I don't think anything had been taken out of the room for twenty-five or thirty years.

My grandfather was a Democrat, and a Democrat in upstate New York was an oddity. He didn't think much of the local papers, so he always had the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle sent to him. It was a family custom to gather round the table in grandfather's bedroom while grandfather read the things he considered important that day. My older sister and brother sat in on those. I was too little. I knew that and never participated.

I may mention, however, my grandfather was what used to be called a "free thinker." He got his Phi Beta Kappa key back in 1835 when he was in Union Law School. In those days, Phi Beta Kappa was thought to

Seiler: be - was intended to be - an organization of free thinkers. That's what Phi Beta Kappa means - "philosophy, the key of life."

He never would go to church. We were Episcopalians, and I can still remember my grandmother asking him to go and he, retorting with a grin, "No. I'm glad to pay for the pew, but you go and sit in it." [Laughter]

Gluck: They didn't quite share those attitudes, then?

Seiler: No, no. He didn't go to church. All the rest of the family was very orthodox, I should say. But I do remember, and I think his attitude must have been somehow bred into me as a background, although, I can't remember any long lectures on ethical subjects.

It seems to me it was very early in my life that I realized you didn't judge people by what they had but by what they were, which has always seemed very, very important to me. I have an idea that many of these things were, as it were, offshoots of my grandfather's conversation and other things that went on in the house.

Gluck: He was retired at the time the family was in the house?

Seiler: No. He was still a practicing lawyer. He retired when he was about eighty-one or eighty-two; he died when he was eighty-four. The last year or so, we had an old Civil War veteran who acted as companion to him, helped him around.

Gluck: How old was he when you moved into the house?

Seiler: Let me just subtract. He was about seventy-four; he was still practicing.

Gluck: And it was your mother, and the three children, and your grandmother, and grandfather?

Seiler: And a maiden aunt.

Gluck: What was your grandmother like? Was she a very protected Victorian woman?

Seiler: Very, I would say. One of my earliest and most charming

Seiler: recollections was when I was quite small. Theoretically, the door to my grandfather's bed-sitting room was always closed, and you knocked before you went in. But being small, I disregarded that and swung the door open and discovered my grandmother sitting on my grandfather's lap. I was so surprised. I'd never seen anything like that before in my life. [Laughter]

Gluck: They never showed any sign of affection in front of the others?

Seiler: Not that I remember--certainly nothing like that. But I remember that very well.

I also remember they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, and my eldest aunt came back from St. Louis where she lived, and that was very exciting. That was in 1899. My grandmother died very soon after that of pneumonia.

Gluck: So she died when you were still quite young, then?

Seiler: Yes, She died when I was about eight, and my grandfather died when I was ten.

Gluck: What was your grandmother's life like? Was it very protected, or did she go out to club meetings?

Seiler: I don't remember anything like a club. They went out to receptions, as they were called in those days. And I also remember that they had perpetually going in the winter what was called duplicate whist. Do you know what that is? It's very entertaining.

They had boards just big enough to hold four hands of cards under elastics. And they had a series of them -- I don't know exactly how many -- I would guess probably twenty. This went on all winter. As I recall, they had two tables always in the front parlor. And they played the boards all the way through, and kept track of their scores.

The boards were shifted one to the right, so they went through again playing the hands their opponents had played, and then compared the scores at the end. That was called duplicate whist, and they did it all winter long.

No, my grandmother was quite an attractive woman; rather small, and she led a quite normal social life. My grandfather didn't like very well having

Seiler: people asked to meals. I do remember that. It had to be arranged with him beforehand, and there were not very many people he liked to have invited.

Also, when people came to the house, they normally were calling on my grandmother, and aunt, and mother, so we entertained at the front. Only very occasionally were they taken back to my grandfather's room.

Gluck: So he was somewhat of the remote patriarch.

Seiler: Somewhat, yes.

Gluck: What was your mother's life like?

Seiler: She was mostly concerned, of course, with us. She was very ill in the beginning, when we came home. I was only six months old and am just saying what I was told. I think, for a while, they weren't quite sure she was going to recover. But then, she grew stronger. She had grown up in Ithaca so she had plenty of friends there. She didn't do anything special that I can recall in the way of church work; it's possible that she did and I didn't know it. We all went to church very regularly.

One of my happiest recollections is that during Lent I always went across the park where our church was, with my mother, for the five o'clock Lenten services, which I enjoyed very much.

Gluck: But you don't recall her being active outside the household?

Seiler: No, I really don't. Incidentally, my mother, being very maternal, I think was sympathetic about suffrage, but I would never say that she was a confirmed suffragist. I don't think it would ever have occurred to her if her daughters hadn't been so much interested.

Gluck: Your grandfather, of course, died before it was --

Seiler: He died in 1901.

Gluck: You have no sense of what he felt about it.

Seiler: No. And I think what got us interested was that Mrs. Blatch's daughter, Nora Stanton Blatch, was a student at Cornell and a great friend of my sister's. I can remember Nora coming to dinner and much discussion of suffrage and so forth and so on. So, it was no surprise

Seiler: when my sister graduated that she should take a very active part in suffrage in New York.

Gluck: At this point, though, your grandmother and grandfather had both died, so there was no question about what their attitudes would have been.

Seiler: That's right. No, I have no idea.

Gluck: When you mentioned that your family traced back to pre-Revolutionary times, that was on your mother's side?

Seiler: Both sides.

Gluck: Were your mother and father separated or divorced?

Seiler: They were originally just separated -- when I was six months old. My mother didn't get the divorce until 1900. My grandfather insisted that she get it because he felt he wasn't going to live much longer, and he wanted that all settled - for matters of the estate - I suspect.

Gluck: That was one of the things I wondered -- it was very unusual in those early days for a woman to be divorced, with the attitudes towards--

Seiler: Yes, and my mother, I think, was definitely made to feel it when she returned to the bosom of an orthodox Episcopal family; that this living away from the husband was not the thing to do. I definitely suffered very much when I was a small child because my sister told me, very early, that I must not ask my mother any questions about it. So I really hadn't the remotest idea where my father was or what was the matter with him. It bothered me a great deal as a child. Other children -- some of them had fathers who worked in Buffalo or someplace like that and came home on the weekends, but they came home. I was the only one who had no father.

Of course, I have since thought that, in spite of its enormous disadvantages which I recognize, it also probably was partly responsible for my somewhat more friendly and less critical attitude toward men. I really never, in my family, encountered the thing known as a dominating male. My grandfather then was too old and too mellow and, of course, charming with us children; he never was, I think, the tyrannical sort. I just grew up liking men [laughter] and never have seen any cause to change my mind.

Gluck: Do you recall suffering any ostracism or isolation from other children in school because of your mother's divorce?

Seiler: No, no. I remember the milkman, to whose beautiful dairy farm I was sent to spend my summers after I'd had a very bad attack of flu, when he introduced me to people, he always introduced me as Judge Ellsworth's granddaughter, and I was very pleased. [Laughter]

Grandfather was really the most important person in my group; I used to spend a great many hours with him after he was retired. He mostly sat about in a chair on the porch or in the house.

Gluck: You had no contact at all with your father or his family, then, until you were--

Seiler: I think I was eight the first time we were invited over to Buffalo by my grandmother to spend Christmas. That was the first time I ever saw my father. Then, we also went back the year they had the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo (1901). We spent almost the whole summer in Buffalo going to the fair every other day and staying with my grandmother and my father. That was about all.

Gluck: So it was very minimal contact.

In the household, were there any differences in the expectations for you and your sister as compared to your brother in terms of education or what you would do?

Seiler: No, my father had been a Cornell man, and it was always taken for granted that we would all go to college.

Gluck: The girls, too?

Seiler: Oh yes.

Gluck: Had your mother been educated at Cornell?

Seiler: Mother had wanted to be a doctor, but they told her that she didn't have the physique for it. I think many girls were discouraged in that age by telling them that it was too strenuous and they could never do it. So she didn't go to college. She was always quite resentful, I think, that she hadn't. I don't remember but I don't think there was a finishing school in Ithaca in her days. I don't recall that she did anything in the way of a special school after she finished high school.

- Gluck: So the granddaughters, then, were the first generation of women actually to be educated?
- Seiler: Yes, to go on to college. As far as I know.
- Gluck: It was primarily just assumed that you would all go on to school.
- Seiler: Oh, yes. We were all infected with the Cornell idea. Students frequently came to call on my sister. No it was just taken for granted that we would all go to Cornell. We were always invited to parties at the Sigma Phi fraternity - my grandfather's fraternity at Union.
- Gluck: And was it assumed that you would have careers, or just the education?
- Seiler: I think it was assumed that my sister would because she was utterly devoted to my grandfather. At that time, she herself wanted to be a lawyer. That was the idea. She abandoned it only after she took a year off between her junior and senior years in college and came down and worked for a year in New York. Then it was that she fell in love with Wall Street and decided that she preferred to go into the bond and stock business rather than be a lawyer.
- Gluck: There was encouragement in the family for the idea of her possibly practicing law?
- Seiler: Yes. There was never anything said against it. She must, I think, have discussed it quite often with grandfather. And of course, she was determined to do well in school. She got Phi Beta Kappa, too, and has always had my grandfather's key. I was so cross that there was only one large key that when I got mine, I bought the smallest one there was [laughter] -- it's about an inch long. I was so furious that I couldn't have my grandfather's.
- Gluck: Nora Blatch first came into your home when you were how old -- in high school, wasn't it?
- Seiler: Let me think. My sister graduated in 1908, but she could have graduated in 1907. She took a year off because she wanted to make up her mind what she wanted really to do. She wound up graduating in the same class with my brother though she was actually ahead of him.

Nora must have been in and out of our house in

Seiler: in 1903 or '04, I would think. Somewhere in there. I only remember that they were in college at the same time and saw a good deal of each other.

Gluck: What was the response of your mother and your aunt to her and the ideas that she was bringing in, do you recall?

Seiler: I don't remember, and I doubt very much that they were talked of before them -- probably not.

Gluck: Do you recall your first reactions to her and some of her ideas? You were awfully young at the time.

Seiler: Well, I can only tell you something that I thought was quite funny. In high school, the speech teacher thought it would be highly instructive to have a debate on woman's suffrage. She picked out two girls, of which I was one, to do the affirmative, and two boys to uphold the negative. And we had a spirited debate before the school assembly.

The really funny thing was that in the heat of rebuttal, I announced in firm tones, "The more responsibility you give women, the more they'll have," and there was a burst of howls from the audience, and I couldn't imagine for the moment what I'd said that was so funny. I heard about that for years afterwards.

Well, we won the debate, but then I was not especially interested in suffrage. I don't ever remember being interested again in it until I was in college. One day, the boy that I was engaged to -- somebody had said something about the law about suffrage, and I heard him saying, rather smugly, "Laura doesn't believe in suffrage or any of that nonsense," and all of a sudden, I knew I did! [Laughter]

That must have been around my junior year, and I forthwith started the Suffrage Club at Cornell among the coeds.

Gluck: I see. So there was a contact with probably germination of ideas that didn't really come to --

Seiler: No, I wasn't doing anything about it. My sister was already working furiously for it in New York, but I wasn't doing anything about it except reading some of the books.

Gluck: You graduated from high school in 1907?

Seiler: Yes, and Cornell didn't take girls until they were seventeen, so I had to wait a year. I spent the winter of that year down in Panama. My father was the official estimator -- he was an architect -- on buildings for the canal zone when they were building the canal. My grandmother had been down there with him, and he thought it would be very nice if I came down and spent the winter with my grandmother and him. So I did that; I was there from about October 'til February.

Gluck: You didn't do anything special down there?

Seiler: No, no -- just had a lot of fun. I got back just in time to take the last semester in school again. I took some post-graduate work. Then, the following autumn, I went to the university.

CORNELL: ENTERING THE SUFFRAGE FRAY

Gluck: What was your course of study at the University?

Seiler: I took an Arts course, as my sister had done. My brother was both an engineer and a naval architect. I got Phi Beta Kappa, for reasons that were a great surprise to me, since I had not concentrated on high marks, especially. Meeting one of my professors coming up the hill one day, I expressed my surprise. He said, "Well, it was kind of a relief to be able to vote for somebody who hadn't always had her nose in a book."

Gluck: When you entered Cornell, did you have any idea about the course of study you wanted to take, or what you were going to do in the future?

Seiler: I wouldn't say that I had any very clear idea because years afterwards, when I was invited back to Cornell to make a vocational speech to girls, the Dean of Women said to me laughing, "Laura, do you know what you put on your application when you came in? As a freshman, you were asked what you intended to do. You put down that you intended to be a teacher, and the next question was why, and you said, 'Because they have such long summer vacations.' "[Laughter] That shows you just how much I had in mind about a career.

I took the minimum number of courses in modern languages to get by for my major, and every year, when I took my list of courses up to be okayed by my faculty adviser, he would heave a large sigh and say, "I suppose if you don't intend to teach, it doesn't matter, because this is a salad course." [Laughter]

I just took the courses that interested me. I took evolution, and comparative religions, and lots of philosophy, some psychology -- all kinds of things --

Seiler: and, as I say, a minimum of my major.

Gluck: Was your expectation of having a career, though, at that time?

Seiler: Yes, I expected to do something but had no idea what. My sister would never have let me get to that point without a definite idea that I was going to have a career.

Gluck: That was one of my questions, in fact. Did you see combining a career and marriage, then, when you were a student at Cornell and before you had actually married?

Seiler: I guess I must have because I definitely was engaged when I left Cornell, and I also was definitely planning to do something. You see, when my grandfather's estate was settled, he had four daughters; the estate was divided evenly among them, except that he subtracted from my mother's part the very considerable sums of money that he had advanced to her during her most unsatisfactory marriage. So that my mother with three children got very much less than the other three who had no children, which made it quite tough.

By the time we were ready to come down to New York, I don't think there was very much capital left. I always expected that I would be doing something in the way of earning a living; I had no very definite ideas about it.

Gluck: It was while you were at Cornell that you became involved in the suffrage movement?

Seiler: It was a very natural thing for me to be interested in suffrage because of my sister's association with Nora Blatch, granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

My sister graduated in 1908 and went to New York and was the vice-president of The Women's Political Union, which was, I think, the most militant of the national organizations.

Of course, I took time off and went down and marched in the suffrage parade, at my sister's behest.

Gluck: Was that the 1913 parade?

Seiler: I'm not quite sure. I would have thought it was 1912. At any rate, Inez Milholland led it, looking very beautiful. There were both jeers and cheers from

Seiler: the sidewalk.

Gluck: Did you march in the Cornell contingent?

Seiler: No, probably with The Women's Political Union.

There were not very many people interested in suffrage at Cornell at the time I started the Suffrage Club in 1912. I don't know whether it was my idea or whether my sister asked me to do it. I just called, or put up a notice, or something. I didn't live at the dormitory; I lived at home. I called a meeting in our general auditorium, explained to them about the suffrage movement. (I think it was after I'd been down to march in the parade, probably.)

Gluck: How many women showed up at the meeting?

Seiler: Cornell at that time had only about three hundred women and some four thousand men. I'd say we probably had a pretty big club before we got through. And of course it went on after I left. I should guess that we must have had at least seventy-five, something like that. It was fairly popular with the women.

Gluck: What sort of activities did the club engage in then?

Seiler: Mostly talk, among themselves, except for one occasion when we staged a debate.

The Debate Debacle

Seiler: One of the men students came over to see me one day to say that his mother, who was a prominent anti-suffragist, was coming to visit him. He asked if I would like to arrange a debate while she was there. I was entitled to ask that one of the big auditoriums be set aside, and so I said, "Yes, I would."

I didn't think it was suitable for a person my age to debate his mother. So I consulted the head of the Women's Club in Ithaca, the wife of an instructor. She agreed to debate. She was a very earnest young woman but not a skilled debater.

The woman who came from New York was a very "grand dame" indeed, with all the polished manners to go with

Seiler: debating. Sitting up on the platform, as chairman, I became congealed with horror because what was developing was a hair-pulling performance, setting the audience into fits of laughter. The woman from New York would say, "Now my esteemed opponent has said so-and-so," and the other woman, who was by then furious at the customary misleading statements that anti-suffragists specialized in, would say, "What she says is not so!" or, "That's a lie!"

And I, of course, grew frantic realizing that the audience, many of whom were townspeople as well as students, were going out to laugh their heads off; certainly, it was going to do suffrage no good. I also knew chairmen were supposed to keep their mouths shut, but I was a suffragist and I wasn't going to let this thing go down the river.

So I rose up at the end and thanked both of them and then proceeded -- rather crisply, I think -- in about five minutes, to point out to them the difference between personality and causes; they could leave either confirmed in reaction with the anti-suffragists or planning to go ahead with the suffragists. And as sometimes happens in those circumstances, I was so convinced that I was right that I felt about eight feet tall and I've never spoken better - with the result that I got an ovation at the end.

It did result in more women students joining our suffrage organization. All together it turned out well in the end, except that I received a letter of reprimand from my sister who said, "Well, I hope you realize now all you did was to furnish an audience and a platform for an anti-suffragist."

But I continued to believe that people should hear both sides of the story. It may not have been good maneuvering, but I thought it was the honest way to do it.

Gluck: Aside from this experience with the debate, do you recall any heckling or ridicule on the part of the other students towards the women who were suffragists?

Seiler: No. Of course, we were not very aggressive suffragists. We met in the women's dormitory. Except for this debate, I don't recall that we did any other public things -- just meetings by ourselves.

Gluck: The group had been going for a while before the debate

Gluck: was presented.

Seiler: Yes.

Gluck: Was there any connection between the college club and any suffrage group active in the town itself?

Seiler: No, not that I recall. The woman I had asked to debate was not the head of a suffrage group; she was head of the Women's Club in Ithaca. No, I don't recall that there was any special connection. Contrary to the way it really is here in Claremont, the town and gown were very separate in Ithaca. They had a town and gown club in which a few men and women from the city joined with the faculty. But basically, the University was up on the hill and the town was down in the valley and they had not too much to do with each other.

Gluck: Do you recall there being a suffrage group in the town?

Seiler: Oddly enough, I don't. I think the Women's Club may have been vaguely interested, but I don't remember. I'm sure if there had been a suffrage society, I would have asked the head of that instead of the president of the Women's Club. No, that was fairly early in the suffrage movement. I don't know, of course, about Mrs. Catt's organization; I have no idea how widespread suffrage organizations were then. Mrs. Blatch had concentrated largely in and around New York City.

ORGANIZING FOR SUFFRAGE IN THE WESTERN COUNTIES
OF NEW YORK

Seiler: Then, when I graduated, The Women's Political Union decided that it would be a very good thing for me to go and "organize" as they then called it, the two counties of Chautauqua and Cattaraugus in New York State. I think that perhaps my endeavors were among the early ones to organize the counties. Certainly nobody had been in those counties before. More work had probably been done up in Westchester and places like that, nearer New York, but I think perhaps mine was the first attempt to organize the western counties.

Gluck: Were these basically farming communities?

Seiler: No, they were small towns with manufacturing. Of course, there was lots of farming in between. In those days, the population was much, much less than now. Mostly they were small towns with one factory, let's say, or some kind of business in which the people worked -- like Jamestown and Silver Creek and places like that. My mother, who was not a confirmed suffragist but a very charming Victorian, went along to chaperone me.

I had a little list given me of people thought to be sympathizers, and I was supposed to go in and organize them and leave a unit behind to go on working. Ahead of time, I had to send the newspapers a little publicity, telling them what it was going to be about. When I got there, I had to contact all these women and get them organized.

Then, I had to make a street speech. That was in the days when you could still rent cars where the back went down. So, we would rent a car and put an enormous banner across the back of it. Then I would stand up on the back seat to make a speech.

Of course, the most difficult moment for a street

Seiler: speaker is getting a crowd. As in all small towns, the most -- well, how shall I put it? -- the most popular corner of the street was the one that held the bar. I always directed the chauffeur to stop just outside the bar.

My mother, who was small, and charming, and utterly Victorian, and convinced that all good things started with the favor of the male, would go through the swinging doors and say, "Gentlemen, my daughter is going to talk about suffrage outside, and I think you would be interested. I hope you'll come out." And just like the Pied Piper, they would all dump their drinks on the bar and come out and make the nucleus of the crowd.

Then, I was always embarrassed to have to take up a collection. I was convinced they thought we put it in our own pockets. But mother had no such qualms. She would circulate about giving out the pamphlets and holding out a basket and saying, "I'm sure you want to help the cause," and the folding money would come in. She was invaluable!

Gluck: Did she become a believer?

Seiler: Oh, well, as long as her daughters believed in it; but she never did any work for suffrage that I recall. She did a lot for the Red Cross but I don't recall her working for suffrage.

Gluck: You mentioned that you had a banner on the car. Do you recall what the banner would say? Was it purple, gold and white?

Seiler: Yes, that's right. The white was for purity, of course; the green was for courage; and the purple was for justice. That's supposed to be the explanation that we gave.

Gluck: And the banner was just one side of the car?

Seiler: No. It was a big one and it covered the whole back of the car. You know how, on the old-fashioned cars, the back went down. The banner would cover practically the entire back; it made a very effective device for public speaking.

Gluck: You didn't have any "votes for women" banners?

Seiler: I don't recall; we had lots of literature but I don't recall any other banners. The big one we carried with us, just for this purpose. But of course they had lots of those in the New York office, lots of "votes for women"

Seiler: and other types of placards that were carried in small demonstrations.

Appealing to the Men

Gluck: What was the usual argument that you would give in your speeches?

Seiler: That varied a little, according to the type of town. In general, it was the injustice of it and the fact, also, that the injustice affected men indirectly; it held down the wages of all of them if women were underpaid.

Once, in a small town, I had a very amusing experience. We'd been the guests in the house of a man who owned a factory - a very charming young man and his wife. I made a speech and, in the course of it, I reminded the crowd that the only way men had been able really to affect their wages, and conditions, and so forth was getting together into unions and bringing pressure to bear. A ripple of laughter swept the crowd and I couldn't imagine why until I got back to my host's home. He told me that he had spent all the last year fighting their efforts to form a union. So here I was, under his auspices, advising them to do it. [Laughter]

Well, things like that happened. And we also, of course, were aware that there were still dreadful conditions in factories in those days. We bore down on things of that sort. Child labor was by no means unheard of - anymore than it is today.

We used all sorts of arguments, depending a good deal on the audience and on the woman who was making the speech.

Gluck: Actually, it was a broader position than the suffrage position, then? Many suffragists would focus only on the vote and wouldn't deal with other social issues.

Seiler: At least my feeling is that most of us focused on the importance of the vote to change social conditions.

Gluck: In these small towns, when you traveled around in the chauffeured car, what sorts of reactions did you get?

Seiler: We didn't travel in chauffeured cars; we didn't have that kind of money. We rented a car in each place.

Gluck: Specifically for the purpose of speaking? What sort of reactions did you get from your audiences?

Seiler: In general -- how much was due to my good mother, I don't know -- I remember considerable enthusiasm and, also, a great deal of good-natured tolerance on the part of the men. And, as I say, rather good collections.

Gluck: Did you pass around petitions for their signatures after the talk?

Seiler: No, I don't recall and petitions. We always gave out a good many pamphlets on one thing and another.

Gluck: Was the audience primarily men?

Seiler: It would be in the evening, after dinner, that we made these speeches, in order to catch the men off work; the crowd would be mostly men.

Gluck: It sounds like -- from the one speech you mentioned where you talked about unions -- that you basically did speak to a working class group.

Seiler: The people you're likely to pick up in a street crowd are nearly all of them from that class, except for a few others that might really be interested in suffrage or might just happen to be roaming around.

Organizing the Women

Gluck: Did you make efforts to try to reach, say, the middle class?

Seiler: That was the whole object of leaving behind a definite affiliated organization, in other words, a chapter of The Women's Political Union.

In most of the small towns, where I had the names of perhaps three or four women who were thought to be sympathetic, they would arrange a house meeting for the purpose of forming a group. I would talk to the women about it, and provide them with the materials, and tell them how to organize and so forth.

It was up to them, then, to do the local work on all classes. And, of course, usually the people whose names we had as sympathizers were definitely upper class or upper middle class. They were people who had traveled and for some reason or another had expressed some interest in suffrage. I don't recall any laboring class women who were ever on that list.

Seiler: Of course, that was very fortunate for us. We were trying to reach the local leaders in small towns and let them conduct the local organization work. It was called an organization trip and that's just what it was.

Gluck: Were you fairly successful in each of these towns?

Seiler: Yes, I would think we'd say so. We left behind a good nucleus of women who would then start in to plan and to work actively, to do things themselves. Oh yes, it bore fruit, definitely. And of course, it gave the central organization a chapter with which to work directly to make suggestions; the chapter could ask questions and get material to us, just the way a political organization would work.

Some of those women that I organized went on into quite extensive suffragist experiences. One of them, I remember somewhat to my dismay, later joined Alice Paul's group and was hunger-striking in Washington.

I'm quite sure that that kind of campaigning did a lot of good, because we reached people, I'm sure, who were not in the least interested in suffrage up to that moment.

Gluck: What was the age of the women in the small towns that you would pull together into a suffrage group?

Seiler: My recollection is, mostly not so young; married. I would say perhaps women in their late thirties, middle forties.

Gluck: How long did you spend in this campaign going to these small towns?

Seiler: All summer. In other words, as soon as I got my degree. I was the last; the others were already in New York. Mother waited until I was through school; then we went immediately and started on the campaign. I think we spent probably about six weeks in each county, and that made it about the first of September when we got back to New York.

NEW YORK CITY: ENTRANCE INTO THE SUFFRAGE POLITICS OF
THE WOMEN'S POLITICAL UNION

- Gluck: When you graduated and went on the tour, was your expectation that after the tour you would go back to New York and work?
- Seiler: We were going to New York; that's where my sister and brother already were. There was no question of where we were going.
- Gluck: Your sister was down in New York already working?
- Seiler: Yes, on Wall Street.
- Gluck: And your brother had gone into what field?
- Seiler: My brother had taken both marine architecture and mechanical engineering; he got degrees in both of them. He had wanted very much to do marine architecture, but there was absolutely nothing going on like that when he left college. He went for a little while into the "experimental basin," as they call it, in Washington.
- Eventually he came out to the Atlantic Gulf and Pacific Company and was their head engineer, for many years before he died. I don't remember too much about those years in between. It was very difficult for him; he couldn't do what he wanted to do.
- Gluck: You went to New York City, following these tours you made with the car, is that it?
- Seiler: Yes, and I was the head of The Women's Political Union Speakers' Bureau for quite a long time. I had had training in Cornell in public speaking. I was supposed to coach all the volunteer speakers; we spoke on the street corners every night. I didn't do the speaker's job for more than six months, perhaps. Not very long.

Seiler: I didn't approve of several things Mrs. Blatch did within the organization. I felt her very arbitrary and didn't like her too well.

Gluck: So you went to work for The Women's Political Union. You mentioned earlier that they were the most militant national group at the time. In what ways?

Seiler: When I speak of the Women's Political Union as the most militant, I have in mind that we believed much more in demonstrations, in street speaking, and in things of that kind which I don't remember as being characteristic of the other organizations. For instance, we spoke on street corners every night of the week, using soap boxes with handles on them which every suffragette carried out and plunked down on the curbstone. We had to have permits for speaking, but we got them from the police department.

Now the others may have done a lot of street speaking but if so, I wasn't conscious of it. They mostly spoke in halls and so on. But we believed you had to get to people who weren't in the least interested in suffrage. That was the whole theory.

Gluck: How many of you would go on to the street corner when you spoke?

Seiler: Of course, it depended. We had really a lot of volunteers. I would say there must have been at least ten or twelve out of our office speaking on street corners every night.

Gluck: Where was the office?

Seiler: The office that I remember best, and I think it was there all the time, was just off Fifth Avenue on 42nd Street, almost opposite the library.

The Structure of The Women's Political Union

Gluck: Can you tell me more about the way in which that organization was structured, how decisions were made, and the leadership role.

Seiler: The president was Mrs. Blatch, and my sister was the vice-president. I can't remember all the personnel.

Seiler: The board made the decisions. Mrs. Blatch, of course, was always in the office. I think Mrs. Blatch was the only officer who was all the time at headquarters. The others were all having jobs of their own, of one kind or another, and they were just serving on the board. I don't remember too much about that. Of course, I was not on the board; I only know a little from hearsay.

It was a fairly good sized organization, and of course we had many, many volunteers. As you know, most of the suffrage work was done by volunteers. We had lots of volunteer speakers.

After I left the suffrage organization, and went into advertising, I spoke for them every so often -- rather often, as a matter of fact. During the campaign in New York State for suffrage, at which we were turned down, I did speak. I took time off and had my daughter looked after and spoke continuously for the last week or so.

Gluck: When you were with The Women's Political Union as head of the Speakers' Bureau, were you actually a paid employee?

Seiler: No. I may have been, a small sum. I was living with my mother and sister, and I don't remember that. I very likely must have been.

Gluck: But you were doing only that at that time?

Seiler: Yes, that's all. I was training speakers and giving them their assignments and doing a lot of speaking myself.

Gluck: How many speakers were there?

Seiler: They were on a voluntary basis and some did much more speaking than others. We did have, especially at campaign times, a certain number of women who were taken on and paid small sums; probably just enough to cover their expenses. But that was never a very great item. You were supposed to be giving your time and yourself as much as you could afford to. The secretaries, of course, were paid, like anybody else. But most of the work was really done by volunteers.

Gluck: You said that most of the women were probably in their late thirties or early forties?

Seiler: Some of them were older. We had [laughter] a large roster of very famous older women who came in and stuffed envelopes and did things of that kind.

Relationship Between Suffrage Groups

Gluck: Was there any feeling of competition with the other, more conservative, suffragists?

Seiler: They often didn't agree on tactics. Mrs. Blatch, I may say, was married to an Englishman, but I don't know whether she had lived a long time in England or not. At any rate, we as a society were much closer to the English group than any of the others.

I've forgotten the exact title of Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont's group. I think it was the Woman's Suffrage Organization, or something like that. Mrs. Catt's was, of course, the National Organization. (National American Woman Suffrage Association). I think there was a feeling (among these groups) that the things the women were doing in England were rather outrageous and they wanted no part of them; whereas, Mrs. Blatch felt -- which accounts in part for the name of the organization -- Women's Political Union -- that the only way they were ever really going to get anywhere was to exert political pressure.*

Consequently, there were very friendly relations with the Pankhursts and with many other English people. Mrs. Pankhurst came, I know, and addressed a large dinner meeting. Sylvia Pankhurst came over and also spoke, and I think we raised some money for her at one time or another. Beatrice Forbes-Robertson was here -- people like that.

The Englishwomen were a much more radically oriented group, I would say, than the Americans ever were. We did no chaining of ourselves to lamp posts. The nearest approach to it, of course, was Alice Paul, with her

*The name was taken from the British group, The Women's Social and Political Union.
(Editor's note)

Seiler: hunger strikers.

And there's no doubt about it, her effort is what precipitated the president's decision to bring the matter before Congress. I'm very sure that if Alice Paul had not carried on those demonstrations, it would have gone on years more before it ever got to the Congress. I think we should give her due credit.

Gluck: What was the reaction of the Women's Political Union when Alice Paul formed the National Woman's Party?

Seiler: We had, as you would expect, a mixture of conservatives and more radical ones. I think there was a general feeling that they were going too far. That wasn't true of all of them, and there was a great deal of sympathy for what she was trying to do. But I think there was a good deal of scepticism as to the wisdom of some of the things she did.

Gluck: I have read accounts which vary. I know Harriot Stanton Blatch said, at one point, that she was responsible for bringing the militant tactics to the United States although Alice Paul was the one to whom that was attributed.

Seiler: I think that is true because, certainly, Mrs. Blatch was working on these things long before Alice Paul came into the picture at all. But I think Alice Paul carried them to the extreme, and went far beyond anything Mrs. Blatch would have suggested herself. That's my impression.

Gluck: Was there a very clear separation between the groups? For instance, were there women involved in your group who might also be involved in --

Seiler: I don't think so. The tactics were quite different and the leadership was very different, and I would be surprised if there were. There may have been someone disgruntled with one group who went into another -- that's quite possible -- but I don't remember any women who ever worked for two at once.

Gluck: You say there were other causes that most of the women in the Women's Political Union espoused. Now, for instance, unions --

Seiler: Yes. Of course, they didn't all agree about that, either.

Seiler: They were all interested in the remnants of child labor - which still existed. You may recall that was the period of the horrible Shirtwaist Fire (Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, 1911) and all that sort of thing. There were plenty of abuses.

I remember when I visited my sister for a summer vacation before I was through college. She got me a press card to the old Morning Telegraph. The editor sent me on assignments, one of which was the Hobo Convention at which Debs was supposed to appear; he didn't, because I think at that time he was in jail. Bill Haywood came to the convention and spoke in place of Debs. There were lots of reporters there.

We all held a little spoofy meeting when we discovered we were not going to have Mr. Debs. Reporters made speeches and they asked "Sis Hopkins" - which was me - to make one; we all wrote that up for the papers. I remember that the Morning Telegraph published two versions of this, one by the man and one by the woman (me), side by side.

What really reminded me of that (newspaper) was, among other things, the editor told me, for my own education, to visit the women's night court, which I did. I was quite horrified at what seemed to me the disregard of women's feelings and rights. I remember one case, especially. It was the trial of a prostitute; and, no doubt, she was a prostitute. Her lawyer said something about it was her word against the policeman. There were no witnesses. The judge said pontifically, "The word of an officer needs no corroboration." I was enraged! That's the one thing I remember clearly out of that assignment.

That attitude was, of course, general: women were viewed as second-class citizens. There's no two ways about it. Their advice was not taken seriously and their opinions were not given the same weight as those of men. I don't think anybody argues about that anymore. It's still true, of course.

Gluck: Was there a connection between your group and, for instance, the Women's Self Supporting League or the Women's Trade Union League both of which were attempting to bridge the gap between women in industry and suffrage?

Seiler: We had a very marvelous woman, Florence Kelley (of the National Consumers League), who was on our board, as I

Seiler: recall it. A very fine person. As I remember it, she was especially interested in the trade union movement for women.

I remember doing a brochure. I had carefully dug out of the library all of the instances where women were discriminated against. When the pamphlet came out, Florence Kelley sent for me and she said, "I wonder if you have any idea how really unfair this pamphlet is?"

"It's all there in black and white," I responded. "Yes," she said, "but so often there are the balancing laws against these." I remember her saying to me, "In addition to the dower rights, there are the things called courtesy rights which help to offset these. And that's true in all statements. It's true of all the statements you've made." I was crushed.

What I had said was true, but it was not true in the sense of the whole truth; I think she impressed that on me forever more. She was a quite marvelous person.

There were others, like Dr. Anna Shaw, who were outstanding just as people.

Gluck: Was she fairly active in the Women's Political Union, too?

Seiler: I'm not at all sure that she belonged to the Women's Political Union or whether she sort of stood outside of all the organizations. She spoke for us very, very often, and she may well have been, but that I don't remember. I think of her as a national suffragist figure.

Gluck: She seems to have been quite often associated with Carrie Chapman Catt.

Seiler: Yes, I think she was. She stands in my mind with a little group of very fine and prominent women who lent their support to suffrage, but I don't associate her with any special group.

Gluck: Were there any ties between the suffragists and the early birth control movement?

Seiler: Yes. Margaret Sanger was quite a good friend of my sister's. She started those clinics in New York that were periodically closed up by the police and reopened

Seiler: and argued over and so forth.

Gluck: Would the women in the Women's Political Union, for instance, give outright support for something like that - which was still quite illegal?

Seiler: I think that would have been an entirely individual affair. I think many of them were very interested and admired Mrs. Sanger very much, but I'm very, very sure that I don't ever remember the Women's Political Union endorsing anything outside of its own interests. I don't think they could have; the women in it were much too diverse. There would be such a risk of antagonizing those who didn't agree at all. There were women who believed all kinds of things. The only thing, you might say, that they all believed was that women ought to have the vote.

We had all faiths and all types of people working for suffrage, most diverse. In fact, for me it was a liberal education, meeting the kind of people I'd never come into contact with before. Some of them were most admirable. Every once in awhile, they'd provoke some funny things.

The daughter of Robert Ingersoll had a house in Gramercy Park and they used often to have little committee meetings there. Among others, one of the best workers in certain districts was a young Jewish girl from Russia, as I recall it. She attended a meeting one evening and took off her coat and gave it to the butler. Then she said, "Where is my check?" The butler said haughtily, "It won't be necessary, madam." /Laughter./ Of course, that little story went all around with great entertainment.

But it's a very good example of the complete cross-section that we had in the suffrage movement, and I must truthfully say that I never say any hint of snob-bishness. There may have been some here and there, but it seemed to me that we all worked together for this one thing, without regard.

I was, for instance, assigned to make campaign speeches in the section that was run by this same girl. I went and I did exactly what she asked me, and she said very approvingly, "Well, it's nice to know you really take orders!" I said, "Of course. I came over, as my assignment, to do what you wanted done in this area." Evidently she had encountered others who hadn't been

Seiler: quite so cooperative.

But, I do think that all kinds and conditions of women were working together for suffrage, with great unanimity on the whole.

Gluck: Was there a sort of sisterhood of women as a result of the common goal?

Seiler: Well, only within the organization. I guess I knew as many women who didn't believe in suffrage as who did. An awful lot violently disapproved. But certainly there was a great feeling of cooperation and admiration among the women who worked together.

Gluck: What were the reactions of friends of yours who were not involved in suffrage?

Seiler: They just thought it a lot of nonsense. I didn't happen to number among my friends any ardent anti-suffragists who did anything about it. Most of them were just plain indifferent and thought it was a great waste of time, that it would just all be the same.

You know, oddly enough, they anticipated what really happened. Most of my friends said, "This isn't going to make any difference; they're all going to vote the way their fathers and their husbands do anyway." You see, that was the burden of their song. As it happened, that's just about the way it turned out, unhappily.

Tactics: From "The Doxology" to Motorboats

Gluck: When you were coordinating the Speakers' Bureau, this was not just of women who went out onto the street and were speaking on soap boxes; they would also speak at gatherings?

Seiler: Oh yes, all kinds of things. One, that I remember, was very funny. A tiny little man in very shabby clothes -- a clergyman from a parish somewhere out in the wilds of Long Island -- came in one day and asked for a speaker for an evening meeting. He went to Mrs. Blatch and Mrs. Blatch brought him out to me.

Seiler: I had already assigned all my speakers for that evening, so I said I'd have to do it myself. My family was not exactly charmed by my taking these evening meetings, but I did when I had to. He said he would prefer a little older and more experienced woman. Mrs. Blatch came down hard on him and said, "Laura is one of our most experienced speakers," and went back into her office. So he was a little crushed.

He began to explain to me how I had to get there. I had to change buses twice and so forth, and also that his wife was in a wheelchair. She'd been in an accident. She was very anxious to have me come out for supper.

I went and it was quite an experience. They sent me upstairs to wash my hands, and the bathtub was full of goldfish. They had two little boys and the little boys had the upper part of the house. When I came back downstairs, they were standing at the foot of the stairs grinning, and their father said to me, "They wanted me to tell you that on Saturday nights, they take the fish out and take their baths." [Laughter]

Then we went over to the church and there was a small group of women. His wife was a very ardent suffragist and she had started this little group. The first thing he did was to ask me to play the doxology. I had never opened a suffrage meeting with a doxology before, but I was lucky enough to be able to play it and so I did.

Then the women clustered around afterward and told me all about this wife and I said, "How come the Doxology?" They said, "Well, Mrs. (whatever-her-name-was) puts more faith in God than in politicians." [Laughter]

So there were lots of funny little things like that that went on, too. It wasn't all difficult.

Gluck: You were married during a lot of this campaigning?

Seiler: Not during the two months in the summer. I was married the following October, after I got back from upstate New York.

Gluck: When you were in New York and coordinating the Speakers' Bureau, what were your husband's feelings about suffrage and your work?

Seiler: He was a very gentle and kind man.

Seiler: The only time I remember specifically upsetting him was when Nora Blatch and somebody else had made a riding trip through a couple of counties. They were always dreaming up stunts to get some publicity -- making speeches from horseback and so forth.

One morning, I was sitting in my office and they came bursting in from Mrs. Blatch's office and said to me, "You ride, don't you?" I said, "I haven't ridden since I left school." "But you do ride and you have a riding outfit?" Well, so-and-so -- whatever the friend's name was -- is ill. The horses are already ordered and we're going to ride down to city hall park and make a speech, and you'll have to take her place."

You didn't argue in suffrage. You took orders! I went home and put on my riding habit and came back. By the time I got back, the horses were dancing out on 42nd Street, very annoyed. I climbed on and they put big boards on the side of each horse announcing a meeting. Of course, the boards didn't please the horses; it hit them every time they moved.

All the sidewalks were lined with people and the buses were going by. There was much shouting at us. The policemen were furious with us for glomming up traffic.

We got down to city hall park just at noontime; it had been calculated that way. Everybody came out from their offices, and Nora made a pretty powerful speech from her horse. Mine was behaving very badly by then. I began to say, "Ladies and gentlemen," bouncing up and down. (They were English saddles and I'd never ridden in anything but an army or a Mexican saddle before.)

Then, just as I was launching into my speech, I glanced across the square and there stood my astonished and astounded new husband. At that very moment, a horrible little office boy jabbed a pin into my horse and she reared! I hung onto the front of this terrible English saddle and sawed on the curb bit and finally got the mare calmed down. But that was the end of my speech. We then took off back toward the office.

Between all the excitement and the saddle sores from not having ridden in a long time, I was in bed for a day. That was a little difficult to explain -- why suffragists had to make fools of themselves.

Gluck: His reaction was primarily how foolish it was?

Seiler: Well, just not caring to see his wife doing such things.

Then, of course, we presently did another thing. They decided it would be nice to hire a motorboat and run up and down the shoreline yelling, "Suffrage votes for women," at all the men who were loading cargos.

I was assigned along with Nora for this job. Of course, we always took reporters with us when we did things. This time, women reporters evidently had rebelled and we got two men, both of whom were definitely anti-suffrage and furious at the assignment.

The man who was hired with the motorboat evidently had not been told what we were going to do. When we explained, he said, "Oh, what the men are going to say to you!" [Laughter] Of course, that was perfectly true. As soon as the men began understanding that we were yelling about votes for women, they made replies that you might expect.

Meantime, as ferry boats went by everybody rushed to the side of the boat and the waves bounced us up and down. Both reporters, I remember, had to bail us out with their hats - just furious every minute.

When we finally got back, Nora said, "Now see that you give us a good write-up." I looked all through the papers the next day. There was one tiny little paragraph in a column.

A few days later I met one of the reporters who said he'd always hated suffragists. I said to him, "You certainly didn't do very well by us in the way of publicity." And he said, "Well, next time, just get yourself drowned and I promise you the first page." [Laughter] So there were lots of funny things as well.

Gluck: I vaguely recall -- it may have been more than one occasion when one of these boats went up the river, but I do recall a picture of a boat with the "votes for women" banner along the side of it. That may have been an excursion that you were on.

Seiler: No. Ours was a small motorboat containing about six terrified people. No, but I don't doubt that they had other demonstrations. In those days, there were the so-called "small river boats" which went up the Hudson from New York to Albany, and I'm sure that they must have, at one time or another, had a demonstration on one. Wherever

Seiler: they were having county fairs or things of that kind, there would be a booth, and people speaking, and handing out literature and banners.

Gluck: Did this motorboat that you were on have any signs at all?

Seiler: No, no, no. It was much too small. I would guess it was about ten or fifteen feet long; it was a very small motorboat.

Gluck: Did you have megaphones then?

Seiler: Yes, the yelling was done through megaphones. I acquired a good many four-letter words on that boat trip.

Gluck: How long did the trip last, do you recall?

Seiler: Two or three hours. We were all exhausted and thought we were going to be submerged. A group of men going on a fishing trip thought that it was funny to annoy us; they went round us in circles, leaving each time tremendous waves behind them until they almost swamped us. Then they decided that was maybe a little too much, and went away. Yes, there were lots of things like that.

Gluck: Did your husband ever march with you in the parades?

Seiler: No, he never had anything to do with it at all.

Gluck: Because I know there were men suffragists.

Seiler: Oh, yes, there were. I knew one of them -- Witter Bynner -- who was a poet and was one of the very early ones.

I think there were about a hundred men that marched in the parade the year I went down from college to march. And believe me, they had courage! Whooh! There was no one that I knew who would have been there, but there were lots of really quite outstanding men who marched in those parades.

Gluck: I have a photograph of a man waving from a car; I think it was that 1912 parade. There's a banner on the car saying "Men's something --

Seiler: That would have been the parade that I came down to march in the year before I graduated from college.

Gluck: I think Floyd Dell was the one who was --

Seiler: Well, Floyd Dell -- yes, I remember him now. It took so much more courage for a man to come out for woman's suffrage than it did for a woman. They were quite remarkable.

Gluck: Your husband was not anti-suffrage?

Seiler: No, just more or less indifferent to it.

Gluck: Were there particular people who seemed to dream up some of these things like with the boats and horses?

Seiler: I don't remember who was responsible for these ideas. They were, of course, always trying to think of ideas which would get us publicity. There were some women reporters who were very helpful to us -- who tried to get us all the publicity they legitimately could. But of course, they didn't mind how ridiculous the thing was.

Mrs. Blatch's whole idea was that you must keep suffrage every minute before the public so that they're used to the idea and talk about it, whether they agree or disagree. It must be something that everybody was conscious of. I think she was quite right.

Gluck: When you went on street corners, you actually had your own little box that you would set down?

Seiler: Yes. They were known among us as soap boxes. Each had a heavy handle on one end with which you carried the thing until you got to the corner.

Of course, sometimes, depending on the neighborhood, those were rather dangerous little times. Things were thrown down from roofs; sometimes stones were thrown into the crowd. I don't remember anybody actually being seriously injured, but they weren't fun!

Gluck: But there would be more than one of you usually going to these street meetings?

Seiler: There would be one speaker and one giving out pamphlets and things of that kind. Yes, as I recall it, there were always two.

Gluck: It must have been quite unusual for women in those days to be speaking out on the street corners.

Seiler: Yes, of course! It was considered outrageous by many

Seiler: people.

Gluck: Did the women in the Women's Political Union use the argument of the moral superiority of women, which a lot of the suffragists used?

Seiler: I don't remember that. Of course, I don't know what all the individual women did in their street speeches. I don't remember that being borne down on much. I remember a great argument, following the same meeting at which I was supposed to write up the workers' meeting.

I went home with a woman who had been a friend of my sister's, who was much more radical than I, and we fell into a discussion of the single standard. I remember it very well because I was a little shocked at the time. She said, "If we ever do get to have a single standard, it'll be the men's standard and not ours." She spoke from experience, and she was a newspaper woman. I don't remember women's moral superiority being especially emphasized.

In the first place, of course, we had this little ultra-radical group within the movement. I think it would have been a rather difficult argument to sustain. I certainly never used it in my speeches and I don't know whether other women did or not.

Gluck: In some groups, the argument seems to have been that women should have the vote because they would clean up politics because they were morally on a higher plane.

Seiler: Perhaps some of them really thought that. I used often to bear down on what I still believe: that there were certain things affected by politics, about which men were relatively unfit to judge, such as things that concerned children, schools, similar things. I felt women should have a much larger voice in controlling these things, and that there were just naturally a whole lot of facets to be considered.

I remember once going to make a speech somewhere, and on the way up there on the train, an idea occurred to me and I used it. I picked up a copy of the evening paper and held it up in front of them, and took one headline after another, and showed how the things talked about in that headline applied to women. I went all the way across the front page and there wasn't a single thing in the news in which women didn't have a stake. That was the thing we tried to get over.

- Gluck: Was the attempt primarily to convince the men directly or to have women work on men they knew?
- Seiler: We were supposed to do both. The speaking that I had most to do with was generally speaking with the idea of reaching as many people as we could. Of course, there would always be a few, then, who would want to really do something for suffrage, and they could join any organization they wanted to. I doubt very much that there was anything you could call a uniform policy. There was too much diversity of women involved; I don't think you could have (a uniform policy).
- Gluck: So within the Speakers' Bureau, for instance, you were concerned primarily in training women in terms of delivery rather than giving them ideas?
- Seiler: Yes. Of course, naturally, there were a few ideas we talked about. "This is a good way to say this," and "This pamphlet will be useful for this, that, and the other thing." But, no, basically my job was to show them how to speak more effectively and to assign them to set places where we needed speakers.

Personalities and Politics

- Gluck: When you mention that Mrs. Blatch was autocratic, was this in terms of the way in which decisions were made, or the way she related to the other workers?
- Seiler: Both, I would say. My sister might or might not agree with me, I don't know. From my point of view, she was very autocratic.
- Gluck: Did you have any open conflicts with her over this, or was it just a matter of being discomforted by it?
- Seiler: I violently disapproved of some of her policies; considering that we were a women's organization, I felt that we should be especially fair in our treatment of employees and so forth.*

*Editor's Note: The interviewee was unwilling to make public the details of her disagreement with Mrs. Blatch and shifted, rather, to a more general discussion of the disposition of several suffrage figures.

Seiler: I think many (suffrage leaders) were very difficult to work with. Certainly Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont had that reputation. I never worked for her. And, certainly, I think that Mrs. Blatch was. I don't think Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt ever had that reputation; I never heard that she did. I think that she had very firm opinions, but I always gathered that she was a person rather easy to get on with.

And, of course, Anna Howard Shaw was a wonderful person; she was never the head of any organization -- I don't think she ever wanted to be -- but she was a marvelous person.*

Gluck: Do you think it was because they were so single-minded about the issue?

Seiler: I don't know. You certainly have met plenty of what we colloquially call bossy women, and they are apt to be women with a great deal of drive, the women who get things done, and they are very apt to be so sure that they're right that they don't want to waste time hearing arguments against their point of view. I think it's quite understandable.

Gluck: So actually, except for the National American Woman's Suffrage Association, almost all the other groups had that reputation.

Seiler: I had the feeling they did; certainly I heard people muttering about Mrs. Belmont.

Gluck: She must have been formidable!

Seiler: [Laughter] I think she was, and certainly Mrs. Blatch was.

*Editor's Note: Anna Howard Shaw did head the National American Woman's Suffrage Association, 1904-1914, when Carrie Chapman Catt returned and took it over.

A CAREER IN ADVERTISING

Gluck: When you went down to New York, your sister and brother were already there, and the plan was for your mother and you to go down. Had you also, by that time, planned to be married?

Seiler: Yes. I was married in October, and we first lived in the same apartment as my mother and sister.

Gluck: So for those first few months, you worked almost full time with the Women's Political League, and then after this falling out is when you decided to try and get another job.

Seiler: That's right. A friend of my sister's came and they were consulting about what kind of business. Among other things my sister, long before, had told me, "Don't ever, ever, ever study stenography. What man studied stenography to get started in his job? You'll just get sidetracked, so be sure to say you just don't know it." So, I didn't have that to offer to anybody.

I remember very well, this friend of my sister's said, "But you've been doing an awfully lot of writing this summer." You see, I had sent advance releases, and then when I got through in the town I gave them another big interview and a release. So I had been doing a whole lot of publicity writing. The friend said, "Why don't you try the advertising business? You can write copy quite well."

I didn't even know what advertising copy was; they had to explain to me that it was the text of the ad. She gave me a list of agencies and I called on some of them. I presume I looked exactly like Sis Hopkins, fresh down from the country. None of them were at all impressed. The agencies said they preferred

Seiler: people who had had retail experience - women, that is.

Then I tried some of the department stores; no, they didn't have any time to try to train anybody like that. By then I got quite annoyed. The only store I hadn't called on was Macy's. I went in and demanded to see the advertising manager and told him about my experience trying to get a job in agencies and stores. And I said, "Now, I will come to work for you for ten dollars a week for two weeks. At the end of that time, both you and I ought to know whether I can write advertising copy." He was so flabbergasted that he hired me. At the end of two weeks, they were running the copy the way it was written. So then it became a real job.

Gluck: This was about 1914?

Seiler: Yes.

Gluck: When you went into the advertising work at Macy's, did you continue the suffrage work at all?

Seiler: I made speeches occasionally, but that was all. I was no longer speaker coordinator. That was a full-time job and I was pretty busy.

Interruption: Family Life

Gluck: And then you stayed at Macy's for how long?

Seiler: I think about six months. Then I got pregnant. My daughter was born in January of 1915. So I must have gotten pregnant quite soon, but I didn't quit right away.

Gluck: Had you intended to have a family?

Seiler: I don't think I ever thought about it one way or the other. I certainly hadn't planned to have one at that time.

I was then out of business until my daughter was about two and a half.

Gluck: What was your life like during that period when you weren't working? Were you involved outside of the home

Gluck: or were you involved primarily with your baby?

Seiler: No. I was involved basically with the baby. We had moved out of my mother and sister's apartment, and we went to East Orange. Things were very tight. I've forgotten what my husband's salary was, but it was tiny. Of course, everything cost less in those days. My house allowance was five dollars, I remember, for food, and I wasn't a very good provider - knowing nothing whatever about it. We had always had servants of some kind or another, and I just never did have anything to do with running a house.

When it got to be Friday, I remember nearly always we had to have cabbage because it was only five cents a head.

Combining Career and Motherhood

Gluck: Tell me about your decision to return to work.

Seiler: I remember very well the day my sister said to me, fixing upon me a beady eye, "When are you getting back to business?" I, of course, felt mildly surprised, to say the least, and said, "How can I?" She said, "You should manage."

Presently, there became vacant an apartment right across the hall in the place she was living with my mother. She immediately said, "This is the opportunity to move back here; then Mother can help and it will be much easier for you to get a maid." So that's what we did.

She really shamed me into going back to work. I didn't think it was possible but discovered, of course, it was.

Gluck: To both work and have the young child?

Seiler: Yes. It was difficult, I have to say. Our apartment had these deep window seats, and I had to walk every morning past that front window on my way to the subway to work. My small daughter used to stand up in the window with the tears running down her cheeks, and I

Seiler: used to feel like a dirty dog. It was very difficult.

And yet, I did think it was the right thing to do. I made a special arrangement with the agency when I went with them, that I would go home at three o'clock every day. So, that was the only concession to it.

When I went back, that's when I decided I didn't want to go back to the department store field. I did try Macy's first, and I told them I wouldn't work after three o'clock in the afternoon (because that's when the baby came home from the park). Well, they couldn't hear of that. "You can have hours off in the middle of the day," said one of them, who would like to have had me, "but you've got to be here to sign out with the rest of the employees, and sign in." I said, "Well, I'm going."

So then I began on the agencies again. Now, of course, I had a lot of good copy samples and I didn't any longer look like Sis Hopkins but most of them would hear nothing about leaving at three o'clock in the afternoon; that was out.

I got to one agency called the Federal Advertising Agency. It had nothing to do with the federal government; it had been named that because of the building they happened to be in. They had started out basically as a trade agency and were developing in the consumer field, and they'd never had women except as file clerks or typists.

When I said this about three o'clock in the afternoon, the head of the copy department considered it awhile and then said, "Well, we've never had a woman on the staff; might as well try it. I like your copy." So I was taken on to work only until three.

After I'd been there some thirty years and they were giving me a testimonial dinner, one of the vice-presidents stood up and said, "Well, I discovered in the records of the accounting department the other day that you were hired on a temporary basis. I would like to suggest that you be put on the permanent payroll."
[Laughter]

Up until World War II, I never did work past three o'clock in the afternoon! I enjoyed it. I could, by

Seiler: condensing my lunch hour, always go to matinees and do all kinds of things. It was very pleasant. Then when personnel problems grew so difficult in World War II, of course, I was working 'til all hours myself.

Gluck: Did you remain one of the few women writing copy in the agency?

Seiler: No. After a relatively short time at copywriting, I was made what they called an account executive and did some copy still but edited other people's copy. Then I eventually was made a vice-president and the head of a department, mostly handling women's things, but not entirely.

I was extraordinarily fortunate. I sometimes think I worked for the only advertising agency I ever could have worked for. I did have complete authority. The president discovered, after a few years, if he'd just let me alone, I would make money for him. So he did exactly that. I was responsible to no one but my clients, really.

I sent him memos about what we had decided to do but rarely consulted him in advance. As I discovered in the course of my life, there were practically no other women in the advertising business who had any such degree of authority.

In the big agencies, for instance, one or two who flirted with me later on, I discovered that everything was a la committee; the plan went up here and had to be approved, and went up again and had to be approved. Of course, I couldn't possibly have worked that way. I discussed things with my clients, and came back and dictated the work reports, and got their okays on the estimates, and that was it! I wasn't discussing it with anybody, except occasionally with the research department.

This was very unusual, I must say. I began to appreciate how unusual it was, because sometimes my clients were the bosses of the women who were supposed to have authority. I knew, of course, from my work with their bosses that they didn't. That was particularly true of the women in the fashion group who were always supposed to be sort of heads in their own particular departments. But I discovered in working with them that

Seiler: all the things they did had to be okayed, and I grew gradually to realize how unusual my opportunity was.

I became a stockholder, eventually, and I was never really tempted to go to another agency.

Gluck: You stayed in that agency until you retired?

Seiler: Yes.

Gluck: Were other women brought in?

Seiler: Yes. Eventually, we had plenty of other women. Many were in the copy department. I had several executive assistants. Also women in other departments like research who were assigned to me from time to time.

Gluck: Did you become involved in any professional organizations, then, in those early days of your career? Were there enough women in that field to have --

Seiler: I belonged fairly early to the Women's Fashion Group; that was necessary. I was never much of a joiner, I must say. I belonged to a certain number of business things, like the American Marketing Association, and all that sort of stuff. I belonged to a couple of clubs but they had nothing to do with business, such as the Women's City Club and the Town Hall Club.

Gluck: Were any of them groups that were involved -- after the ratification, there was that Women's Joint Congressional Committee.

Seiler: No. I also belonged to two clubs - all women - which were entirely different. How shall I say it? They were made up of women who definitely were the suffrage type of women. There used to be a very interesting club of unusual women to which my sister belonged. One of these women had a big fuss with the head of that club (you can imagine they were all women with minds of their own) and she broke off and formed another organization. Later on -- it had been going for some years -- my friend, Blair Niles, insisted on my joining that. It was called Query Club.

It was an extremely interesting club because of the women who belonged to it. Most of them were writers;

Seiler: one woman was an explorer. They were all quite well-known women, as a matter of fact. A very interesting club.

The other one was more of a debating club. For a while I belonged to the Phi Beta Kappa chapter in New York, but I got bored with that very quickly; I didn't do that very long. I never have been much of a joiner.

Maintaining the Suffrage Ties

Gluck: Did you continue your suffrage speaking right up until the passage of federal legislation?

Seiler: No, I took time off and spoke continuously for the last two weeks before the final campaign. But before that I had just spoken occasionally when they needed a speaker, especially in the evening.

Gluck: Was this the campaign prior to the passage of the amendment or during the ratification drive?

Seiler: No, it was -- now let me be sure about this. Of course, New York had not ratified it. I wonder if that wasn't when we were working on New York to ratify it, and lost.

I must have worked both times, then, because I do remember that there was a vast celebration when we finally had it (the federal amendment) approved. Tennessee, I think, was the last one. But that spread over a long period of time, and my daughter would have been five when that happened. She was much younger than that when I took the time off. I think it must have been when we were trying to get it (a state measure) ratified in New York State.

Yes, I'm sure it was that because I well remember the attitude of men - both in my office, in the subway and on the street - the morning after the state measure was defeated. They openly jeered!

Gluck: When it was known in your office that you were a suffragist, did you have difficulties before that occasion?

- Seiler: No.
- Gluck: But once it had been given public approval for defeat, then it was all right to --
- Seiler: Oh yes. I'd never had any discussion about it before. But there were two or three men in my office who took occasion to make disparaging remarks the morning afterwards. "Well, I guess we know what we did to you yesterday!" and that kind of thing. But it was a very passing phase.
- Gluck: So you did keep some sort of active ties still?
- Seiler: Yes, because my sister [Elizabeth Ellsworth Cook] was still, of course, vice-president of the organization.
- Gluck: Did your sister pursue a career?
- Seiler: Oh yes, and such a career! In Wall Street. She had a very long one. She didn't retire from Wall Street till she was an old lady. She still had her own clients in a brokerage house until she was eighty-four. She's now eighty-eight. She's down in Florida.
- Gluck: Do you recall your own reactions when Alice Paul and her group started their campaign in Washington (in 1917)?
- Seiler: I don't ever remember being disapproving because I understood quite well the reasons that she did it. I remember being very horrified at what was done to the women - especially to this very delightful woman from, I think, Chautauqua County whom I had enlisted in suffrage and who was one of the hunger strikers.
- I think everybody was just sort of nauseated over the whole thing; it was so horrible. But I don't ever remember disapproving of it, except for thinking that it was a dreadful thing for the women to go through. But I also felt that it was a very daring and probably a very valuable demonstration.
- Gluck: After the passage of the (Nineteenth) Amendment and once Alice Paul's group started on the Equal Rights Amendment, were you at all interested or involved in that campaign?

Seiler: Not involved at all. By then I was already in the advertising business -- very busy, a child. No, I had nothing whatever to do with that beyond being interested, of course, by what I read.

Gluck: So after the actual ratification drive, you pretty much --

Seiler: Nothing whatever.

Gluck: And did the Women's Political Union survive after the drive?

Seiler: If it did, I don't have any recollection of it. Of course, after I fussed with Mrs. Blatch and departed from them and when I went into business, I no longer was as close to them, organizationally speaking. As I say, I spoke occasionally for them when they needed a speaker.

But I don't remember. I can't imagine that they would have stayed as an organization because there wouldn't have been anything for them to do, if you want to put it that way. At that time, I think it hadn't occurred to a great many women that once they got the vote, the rest wouldn't be easy. I think most men felt that.

I remember once, when watching at the polls, I was talking to a Tammany boss who was also watching, and he said, "Of course I'm opposed to women's suffrage; once women get the vote, they can get practically anything else they want."

And that was more or less that attitude; it didn't occur to them that women were going to break up as soon as the vote was won. They let their organizations go and most of them paid no further attention. A very few of them, of course, began to work in politics, but I think they were few and far between. From what I know, at least.

Gluck: Yes. The information that I have read was that up until about 1925, the politicians still thought that there was a woman's block. After that, it became obvious there was not and they really paid no heed to any legislation that the women were interested in.

In the forties, then, there seemed to be another upsurge and then a real push again for the Equal Rights

Gluck: Amendment, and many of the women's clubs seemed to be involved then.

Seiler: No, I never did.

Gluck: You were divorced in what year?

Seiler: Nineteen twenty-eight.

Gluck: And then you remarried in --

Seiler: Nineteen twenty-nine.

In and Out of Retirement

Gluck: So you stayed at the Federal Advertising Agency continuously until '47?

Seiler: Yes, it was '48 that I left Federal; in June I guess.

Gluck: Were you living in New York City up until that time, then?

Seiler: I went right on living in New York City, yes. With a week-end place in the country.

Gluck: During that five or six years -- that first retirement -- you stayed in New York City?

Seiler: Yes.

Gluck: What were your activities during that time period? By then your daughter was grown and, I imagine, gone, wasn't she?

During that first period of retirement, is that when you became involved in some of that activity?

Seiler: No. In the first place, I was utterly worn out; it took a long, long time to recover. I don't think I did much but a little writing here and there.

Gluck: Did you continue your public speaking in all of those years?

Seiler: I did quite a lot during my years in business. I had

Seiler: to talk very often to boards of directors and things of that kind which you may or may not consider public speaking, but it falls into the same group. Once I went up to Cornell to speak to the coeds. And once I remember going to Philadelphia to address an advertising group, and things like that, but nothing else special.

I had no idea of going back when I retired: I was worn out with the whole advertising business and I stayed home for six years. One day, one of my old clients -- one of my smaller clients, as a matter of fact -- called me up and was bitterly unhappy with his agencies and had been ever since I retired. He asked if I would meet him at the Union League Club; he wanted to talk to me about something.

I went, and he had his general manager there. He said, "I'm about to go to Europe on a buying trip and you can think about it while I'm gone, but I wish you'd go to some small agency -- anyone you pick -- and make an arrangement with them to work only when you want to and as much as you want to, and take my account to them."

So I thought about it. I had been fairly bored in the meantime, I may say. And so I did just that. I didn't go in at all in the months of July and August-- we had a place out in the country -- and I worked about three days a week the other months, perhaps four or five hours a day; whatever was necessary to handle his account, basically. I did some other things for them, too. That was for four years.

Then my husband was ready to retire and so I went too.

Retirement Life Style

Gluck: Did you get involved in any other kinds of activities during that time, after that retirement?

Seiler: No. We began to travel then; we travelled a great deal, mostly in Europe because my husband is a European and we had most of our friends over there. We'd always been going back and forth.

Right after he retired we spent the winter studying

Seiler: at the Instituto de Allende in Mexico. Then we spent the summer in Bucks County at our place. The next year we went out to make up our minds whether we wanted to live out here in California and drove all over California. Then in '60, we went abroad for a year until the Mount San Antonio Gardens was built, because we had ordered a cottage there.

TRACING THE FEMINIST INFLUENCES, IDEOLOGIES,
IDENTIFICATION

Gluck: I'd like to explore now some of your ideas during the suffrage period. First, for clarification, did you call yourselves suffragettes or suffragists.

Seiler: I would say a suffragist is the way we spoke of ourselves. It was mostly the newspapers, I think, that called us suffragettes.

Gluck: Was that an attempt to put the movement down, do you think?

Seiler: I think so, yes.

Gluck: Did you define yourself in those early days as a feminist?

Seiler: I don't really think I ever -- I think it wouldn't have occurred to me to call myself a feminist. When you said feminist, I thought of people like Olive Schreiner and Mrs. Pankhurst, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and so forth.

Gluck: How do you see them as being different?

Seiler: How shall I say it? Being so interested in the one thing that they hardly had time for other things. I think always, all my life -- just like my courses in college -- I have always wanted to be interested in a great many things. Of course, that's the reason they got things done -- because they did channel all of their interests in one direction.

No, I never thought of myself as a feminist. In fact, all my life -- until I was retired -- I had more men friends than women. This was partly because of my choice of business. And I always got on extremely well

Seiler: with them (men). I have ascribed that, truly or not, to the fact that I grew up in my grandfather's house; my mother had left my father when I was about six months old and I never laid an eye on him until I was about eight. My grandfather was elderly, then, and there was never any question of a dominating male. I grew up with absolutely no feeling of having been put down, as it were, by a male, and I never have felt that way. Consequently, I don't have any of the bitterness that many women, I'm sorry to say, in women's lib have.

Gluck: You associate the word "feminist" with a rather bitter, anti-male feeling, then?

Seiler: I think I did, in spite of the fact that my sister was very popular also with boys. But I never thought of it, really, in college. I discovered very early that if you danced well and skated well -- and I was a fancy skater -- and did such things, that boys were also very pleased to discover that you could think. I was never brought up to feel that you had to pretend to be an imbecile to be attractive. I always got the kind of response I expected.

The same thing was true in business. I can only remember twice when there was an attempt made to what you would call "put me down."

One of them, oddly enough, came about in a very curious way. I had become a little distressed at how rapidly the things we learned in college became obsolete. I wrote up to the president of Cornell and suggested that perhaps when twenty-five year reunions came around it might be a very good idea to set aside at least one day and arrange (workshops) with the heads of departments -- particularly the scientific departments, in which the changes had been greatest -- so that the alumni could be brought up to date. And they could say, "This is what you were taught in physics when you were in college; this is what we think now."

He thought it was a good idea, and he wrote down to the man who was the chairman of the twenty-five year reunion of men that year who came to call on me. He listened in a rather supercilious way to this idea, and when I was all through he said, "Where did you get the idea?" I said, "The same place where most of my ideas come from -- out of my own head. Good evening." I was enraged.

Seiler: That is one of the few times I can remember. Otherwise, I have always found men very open and willing to meet you on your own grounds.

Gluck: So you saw feminists as responding to men's attitudes towards women. What about other ideas they held, for instance on marriage?

Seiler: I used to think it was rather funny. Some of the English women who came over, Beatrice Forbes-Robertson and people like that, there was a great deal of talk among them. I don't ever recall very much of this among the American women, but the English women were very fond of talking about free unions; their children were going to have hyphenated names. Like Havelock Ellis and his wife -- they were going to have houses on opposite sides of the park.

They were very interested, and they felt that the conventional marriage was not right, wasn't fair to women.

I was a little more conservative about things at the time and I felt the family had a place in society, and I didn't go along with that. I thought it was kind of funny. But they took it all very, very seriously, you know. There was a whole cult of that sort of thing, especially in England. I think not to any great extent here.

I did meet a few women living in Greenwich Village at the time whom my sister knew, who were living with men without being married to them. You know, there was a certain amount of talk about it but they were still very valuable suffragists. They weren't making as much propaganda about it, as the English women were. The attitudes of the English women reflected, of course, the much more difficult position, I think, of women in England than in America; American women have always had more freedom.

You may or may not recall that famous little curtain raiser of Ethel Barrymore's called "The Twelve Pound Look." That was marvelous. It played in England. The twelve pound look was the cost of the typewriter with which the woman made herself economically independent from her husband - left him as soon as she learned to type. The twelve pound look.

Gluck: But ideas about women's economic independence you didn't see as being the crucial distinction between, say, a feminist and a suffragist?

Seiler: I don't recall ever being concerned with that.

Gluck: Were these women you met identified as the Greenwich Village suffragists -- feminists -- like Henrietta Rodman and those women?

Seiler: Yes.

Gluck: Were these women known to you in terms of their ideas, or was it primarily through your sister that you knew about these women?

Seiler: I think I met some of them, but they were all somewhat older. They were basically friends of my sister's.

Gluck: She was somewhat on the fringes of what was actually the feminist movement?

Seiler: Very definitely. I would always have called her a feminist.

She did all kinds of things. I mean, she started the Women's Bond Club, as I recall it, on Wall Street; she was really quite prominent.

As far as what she thinks now in her innermost mind, I don't know. But at least in her expressions of opinion, I feel that she has changed very much. I wouldn't consider her even a liberal anymore.

Gluck: That's the kind of thing we have found with several women. It seems like what you're saying is that you never fought any of the other battles that women who were defined as feminists were fighting, like equal pay and so forth?

Seiler: No, I can't say that I did.

Once or twice, other agencies flirted with me a little. I remember I had a long session with the wife of the president of J. Walter Thompson. I used to know her in suffrage before her marriage, and we had lunch together occasionally. One day she sounded me out about business, and I inquired about the way they worked. I just said it was not for me.

Seiler: I had a very odd relationship, you might say, with my job, and I knew it. I think I wouldn't have lasted in any other kind of job, frankly. In the first place, I was the first woman they'd ever had except for a file clerk. They put me on as a copywriter, and then very quickly made me an account executive. And the president discovered quite soon -- in about five years -- that if he just left me alone, I would make money for him. So he practically never interfered. I mean, it reached the stage where I never any longer consulted him about what I was going to say to the client or what we were going to do; I wrote him a memo afterwards and told him what had been decided.

That amount of freedom -- real authority -- I began to discover was almost unknown among women.

Gluck: One of the things that I found very interesting about several of the women who were involved in suffrage was the assumption that they would be self-supporting, and one of the things I've tried to pursue is, if this was tied into the ideas about suffrage and women's rights, or if it was just an attitude that you had acquired in growing up in your grandfather's household.

Seiler: I would suspect that the emphasis on that must have come probably from my sister and from separate ideas. I don't think there would have been anything about it growing up in grandfather's house. In fact, I would think that the whole attitude of the family at that point would have been that you married and stayed home and had children. And, if you were a maiden aunt you would stay always in the home. I think it was assumed that my Aunt Lil would always live in my grandfather's house. I would say that was the pattern of a perfectly orthodox Episcopal family.

Gluck: So that, even though you had felt that -- part of it was just the economics of it, by the time you were in school.

Seiler: Yes. But part of it, unquestionably was that my sister would never have allowed me to think of living without doing some work. I must truthfully say that I sometimes wonder -- I wrote my sister this a while ago -- I think she had a great deal to do actually with my persisting and having a career; because it would have been very easy for me to give up after I had a baby. In fact, I remember quite clearly when the baby was about a year and a half old, my sister said to me one day,

Seiler: "When are you planning to go back to work?" I looked somewhat taken aback, and she said, "Well, it's time you should."

So, the next thing she did was to find us an apartment in New York right across the hall from hers and my mother's; and we moved back to New York from East Orange which, of course, made it very much simpler. I was very lucky; I had a marvelous black from Virginia who was with us for -- Emma first came to work for me when I lived in East Orange. She told me afterwards that I was the only woman for whom she ever washed in the morning and cleaned all the afternoon /laughter/ - because I knew nothing whatsoever about domestic things. I really didn't, and I don't know what I would have done. Mother, as I recall it, paid for me to have Emma once a week.

When we moved back to New York, we had another woman who proved to be no good at all. I begged Emma and she consented to come and stayed with us the time my baby was growing up. She was marvelous.

Gluck: Your sister was really a very important role model for you from very early days.

Seiler: Definitely. Looking back, I realize how great an influence she had. For instance, I don't think I ever would have taken public speaking in college if it hadn't been for my sister. She won the prize for the Woodford Oration which is an original oration. The title of her oration was "Men, Women and Human Beings."

I came along and survived the competition and was on what they call "the stage." In other words, I was one of the eight speakers on both the Eighty-Sixth Memorial and the Woodford Oration. But I didn't win either one of them, much to my sister's chagrin. My title for my original oration was "Crimes Against Criminals." I had spent quite a lot of time down on the East Side with my sister, seeing what went on, and also quite a lot of time in the night court.

Gluck: That was when you were still at Cornell, then?

Seiler: It was. It was when I spent the summer with my sister between my junior and senior years.

Gluck: Because you talked about being a reporter for some paper and going to the night court, and I wasn't sure what time period that was. I see.

Seiler: That's right.

Gluck: There was no problem in terms of your husband's attitude towards your pursuing a career?

Seiler: No, I don't think it ever occurred to him. He was a charming man, a very gentle one, and a very open-minded one - a very good natured person. I don't think, left to himself, that it would ever have occurred to him to advocate suffrage, but he was not against my doing it, and he never made any fuss (about my working). Of course, I think he was probably rather pleased; he wasn't getting a very big salary in those days, and it was quite helpful to have a second salary.

Also, of course, it was the example of my sister who had gone ahead and done it and was getting to be quite well known in Wall Street.

Gluck: Was your sister's influence as a result of your admiration for her, or was she also quite direct in letting you know how she felt your life should be lived?

Seiler: No, she was not aggressive, if that's what you mean -- no, I wouldn't say so. But to her, of course, the arguments are absolutely unanswerable. She just is and always was a feminist. So, I would say probably -- I might and might not -- my daughter thinks that I would have climbed the walls if I had tried to stay home. I've sometimes wondered if I would have gone back into business if my sister hadn't urged me.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT TODAY

Gluck: What are your reactions towards the modern women's movement -- some of your feelings about it and how you think it compares to the original suffrage movement.

Seiler: It's very hard to compare it because it's so much wider and deeper a movement than suffrage. That was really a political job, and it was handled like a political job, more or less. But this seems to me to involve -- how shall I put it? This movement now, I think, springs from much, much deeper grounds than the suffrage movement. It involves really women's estimate of themselves and what they feel they could contribute to the world. Also, I think that whereas women felt it definitely unfair that they couldn't vote I think now women conceive of the inequality as something a great deal more serious than a personal affront. They realize that it has a lot to do with the kind of world we have and the mess we're in, and that the only valid hope for the future lies in true equality.

As you know, and as I've told you before, I think women have a lot of changing to do too. I listen with horror at the chichat that goes on in a normal group of women, and I'm not surprised that men make snide remarks about "girl talk."

That isn't the kind of thing that is involved in the present movement. I blame it mostly on the fact that I mostly see women in my own age group -- they're not going to change, and most of them are quite horrified, I think, at the changes the younger women want. Of course, it just so happens that I go along with the younger women, so I mostly have to keep my mouth shut.

Gluck: How about your own daughter? What sort of attitudes

Gluck: does she have towards the women's movement?

Seiler: I don't think she's at all interested. She's made a marvelous career herself, but she is entirely wrapped up in art: I don't think anything in the world exists actually outside of it. She does read the papers and probably Time and the New Yorker, but I don't think she spends very much of her time thinking about the world affairs in general. I think she's mostly basically concerned with her own immediate problems.

Gluck: Would you say, in terms of the way you depicted the modern women's movement, that in some ways it's similar to the ideas of the women in that early movement who were considered the feminists?

Seiler: Yes. I think this movement that's going on now goes back to the roots. And they wrote very well. I don't know how much of Charlotte Perkins Gilman you've ever read, but she writes well. Olive Schreiner, of course, I always think of with special feeling because I felt that she, of perhaps all of them, had the least bitterness; she thought of it in terms of what it could become. I also felt that she was very much fairer to men.

I can't help reminding women that up to the time that the suffrage amendment was ratified, every single thing that American women had legally in terms of consideration was given them by men. They had no way to get it. I think they were very unappreciative of how much they had actually been given because of men's own sense of justice. That's one reason I get very impatient with them when they are too bitter. Perhaps if I'd had a different kind of life and different associations with men, I too would feel bitter. But I don't and I think it's a great drawback because, as I have written my daughter, I look on bitterness as a kind of cancer of the heart. I think you get nowhere with it, and it's one of the most deadly things that one can give way to.

Gluck: So you see that as one of the major failings, then.

Seiler: Yes, I definitely do. I'm astonished by some of the things I read. Now, how much they've been blown up by the media, of course, one doesn't know. And I'm far from saying that I'm silly enough not to know that a great many women have ample reason for the bitterness they feel. But I think it's a defect when you're working for equality.

Gluck: Do you think that bitterness is quite new?

Seiler: No.

Gluck: Do you think that women felt that earlier and just didn't express it?

Seiler: No. Many women felt very bitter in suffrage days -- many of them, and with good reason. But it's never a help; that's my feeling about it.

Gluck: I feel that it seems to be the first step and then you get beyond it. I think many women haven't figured out where you go from there.

Seiler: Maybe, maybe. It's possible.

Gluck: Are there any other comments or reactions about the modern women's movement, or comparisons that you might have?

Seiler: I'm not particularly eager to make unkind comments about them. I have every sympathy with their goals.

Gluck: Your major criticism seems to be related to the issue of bitterness and sometimes focusing on issues that you think are not as important or as relevant.

Seiler: Yes, and when I hear them speak, I find so many of them strident and disagreeable. Well you know, I'm sure. I've heard Jessie (Haver Butler) rave on about what goes on in the NOW meetings. She also is repelled, I think, by a great deal of it.

It's the old, old story. People don't really get outside themselves enough. I get very impatient with their bringing up individual grievances about things. I don't understand why they don't work more through groups of women. I have very definite ideas about what they could be doing with groups of women that, as I see it, they are not doing.

Women's groups seem to feel that they have to operate in a vacuum. If they belong to one little group that's dedicated to doing this particular thing, they're not at all concerned with what's going on out here and around. I think that's all wrong for this movement of women. I think that every woman's group has a stake in this movement, even though they are not organized to fight for it.

I don't care what the individual's special interest

- Seiler: is in that group, they should have an overall interest in all women. And every organization speaks with a louder voice than its individual members, so that if a group which is especially interested in this movement could only learn how important it is to approach other groups and say to them, "Look -- we know that you have to give ninety-nine percent of your time to your project, but how about, just this once, writing a letter as an organization regarding this women's movement." I think they'd be rather surprised at the network of influence they could build up.
- Gluck: That is what happened in suffrage, basically.
- Seiler: Yes, it did. We had a great deal of that. I'm amazed that modern women don't do more of it. They don't, from my point of view, make very good use of women as a whole. I mean, the small number of women that are ever going to get involved with NOW as compared with the number that sympathize with the overall aims and would be glad to lend their hands, perhaps, to advocate the passage of a specific bill or something of that kind.
- Gluck: In other words, to form coalitions with other women's groups.
- Seiler: Exactly. Not to expect that they're going to spend much time on it, but that they are a group of women (some of them will have had jobs, most of them). They can take a vote and will probably be sympathetic to doing this little bit for equality, and it would add up to a great deal.
- Gluck: I sometimes marvel at the fact that -- even though it was a safer issue since it didn't challenge a lot of other values of society -- suffrage did manage ultimately to include over two million in its ranks, in terms of support. I wonder how we can now do that for a battle that really is, as you say, much deeper and will have much wider impact, I think.
- Seiler: It was quite interesting when we were doing the organizing, of course, to see which women in these very small towns, could be interested. In general, it was, the women with better educations. Once in a while, you got a woman from the blue collar group, but not very often. And in some cases, you got women whose husbands definitely were not crazy about suffrage at all; they just said, "Well, if you want to, go ahead," even though they didn't really go along with it.

Seiler: But they were mostly very substantial women -- those who were willing to come right out for suffrage and form a suffrage group. That, of course, was my job -- to leave a functioning branch which would carry on with whatever they were asked to do from headquarters.

Gluck: Do you see that as a difference in the two movements, in terms of, in a sense, the greater range of background?

Seiler: I think this involves all women, and I think that in a curious way, women recognize that, even though they get awfully mad about the thing. Even the older ones who want to hang on to everything they have and not let anything go -- even they, I think, have a certain sympathy with it. I have always felt that's why they are so nit-picking about the smaller things. In a way, I do it myself talking to you about the subjects they discuss. In a sense, that's nit-picking too. I just feel that it's a mistake, that they're antagonizing a lot of people by (some of the things they do), and they shouldn't just out of pure wisdom.

It's perfectly true that marriage has been one of our most stable institutions, but that's no reason that it can't be re-examined in the light of our present-day situation, and especially now that there is so much clamor for a decrease in population. I think it's awfully silly the way many women talk about these things.

However, to the young people belongs the future, and whether the older generation likes it or not, these things are all going to be re-examined and re-arranged. At the moment, of course, I don't see very much possibility of creating a permissive institution which can offer the stability that marriage has offered us. But I think it's going to be a very unhappy environment for children, if we marry and divorce at such a rate as we're doing now.

It is tough for children. They have enough things to learn about the world, without having to adapt themselves overnight to a completely changed environment; it's very difficult.

So I would hope that a good many people would try out -- I've forgotten; they have a nice name now for the marriage that isn't legal. What is it? There's a colloquial name for it. At any rate, the Swedes, after all, have done this for years, tried out the thing first. Fine. But after they've tried it out, I would hope that people who had lived together for three or four years and

- Seiler: found it companionable, they would go and get married before they have children, because it seems awfully tough on the children to have their homes changed by divorce. Those are things the younger generation are going to work out for themselves.
- Gluck: Despite some of your criticisms, you really do wholeheartedly endorse the efforts of the modern women's movement.
- Seiler: Yes, I do. I think it's ridiculous that they shouldn't participate. I'm very happy that we succeeded in electing the other day that nice Mrs. Cohen to our council here in Claremont; I don't know her personally, but I've heard a lot about her. We are now getting more women all around. Of course, getting them in where their faces show isn't the answer until they get some real authority and knowledge.
- There is something to be said for the fact -- and big organizations say it with regard to minorities -- that one of their troubles is not so much unwillingness as it is to find qualified applicants; the same is true of women.
- Gluck: I think that certainly has changed in many areas now, and has very quickly changed in terms of the areas women are going into.
- Seiler: I do hope there is going to be a considerable change in the vocational advice that's handed out, beginning way back. Much earlier than college; certainly in junior high and on up. There isn't any reason on earth why girls shouldn't plan -- if they find they're especially good at mathematics, for goodness sake, then let them be! Let them take part in the new technology, if they actually fit it.

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Suffragists Oral History Project

Ernestine Hara Kettler

BEHIND BARS

An Interview Conducted by
Sherna Gluck



Ernestine Hara Kettler
1974

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

The Feminist History Research Project contacted Ernestine Kettler who was known in the Los Angeles Women's Movement for her participation in the Washington, D.C. National Woman's Party picketing in 1917. She had joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) in about 1968 and during the Jubilee Celebration of Woman's Suffrage, August 26, 1970, was one of the principal speakers, describing in rather moving terms her jail experience. An initial exchange of letters with her revealed her long involvement in the labor movement following her participation in the suffrage struggle.

Ernestine Hara Kettler is a very petite woman who appears younger than her seventy-seven years. Despite her appearance, she is a rather inactive and depressed woman who feels she is at the end of her life--a life which she believes has been wasted. This mental state was obvious even in our first interviews, though at that time she did not suffer from any acute medical conditions.

A series of five interviews were recorded over a two-month period, beginning January 17, 1973. The interviews were conducted in her hotel in the MacArthur Park area of Los Angeles, a neighborhood populated primarily by pensioners and retirees. Her room in the hotel was rather sparse, and many of her belongings were in boxes, reflecting a state of uncertainty about her future. She considered moving back to San Francisco, and in the end of April, 1973, while preparing to make the move, suffered the first of a series of strokes.

Throughout the series of five interviews there was evidence of poor memory; she could not recall what might be considered dates of major events in her life, and her grasp of details was poor, a possible indication that she had suffered minor strokes prior to the interview. She clearly did not want to talk about events that she felt were personal. She was primarily interested in discussing her ideas, rather than the details in her life.

Despite these factors there is information contained in the Kettler interviews that is valuable in understanding the range of participants in the suffrage struggle; the sections on feminism and suffrage in the manuscript reflect the ideas and motivations of a young woman on the fringes of the anarchist/socialist/bohemian movements of the 1910s. It was not very usual for these "new women" to become so actively involved in the suffrage campaign, though there were notable exceptions like Crystal Eastman.

Because of the larger scope of the Feminist History Research Project, many of the interviews with Ernestine Hara Kettler covered her union activities and this information is not included here. Because, however, the discussion about the union activities were interwoven with those on suffrage and her views on feminism, liberties were taken by the interviewer/editor in editing the transcript to provide a natural flow to the material. Despite the rearrangement of material, I do not think that either the spirit or the intent of her thoughts or language were violated. The full tapes have been retained by the Feminist History Research Project. Unfortunately, as a result of her more recent strokes, and the subsequent double vision, it was not possible for Ernestine to actually read the transcript herself. However, in conference with her, points requiring clarification were reviewed.

Sherna Gluck
Interviewer-Editor

March 1974

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA - Ernestine Hara Kettler

Personal

Born to Buhor Hara and Mali Eliescu Hara, January 25, 1896,
Craiova, Roumania

Emigrated to United States, 1907

Married: Van Kleeck Allison (Anarchist journalist for Mother Earth), 1916 or 1917. Duration, one month

Archer Lyle Emerson (I.W.W. organizer), 1919. Separated
1923, divorced 1927

William J. Kettler, 1928, widowed 1936

Education

High School, New York, 1912-1915

Oberlin College, 1915-1916

University of Wisconsin, summer session, 1925

Career

Worked in clerical positions for various unions, beginning
in 1918 in Seattle until her retirement in 1959 in Los Angeles.

A few of these were:

I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of World), 1923, Butte, Montana
and Chicago, Illinois

Marine and Fireman's Union, San Francisco

Bakers Union, San Francisco

Carpenters local, Los Angeles

Member of Professional and Office Employees Union

Geographic Mobility (Areas of residence)

Roumania, 1896-1907

New York, 1907-1918

Everett, Washington, 1918

Seattle, Washington, 1918-1923

Butte, Montana, Chicago, Illinois,
1923

San Francisco, California, 1926-1936

New York, 1936-1938

San Francisco, 1938-1948

Los Angeles, 1949-1974; brief trips

to England, 1959 and Israel,
1966

Writings

Poetry, published in small radical magazines, to 1917

Unpublished stories, plays

Political Essays, published in various radical journals and
newspapers, e.g. New America, The Pagan, and The Socialist Tribune

BACKGROUND

Gluck: Can you give me an idea of your background in very general terms, beginning with your youth and how you got involved in the suffrage activities; and, then, you mentioned you were involved with the Wobblies [Industrial Workers of the World - I.W.W.] and with trade unions. After knowing the general picture, I'll then be able to know what areas to cover in detail in later interviews.

Kettler: I came out of an anarchist family. Of course, my mother followed my father's ideology - as most women in love with their husbands will do. I was not born in this country; I was born in Roumania. But, you know, at that time I was young and it [the anarchist background] didn't impress me. It just didn't make any impression on my mind. It was an experience I hadn't had until I came to this country.

Gluck: When were you born?

Kettler: January 25th - and you may send me a birthday card, if you wish - 1896. It seems awful to know that I'm of that age because of the way I think and the way I feel. I cannot understand old age. This is true I think of many old-aged people; they cannot understand that they are old. They do not know what it is if they're active and are extremely interested in ideas and get aroused by all kinds of unhappy things going on in the world. They just don't understand old age.

I mean, I feel today the way I used to feel years ago. But the only thing is that I realize that I'm physically not as capable of navigating as I was before; that I'm just reaching the end of my life. I'm speaking now without having told you anything about the beginning of my life.

Gluck: You came to the United States when you were thirteen?

Kettler: Oh no. I was eleven.

Gluck: Do you remember anything about your life in Roumania?

Kettler: Yes, I remember certain very interesting things about my life in Roumania. I remember my reaction and attitudes towards superstitions. That, I thought, was rather remarkable. For example - I've always remembered this and I've never forgotten it - children used to follow funerals. I was one of the children and I used to go along with them from one funeral to another. Sometimes we used to have good things to eat. We always went to funerals.

The last one I attended, we went up to the corpse and stood there looking at her - an old woman with her arms crossed, hands crossed over her chest - and it was just a sudden shock. I thought, "What am I doing here?! Why do I follow funerals? Why do I come to look at dead people?" Since that time, I have never - never, not since that time - ever looked at a dead person again. And I've been to many funerals.

The vision was so strong that it shocked me; the realization that I was doing such a morbid thing. To me it seemed morbid, but it didn't seem morbid to the other children. I still wonder what on earth made me follow those children around from one funeral to another. I couldn't understand it.

Another thing that happened to me; I'm of Jewish extraction and some of my friends said, "Now, be careful, Ernestine, when you see a priest coming down the street, take three steps back and three steps forward, and the devil won't get you." I used to do that. You know, you follow the leader. You do what the leader does.

I did that one day when I was quite alone. A priest saw me, and he stopped me and he asked me why did I do that. Do you know, I had no answer. It just suddenly seemed very irrational to me. I just couldn't believe that I'd do such a stupid thing. That's the last time I was ever afraid of a priest. Those were the childish things, you know.

Gluck: Were your family Orthodox Jews?

Kettler: No, no. They were agnostics; at least my mother was an agnostic. My father died rather young; he was around forty and I don't know what he was.

We were never taught religion. My mother used to tell us stories out of the Old Testament of heroes and heroines, you know, just to amuse us. They were better than some of the children's books that were published. But we had no religious training of any kind. We really didn't have it.

Gluck: Were you in the city or were you in the countryside?

Kettler: No, no, we were in the city. What I remember is that there was a city there and we were like in the suburb of a city.

Gluck: What was the name of the city?

Kettler: Craiova. Then, just before we left Roumania, we lived in Bucharest. I remember a little about that but not too much. We didn't get around too much. We were very poor. After my father died, we really had no money. I suppose we came to this country, like a lot of immigrants come here, helped by their relatives - money is sent them or tickets are sent them. That's how we came here.

Gluck: You had relatives here when you came?

Kettler: Yes, we had relatives here. Do you know that not a single one is alive? I'm really a person without a relative. The cousin that I now have is certainly not my type of person, and it's very difficult to form any kind of relationship with her because there's no basis for a relationship.

Gluck: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Kettler: Yes, I did. My two brothers died and my sister is in Israel.

Gluck: When you came at the age of eleven, did you have to go to work right away?

Kettler: I went to school. I never did go to work until I was about eighteen, I guess, or older.

Gluck: So your family settled in New York when you came?

Kettler: Yes, oh yes. I think that I really left home when I was in my twenty-first or twenty-second year and came West - went to Everett, Washington.

EARLY RADICALISM

Kettler: After I came to this country at the age of eleven, I became involved with a group on the streets where I lived (in New York City); a close associate - a young girl - was radical herself, and the Socialist party was just around the corner from where I lived. We used to go around there. Although we never joined the Young People's Socialist League, we were nevertheless curious about the place and we became friendly; it sort of strengthened our political ideas. I don't know how much of it I understood then. It was at a later age that I was more aware of it, at sixteen or seventeen.

I went to school [high school] and then I was sent to private school for one year by a rich millionaire who had hopes that I'd become a professor someday. I'd never graduated, even from high school, but I'd had one year of college education just the same [at Oberlin] because of certain knowledge that I had. I was advanced in one respect, but I lacked credits in other respects.

In 1917 - that's really the beginning of the suffrage story - I met a woman from Everett, Washington, Mrs. Katherine Hodges. (She's dead now.) She had come to New York as a delegate to a Socialist convention. Evidently I was doing some work for the Socialist party then and met her. We started talking and she was telling me about the party in Washington [The National Woman's Party - N.W.P.] whose members were picketing the president, and she asked if I cared to go.

It happened that I just turned twenty-one. I was of legal age, and I could go. Of course, anything as exciting as that would appeal to me. So I went. I can't remember just what arrangements I made, but

Kettler: the arrangements were made and there I was in Washington. This is the story of the suffrage picketing. Do you want me to tell it now?

Gluck: Was this your first exposure to the suffrage fight?

Kettler: That was my first exposure to it. I was always a suffragette and I used to argue about it with this early friend of mine, this chum of mine. She wasn't in New York at that time or she might have gone down to Washington, D.C. with me. But I went down. The story with her follows after my experience with the suffrage party [The National Woman's Party].* You don't want to hear the story of the suffrage party yet, do you?

Gluck: First, can you tell me more about your radical political involvement?

Kettler: Prior to that I had been, with my friend, active in the various movements that existed in New York. I met a number of IWWs [Industrial Workers of the World] there and a number of socialists and general radicals who were not committed to any particular ideology or to any particular party. I was already familiar with the IWW and the socialists.

As far as anarchism is concerned, that's really more of an aesthetic philosophy. Even in those days, I thought it was an aesthetic philosophy - although it is not. I had opportunities since then to analyze it more thoroughly and still think it's a rather aesthetic philosophy; an ethical one rather than a practical one. A practical one is the things that we are faced with in life. You're trying to transform a society and suddenly you are faced with many practical issues. If you have not had the experience, you really stumble and you fumble in trying to break down these issues and then reorganize them into a new type of administrative work.

Of course, you know, I have read about anarchism

*Editor's Note: Whenever Mrs. Kettler talks of the suffrage party she is referring to the National Woman's Party.

Kettler: and I realize that they have a fairly organized idea of how society would be handled. I'm not sure that I quite agree with it. It still sounds idealistic to me. As a matter of fact, all radical movements sound very idealistic to me as they haven't been realized in any society except the Soviet Union. And the Soviet Union has been a dismal - not just failure, but - disappointment to me.

Gluck: So your ideology at that time, when you became involved in the suffrage movement, was basically the current socialist ideology of that period?

Kettler: It was actually a current anarchist ideology and, as I say, rather on the ephemeral side. I really hadn't done any reading. I don't believe I read until about thirty or forty years ago, which is very shameful of me because I should have read at the very beginning. But I was a romantic person so I was interested in novels rather than in politics. I can't say that. I don't mean interested in novels rather than in politics, but rather than in political education, which really was extremely necessary for me because I was forced to form my own ideas of an ideal society. It was very interesting, later, as I compared it with the books that I'd read, how close I'd come to working out a pattern that might more or less work - or that seemed to be comparable to what I had begun to study.

You know, actually, you have a thinking mind. If you were raised as I was raised, in a radical world, your ideas begin to function radically; and they function theoretically, too. They also function with a great deal of disappointment when you see how the world is operating and how you're not getting any place; how a Russian Revolution takes place and what happens to it in a very short time.

You have a great deal of idealism towards the Revolution, which was phenomenal. The Revolution really was phenomenal. Then you have to go through the entire progress of communism to what [Alexander] Solzhenitsyn called state capitalism. This is the thing that surprised me - that they'd even come to changing the whole structure of the Soviet Union by calling it state capitalism. I'm not too much

Kettler: impressed because from all that I've read of his letters and his articles, he still doesn't understand Marxism. They don't understand Marxism and have no way of really understanding what was done wrong in the Soviet Union. These professors at the universities over there aren't even allowed to read the old Marxist literature; they only read what has been revised by Stalin and by other capable writers in the Soviet Union.

Anyway, I'm going off the point - I'm talking generally now, including my ideas as well as my experiences. But this is what happens in my letters to people; I start out nonchalantly and the next thing I know, I'm knee-deep in a political idea and philosophy.

Gluck: What about your involvement with other radicals in New York?

Kettler: The involvement was general. I wasn't a member of anything; I didn't join any of the organizations. But I knew a lot of different types of radicals - IWWs and socialists, mainly. Some anarchists, but I don't remember any to an important degree.

Gluck: You mentioned before knowing Hippolyte Havel [an anarchist associate of Emma Goldman].

Kettler: Oh, yes.

Gluck: He was still an anarchist then, wasn't he?

Kettler: Yes, he was an anarchist, that's right. I guess the only anarchists I knew were the big ones. [Laughter] I went in 1916 to Provincetown, and I think that's where I met him. No, no - I knew Hippolyte in New York City. I met him before then. But it's so many years ago, and it didn't seem important to me to remember dates and figures and - there was a continual meshing of dates.

Gluck: The dates aren't that important.

Kettler: But I met Hippolyte in New York before I went to Provincetown. I went to Provincetown with the Zorach family. Did you ever hear of them? He was a sculptor and she was a painter. He was with the New

Kettler: York School of Social Research; I think they had an art department. He was there until he died not long ago - two or three years ago.

Gluck: And you went as a friend of theirs?

Kettler: I met them and they wanted somebody to go along and look after their young boy. He was about a year or a year and a half at that time. I don't know whether I was in Provincetown the whole summer. I was there at least two months. I stayed there [with the Zorachs] about a month and then I left them and got a room.

I met the people who were there. How I met them, I don't know - perhaps through the Zorachs. But I told you the story already about meeting Eugene O'Neill and Terry Carlin. And about introducing Eugene to this group of people there, and about how I was offered a part in one of Louise Bryant's one-act plays and about how I turned it down because I wanted one in Eugene O'Neill's. [Laughter] I couldn't act worth a darn, but do you know I chose the biggest role there was and the most difficult. You had to be a professional actress to play it. [Laughter]

Gluck: So your associations were with an occasional anarchist, like Hippolyte Havel. Did you know Berkman and Goldman?

Kettler: I met both Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman and I know I received a letter from Berkman while I was in jail in Virginia [Occoquan]. I didn't know them well; I just met them occasionally. I remember, now, that I met them through their anarchist group. I used to go to their affairs and sometimes to their forums, and I met a number of people there. You see, I traveled around to all these various groups.

I don't remember going to the IWW headquarters. I did go to the Socialist party headquarters. I had very strong views against those fellows who registered for the draft - very strong - and had great admiration for the two or three who refused to register and spent the years in Leavenworth Prison.*

*Editor's note: There were many who refused to register, but only a few were widely publicised.

Kettler: Evidently Leavenworth has been the one federal prison that was used for conscientious objectors in this country.

Gluck: That's where Berkman served his second term. No. No, it was at Atlanta. He and Ammon Hennacy were both at Atlanta.

Kettler: Who?

Gluck: Ammon Hennacy of the Catholic Worker.

Kettler: Oh. I didn't know him. I might have met him, but I do not recall him. From the Catholic Worker paper, you mean? The only one I know there is Dorothy Day. I know her through the Liberator; that preceded the Masses.

Gluck: In all of these groups, you were sort of in and out?

Kettler: Just in and out. I was a general radical; a general radical with not much education and not much knowledge. But I have a very fertile mind. I worked out my idea of an ideal society. It was very funny that I was much more logical than I realized; because when I finally joined the Socialist Workers Party I had already accepted a great many ideas in it. I had already worked them out in my own mind.

But I didn't know history. I tell you, it's pitiful when you don't know history. You listen to people giving you a lot of historical material, and you have no basis on which to judge it; you have no knowledge of it. That was one of the pitiful parts of my life that I've always regretted. I've had to study, to learn so much since then.

I joined the Socialist Workers Party in 1940. That's about thirty-three years ago.

Feminist Ideology as an Extension of Radicalism

Gluck: During this sort of going in and out of radical activities, before you went to Washington, do you remember if there was much talk or thought about women in the radical movement then?



Kettler: Evidently there was. How would I have gotten started going down to Washington if I didn't have ideas already about the repression of women in many fields of political and public life? Also the repression of women as thinking creatures - that was my first objection. I thought women were very capable of thinking and very capable of organizing and very capable of all kinds of political activities and political knowledge. After all, I met a lot of women and I listened to them.

Quite aside from that, I had a strong feminist viewpoint virtually my whole life. I mean, I used to argue about it with various people over the years. But the only time I ever joined anything is when I joined the suffrage party in Washington, D.C.

Gluck: Do you remember any of the activities around the birth control fight, like when Emma Goldman was arrested for giving out birth control literature?

Kettler: Vaguely. I wasn't involved in it. I just don't remember [any birth control activities] until I went to Seattle, Washington. I could have gotten so many years in jail for writing a letter on birth control. The [police] officer read it. Do you know how I kept him from knowing what he was reading? I talked. I talked the entire time that he was reading that letter and he never made any sense out of it. He just folded it up and put it back in the drawer.

Gluck: In this earlier time, though, you don't remember consciously being aware of discussion in the radical movement about women? It was there somewhere to have influenced you?

Kettler: I accepted it passively. Looking back on it, I don't recall any specific instance, I was travelling around with two or three girls; we were all feminists and we all believed that women were just as capable as men if given the opportunity or permitted to develop the potentiality. It just never occurred to us that women weren't any less capable than men.

Of course, for my whole life, I've had the attitude that men themselves weren't very capable; that the average person is too busy trying to earn a living to find out if he had any talents or to develop arts or to develop other types of work besides whatever they were doing working for a living.



- Kettler: But, you know, this was a part of the whole philosophy that we carried, and I can't separate one from the other and remember distinctly any special struggle that we fought.
- Gluck: Do you remember at that period of time using the word feminist to describe yourself?
- Kettler: No, I don't think we used that word. I don't know what we used. I don't know how this word feminist came into use, do you know?
- Gluck: It was used early, but a lot of women who were involved in radicalism didn't use it to describe their own position.
- Kettler: Yes, because they allied themselves with men; this was a total struggle, regardless of sex.
- Gluck: At that point - this is still before you went to Washington - did you have any ideas about marriage and children and sex?
- Kettler: I had ideas about sex and marriage, but I don't think I was thinking about children for myself.
- Gluck: What were your ideas at that time?
- Kettler: As I said, the ideas were all meshed together. I can't remember any specific instance about children. I had an interest in sex and in marriage, and that's all I remember.
- Gluck: Did you believe in the institution of marriage, then, at that point?
- Kettler: I imagine that I didn't. I think that I even had a legal objection to it. At that time, they were talking about the women who were married being legal prostitutes. There was a great deal of that kind of talk. I accepted it without going deeply into it.

However, I really had feminist views my whole life. I'd notice areas of repression against women and discrimination - I noticed that constantly. I don't know of any field I can touch where it didn't exist. So that, really, my whole attitude was a total attitude against discrimination. Whenever I'd hear



Kettler: of something new that I hadn't heard of before, I accepted it. Perhaps I accepted it too quickly and too glibly. But my views haven't changed about it so that I think I was correct in accepting them.

You still want just my philosophy, my early philosophy?

THE SUFFRAGE STRUGGLE: DIRECT ACTION IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Prelude

Gluck: We're going to start shifting to the suffrage story. I want to ask you a few more questions about New York, though. Do you recall those earlier suffrage parades in New York? Like in 1915 there was a big parade. Do you recall any of those suffrage parades?

Kettler: I walked in a couple of them. I know that I walked in one of them before I went down to Washington and walked in another one after I went down to Washington. That's all I remember - just walking in them.

Gluck: What I wasn't sure about was if the Washington, D.C. experience was the very first contact with suffrage or if you had been in the parades or had some other suffrage exposure.

Kettler: I know that my friend and I walked in that earlier parade - about 1915, or whenever it was. I know that was before I went down to Washington. Then, I walked in the next parade, but my friend wasn't there any longer; she was opposed to what the suffragettes were doing in Washington. She was opposed to direct action, which surprised me very much.

Gluck: So the next parade was after you had been in jail?

Kettler: Yes, after I had been in jail. I don't remember what year it was.

Gluck: The two really big ones were, I think, the one in 1912 and then this one in 1915. Then there was, of course, one in Washington itself also; there were several.



- Kettler: Well, it must be the 1915 one, but I thought I marched in two of them. The latest I could have marched was in 1918 - the early part of 1918. I left New York then and went to Everett, Washington that year.
- Gluck: This friend of yours who was also involved in radical activities - she marched with you?
- Kettler: She marched in one of them with me but not in the other.
- Gluck: Did your other political associates, do you remember, also go to those parades?
- Kettler: I don't remember. There must have been a group of us who went to this parade and marched in it. A group of my girl friends.
- Gluck: They were all involved in radical activities?
- Kettler: Oh yes. We all were. We were going to publish a monthly magazine - type so many copies. [Laughter] How we ever planned it - it was very comical, you know. Type so many copies and give them around. I was the only one that was writing, [laughter] so what material did we have? They thought I had a lot of talent [laughter]; I was surprised.
- Gluck: How you got involved in the Washington, D.C. suffrage activity, then, was that you went to a Socialist meeting of some kind.
- Kettler: I went to the Socialist party to help them out with the mailing. I often did that. This time, I met this woman, Katherine Hodges, from Everett, Washington, who became interested in me. How the conversation started, I don't know, but she told me what the suffrage party was doing in Washington and she asked if I'd like to go.
- Gluck: About how old was she? Was she in her fifties at that time?
- Kettler: How old was she? Oh, about thirty I imagine. The first thing she asked me was how old I was and I told her. I had just turned twenty-one. Then she told me about this group and asked if I would be interested in it. She told me how they were conducting



Kettler: the picket lines and so on, and said I might go to jail. Well, I'd never been to jail; it was kind of romantic in my mind. I thought that would be a very thrilling experience.

I was both serious and light-headed about it - not light-hearted but just light-headed about it.

Gluck: Had she herself been involved in the picketing or she just knew about it?

Kettler: No, she didn't go. The convention generally lasted about three days and she was actually, at the end of it, returning to Everett. She couldn't stay because to stay meant not only to picket several days but finally being arrested; and then you have to appear at the trial and then you have to grit your teeth and take your sentence.

So she couldn't stay. She was married and had responsibilities back home.

Gluck: Among the socialists, was she unusual in her interest in the suffrage struggle?

Kettler: She was unusual in that she was the only one who spoke to me about it at the time. They [the N.W.P.] were doing all this picketing in Washington; it was during the height of their picketing.

I don't know how I got there; I might have contacted some suffragettes in New York. All I remember is that I found myself in Washington. I didn't even have money, so someone must have paid my fare down there. Perhaps this Katherine Hodges paid my fare, or perhaps the suffrage party paid my fare. But my fare was paid down to Washington. Probably I was met at the station and taken to headquarters.

Headquarters was the Little White House. You've heard of the Little White House, haven't you? That's where President McKinley died and I was given his room and his bed. [Laughter] After that, I wanted to get out of that room; I didn't want to sleep in anybody's death bed. Of course, he was only killed, you know, he didn't die of a disease.



Gluck: Was this the National Woman's Party house, then? The one on Lafayette Square?

Kettler: In Washington? I guess it is, but I don't know; it was really kitty-corner from the main White House. That's Lafayette Square?

Gluck: I think so. Now, you met Alice Paul then?

Kettler: Oh yes. Oh yes, I certainly met Alice Paul.

The Picketing

Gluck: Can you remember when you got down there? You must have been really excited and everything about all this. You were all alone?

Kettler: I was all alone. Yes, I was alone. You know, they picketed four in a group; I met the other four only in Washington at headquarters. One of them was Peggy Johns from New York. The other girl's name I do not remember, but she was in the needle trades industry - an organizer in New York. The fourth person was a lawyer, either from Wyoming or Arizona or some western state.

Gluck: How long had you been at the headquarters there before you went out in a group?

Kettler: I was there perhaps a week before I went on the picket line. I don't know, two or three days before I went on the picket line.

Gluck: So you got familiar with everybody then, before you -

Kettler: Yes. I think that we started picketing the second or third day I was there. We picketed several days before we were finally hauled in and arrested.

Gluck: The same four of you picketed each of those days?

Kettler: Yes. See, what they did was as soon as four of the group were arrested, then they sent out another group of four. There was just a continuous picket line, and that's what drove the policemen crazy - they saw



Kettler: no end to the number of women who were picketing.

In the beginning, for several months, they were chastised or given three days in the city jail; anyhow, they weren't branded in the sense that they were sent to a workhouse. When I came, they had already started giving women thirty days and sending them to Occoquan workhouse.

Gluck: So you knew when you went out picketing that you would probably be arrested?

Kettler: So I knew that I would probably be arrested. But, as I said, it sounded very exciting to me.

Gluck: Did they prepare you for it in anyway?

Kettler: Well, I think they probably gave me a story about it. But we were quite capable. We started the [issue about] brutality at the workhouse; that shows that my group was a very capable group.

Gluck: How old were the others in your group? Were they older than you?

Kettler: I'd say they were between twenty-five and thirty-five.

Gluck: Were you actually picketing or were you sentinels? Did you stand in one place or did you walk?

Kettler: We were walking, right in front of the gates. Walking back and forth, just in front of the gates.

Gluck: Did you have that purple and gold and white banner?

Kettler: Oh yes, we had that. I remember now that those were our colors. Then there must have been a saying on it of some kind. You just can't have just a plain banner without something on it to draw the attention of the people passing by. I don't remember whether we each carried one banner or whether the four of us carried a long banner, with four posts on it.

Gluck: Do you remember what they said, the banners carried by your group?

Kettler: No. I should remember because it was in my mind for many years. I've forgotten. You know, it's very



Kettler: easy to forget after so many years. If you don't come across it, you just forget. But I think that they are in the two books on the subject that have been published. Have you read them?

Gluck: I read Up Hill With Banners Flying: The Story of the National Woman's Party.

Kettler: That was the second book that was written. The first one was written by a woman whom I knew, but I can't remember her name.

Gluck: Inez Irwin.

Kettler: Who?

Gluck: Inez Irwin.

Kettler: How many books were written on the subject that you found?

Gluck: There's one written by a Doris Stevens about the treatment in the jail.

Kettler: Doris Stevens is the one.

Gluck: The other one was Inez Irwin, which is the story of the whole party [N.W.P.] and the picketing; it's a much broader one.

Kettler: Doris Stevens didn't know that it was my group that started the [events leading to the] brutality; the first real confrontation that we had with the prison administration was through my group.

Gluck: Before the prison part, can you describe more what happened with the picketing. Were you harrassed while you were picketing?

Kettler: We were terribly harrassed. There were always men and women standing out there harrassing us and throwing some pretty bad insults - and pretty obscene ones.

Gluck: The women, too?

Kettler: The women weren't obscene, but the men were quite obscene. During that period, somebody shot right through the open windows of the Little White House



Kettler: of the headquarters - could have killed any woman that happened to be in the right position for it. And we couldn't get police protection. We just couldn't get it!

The police, as I said, left us alone; but when the crowd got too noisy and the police couldn't get rid of them, then they hauled us in for obstructing traffic.

Gluck: How large a crowd would gather everyday?

Kettler: I don't remember, but it seemed pretty big to me.

Gluck: Of the people passing by, were they all hostile? Did you get any support?

Kettler: We had some support, but you took your life in your hands. If any of the bystanders supported us, they could be beaten by the rest of the crowd.

Gluck: How did you handle the bystanders? Did you just ignore them?

Kettler: We just ignored them. These were our instructions - "just absolutely pay no attention to them." Then, towards the end, I know they started throwing stuff at the women. We had no police protection whatever - absolutely none. The only protection we had [laughter] was when we were arrested; then we were protected. [Laughter]

Gluck: How did you feel about all this? Were you pretty frightened?

Kettler: Oh, I was brave. My goodness. I was fighting for a cause. I didn't pay attention to them.

Gluck: How did it work? Did the four people stand there all day, or did someone come and --

Kettler: I don't remember. We probably must have had shifts. I don't think that we were there all day; I think we were there so many hours. We did have shifts. What did Doris Stevens say about it? Do you recall? You know, I had two books and I gave them both away. (I'm like that; when I value a thing very much and I value a friendship, I give what I value.)

Gluck: They're very difficult to get hold of.



Kettler: It's so sad because the book that I had was the Doris Stevens' book. The National Organization for Women learned about me only when I sent an article in to the bulletin, and they couldn't believe it. I looked young; I looked too young to have been in that fight.

They went to the library and picked up a book and found my maiden name; they recognized me by my first name. I was the only Ernestine, but they couldn't find the picture. [Laughter] It's awfully hard to find a picture of a twenty-one-year-old.

Gluck: I have some of the pictures of the picketing groups, but it's so hard to see who's who in them.

Kettler: Yes, it is very hard. I happened to know what kind of a hat I wore. I happened to recognize myself but that's all. One book, the Doris Stevens' book, has many pictures in it.

Gluck: And you were in one of those pictures?

Kettler: I was in one of those pictures.

Gluck: I'll have to get the copy out of the library again and have you show me which one was you.

Arrest and Jail

Gluck: So you were picketing a couple of days, then, before the arrest?

Kettler: I don't really know how long I picketed. I cannot tell you that, I do not remember.

On one of the picketing days, the police hauled us in and took us to jail.

Gluck: When you were arrested, were the four of you in one van when they took you off?

Kettler: I suppose so - or one car, whatever it was. All four of us would be arrested at one time. Immediately, the lawyer or somebody was sent to the city jail to bail us out.



Gluck: So you weren't really in jail very long when you were first arrested?

Kettler: No, we were probably there an hour. We were bailed out right away and then we appeared in court.

Gluck: How long did you have to wait for your trial to come up, then?

Kettler: I don't remember, but it wasn't very long. After all, they [the N.W.P.] had to board us and that costs money. But they really got a lot of money; they got a lot of contributions.

Gluck: Once you knew you were going to be going to jail, then, how did you feel?

Kettler: I already knew. As I said, I knew it when I was in New York because Katherine told me. She said, "You might go to jail; you might be arrested." I said, "That's all right." But I could not have gone again to jail.

Gluck: Do you recall what happened at the trial itself? Did you all make statements, or what?

Kettler: We all made statements that we were not obstructing traffic, but that the traffic was obstructing us - which was true. What is the other petty charge they can have? Obstructing traffic and loitering - I don't know. We weren't doing either one of them, we were marching. There were only four of us. We told them we couldn't possibly obstruct traffic. We were on the street. There was only one row of us, only four of us. There was plenty of room. "But," we said, "unfortunately a lot of people stopped and they obstructed traffic. None of them were arrested, except us." We were very bold.

Gluck: Did you make statements about suffrage at the trial?

Kettler: We tried, but we didn't get very far. Oh yes, we always made statements. Besides which, we had a lawyer. I'm trying to think of his name - he was very famous. He fought for woman's suffrage for years, and I can't think of his name. He was in that book, also.



Kettler: The judge asked me how old I was and when I said twenty-one, he was so mad; he couldn't believe it. But he had to believe it because he knew that one thing that the suffrage party was very insistent about was age; that we had to be twenty-one or over. We couldn't march, otherwise, and we couldn't participate in that fight.

So we were given thirty days.

Gluck: You were sentenced right at the time you were arrested?

Kettler: No, not at the time. We were bailed out first. Then we appeared in court, and then the judge sentenced us. Before then, only the hardcore criminals like Alice Paul were given thirty days. Some of the others were given ten days or three days. I think that the three-day [sentences] were spent in the city jail.

Suffragists as Political Prisoners: The Demands

Kettler: After we were sentenced, we were taken directly to the city jail. That's where we cooked up our political prisoner demands.* "We were political prisoners. We were not guilty of obstructing traffic. We were not guilty of the sentence as charged. Therefore, we did not owe any kind of work in the workhouse." That workhouse [Occoquan] was a real workhouse - you worked or else. We didn't work so we were "or elsed." That's the beginning of the real fight at the workhouse.

In the jail, where we were taken that evening and overnight, we made all these decisions. We were not going to work. We were going to ask all the other suffrage women already in jail to accept our

*For another account of prison life and development of the political prisoner demands see Doris Stevens, Jailed for Freedom, N.Y. 1920. pp. 175-183.



Kettler: decision, and whatever happened, happened.

Gluck: There was already a group in [the workhouse] when you went in?

Kettler: There was a group of either eight or twelve women. I do not remember; either we made the twelve women or we made sixteen women. It seemed like a rather large crowd to me, so I think that we made it sixteen women when we got there. Now I'm giving you the real story of the prison experience. [Coughing] (If I didn't smoke so much, I wouldn't be coughing.)

When we got there, we had an immediate discussion with the other women and told them our decision. They were very enthusiastic about it; they accepted it without question. The next day we appeared in the workroom, and we just sat there with our hands in our laps.

I don't know when the superintendent began to talk to us, but it wasn't long before he asked, "Would we, at least, please hold the work in our lap," [He said that] we were demoralizing the other prisoners in that workroom. What we were making, I suppose, were sack dresses for the prisoners; that's all we wore, just sack dresses.

We said, "No." We'd decided that since we were unjustly arrested and that we were political prisoners, it would be just as wrong for us to hold the work in our hands as it was to sew it. We were going to abide by our decision - that we had to be respected as political prisoners." This went on for twenty-six days.

We were supposed to have thirty days there but we lost the four days or five days off for good behavior the first day we were at the city jail where we raised Cain (or perhaps at the workhouse, where we refused to work).

All the women in that room [the sewing room at Occoquan] took an example from us, and they also refused to work; there was nothing they could do about the whole room. I think that there probably were about a dozen other women in that workroom. I really don't remember; it was a fairly big room, but it didn't seem crowded.



Gluck: In the Doris Stevens' book there is a letter signed by all of you, protesting conditions and stating your demands.* Do you recall how that statement was drawn up?

Kettler: I don't think we even wrote anything during that period. I think we really voiced it orally.

[Commenting on the contents of the letter.] We were not segregated, I know that. We asked not to be confined under locks and bars in small groups. In the time that I was there, none of us were segregated and no one was in solitary confinement except the voluntary one of Peggy Johns who really took herself to the hospital and stayed there.

We asked exemption from prison work; that our legal right to consult counsel be recognized; that food sent to us from outside; that we be allowed to supply ourselves with writing material for as much correspondence as we may need - which we didn't get. We were allowed some correspondence, not much. That was limited to receiving books, letters, and newspapers from our relatives and friends.

To my knowledge, I was the only one who was permitted a visit; my mother was permitted to come and see me. The people in the office were mad as hell because we spoke in Roumanian and nobody understood. [Laughter] [Coughing and sneezing]

[Reading from the Doris Stevens' book] "On entering the workhouse we found conditions very bad, but before we could ask that the suffragists be treated as political prisoners, it was necessary to make a stand for the ordinary rights of human beings for all inmates." That must have been before we came there. As I said, there were about a dozen women already there.

Gluck: So you don't remember any statement being written while you were inside? Do you think this was written once you were out?

*See Appendix for Letter to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia.



Kettler: I don't remember a statement that we wrote inside. It seems to me I should remember it. I know what we told the superintendent virtually everyday that we were there; but I don't remember a written statement. The written statement, I think, was done afterwards. They got the names of everyone who was there but I don't think got enough names.

Serving Time at Occoquan

Gluck: Do you remember Lucy Burns? In that letter that all of you signed it sounds like she, not Peggy Johns, was the one who was separated from the rest of you. You ask that she should be rejoined with you; it sounds like she was put in the psychopathic ward.

Kettler: I think they made a mistake. Absolutely, because during September Peggy was there, and she was in the hospital all of that time. It's possible that they had forgotten it.

You see, my friend, Peggy Johns, became ill and she was taken to the hospital. Believe it or not, she was in the hospital the entire time, for twenty-six days.

I used to visit her in the hospital every day. One day I went to see her and she wasn't there. I asked the nurse what happened to my friend. She said, "I don't know." I asked all the other nurses, whoever was there. They said, "We don't know. Just go and ask the superintendent."

I rushed into the other building. There was a long hallway - a dining room at the end and a long hallway to the superintendent's office at the front. As I walked along the hallway, there was Peggy - all dressed up in her civilian clothes.

I said, "Peggy! Where are you going?" She said, "They're taking me to the psychopathic ward in Washington, D.C. Go tell the other girls, and all of you rush back here." So I did. I rushed back and told the girls what was going on, and we all rushed



Kettler: into the office.

The superintendent was absolutely dumbfounded when he saw us, you know. He just thought that he would be able to steal her away without us knowing anything about it. If it hadn't been that I was her very loyal visitor, I wouldn't have known a thing about it and we wouldn't have found out. But I think that eventually we would have found out through what happened afterwards.

When we got into that office, we told him that he can't do that; that she will have to be picked up by our lawyer in Washington and taken to the hospital; that she cannot be sent just by the prison alone; that we had no assurance what would happen to her; and that, above all things, we want security for our women.

He wouldn't abide by it. One of the women rushed to the telephone to phone our headquarters in Washington, and he rushed over, too, and just tore the phone right off the wall. That's the time that he called in deputies. Of all the dirty tricks, he called in Negro girls to come in there and - I'm telling you - they beat the hell out of us.

I was so little that I was scared to death to get in the crowd and I was on the outside. I saw some women on the floor being trampled. The Negro girls - considering how badly they were treated - got the most intense joy out of beating the hell out of the white women. The superintendent was so frightened when he saw the zeal with which these women were beating us - he didn't want us killed or hurt in anyway because he would be held entirely responsible - that he had to call in the men deputies to haul the Negro girls off of us and get them outside.

He then allowed us to call Washington. We called headquarters and told them what was going on. Peggy was sent to Washington and the lawyer met her and took her to the hospital (or wherever he took her). Anyway, she wasn't taken to the psychopathic ward. I think her illness was perhaps contrived.

The food was so bad that it was all we could do to eat it.



Gluck: This was before the hunger strike, so everybody was eating at this time?

Kettler: Yes, this is before the hunger strike. Everybody was eating. The next group was the [one which called the] hunger strike - the one that followed us. That was another decision that was formed by the women.

Alice Paul was still in jail after we finished our thirty days. We were sent back together [to the city jail] with other women, but Alice Paul - I think - either hadn't quite finished her thirty days or she had sixty days. I don't remember.

Gluck: She was in jail the same time you were.

Kettler: She was in jail when we got there, together with about eight or twelve other women; they were all arrested at different times and a sentence would expire at different days, too.

Gluck: While you were in jail, did she make decisions for the group, or did the group really decide together?

Kettler: The group decided together. We talked, you know. All we could do was talk. We couldn't read. I don't know why. Since we were all sitting at one table, we did a great deal of talking as to how to comport ourselves.

We also had certain prescribed prison walks through the gardens there; it was a lovely fall time of the year, you know. The leaves were turning red and they were falling, the air was fresh.

The food was the greatest problem we had there. It was just unbelievable - the worms that were found in the oatmeal we ate, in the soup we ate. I don't remember what else we were given to eat. I don't remember anything else. The coffee was God knows what -- it wasn't coffee. It might have been chicory or - whatever is chicory, roasted peanuts?

Gluck: It's a root.

Kettler: A root? I think peanuts are probably too expensive, you know.



Kettler: Some of the women were actually on a hunger strike already; they just couldn't eat. The only thing they could eat was bread - if it wasn't moldy and if it didn't show rat tracks.

That prison was paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to feed us, and it raised beautiful vegetables. We had none of them. It raised all the food that was necessary to maintain that prison - besides a great deal more that they could buy on the outside. Instead, they bought this old stuff that's been rancid and in warehouses heaven knows how many years, and fed us that.

Of course, in those days a lot of food had worms in it; you had to be careful. When you bought it, you had to eat it right away. The prison didn't buy the food right away or didn't cook it right away, and it bought the worst of all possible foods anyway. It was all loaded with worms. I just didn't know what to do; I used to pick out the worms. If I found some clean oatmeal or clean soup, I'd eat it. But most of us lost a lot of pounds during the thirty days in that jail.

Incidentally, we weren't there [at Occoquan] thirty days. After they sent Peggy back to Washington - I think the next day they sent us back [to the city jail]. The superintendent didn't want us any longer, and he maneuvered to get us moved out of there and to send us back to the city jail to finish our sentence. We had about three days more to serve. We had lost our five days off for good behavior the first day we were in the city jail. Of course, we lost it at the workhouse, too, because we initiated that -- what do you call it?

Gluck: Work strike?

Kettler: We had all kinds of notoriety. The newspapermen came to interview us. They'd even bring us food from the outside. The food in the city jail was much better than at the workhouse. But we were mad; we were so darned mad. They put us in solitary confinement - two in each cell.

Gluck: This was in the city jail?



Kettler: This was in the city jail; after the fracas at the workhouse. I remember that after we ate, we'd take the tin plates and throw them through the bars of the [laughter] gate, of the doors, right at the windows. I think we broke some windows. We raised Cain! We raised so much hell that, I tell you, the prison was glad to get rid of us; we were demoralizing the other prisoners in the place.

Also, I was smoking then. I remember giving one of the girls some money to buy me cigarettes. I never got them. She probably spent the money on dope. It was really funny, I mean. We learned one thing: that you never, never buy anything through the prisoners in a jail. Never, because you'll never get it nor the money back.

Gluck: In Occoquan were you in a cell? How many were in a cell together?

Kettler: We were in dormitories. We all slept in one long dormitory, with beds on both sides; like the ones you see in motion pictures of prison wards or hospital wards, where they have beds on both sides.

Gluck: And all the suffragists were in the same dormitory, or most of them? All of you who were arrested were in the same dormitory? You weren't in separate dormitories?

Kettler: Oh, no. They had a dormitory for about thirty women. I think we all slept there, not just the suffragettes but the other women, too. I don't recall they had two dormitories. At least I have no recollection of seeing another dormitory. And the beds were about three feet apart.

Gluck: Were they bunk beds?

Kettler: No, no. Just straight, narrow beds, like the hospital beds or the prison beds you see in dormitories. Or like the dormitories in the army that I've seen in pictures.

[The isolation of the suffragists] happened afterwards. You see, after our insistence that we were political prisoners, and the fact that we started the incident leading to the brutality there, the later prisoners were segregated; they were put in cells. This is what they're referring to [in Doris



Kettler: Stevens' book, Jailed for Freedom]. They're not referring to the time that I was there, but to later times.

We were in the same dormitory. We took turns washing ourselves every morning. There were several places there and we just took turns washing ourselves. Then we dressed and went into the dining room to eat our worm food.

To me, that was the most terrible part of the whole prison - the food. We all suffered. One woman was terribly sick when she was taken out of there because she just couldn't eat. She came from a wealthy family. I think two of those women had husbands or fathers who were senators or representatives in the Congress. One of them came from an extremely wealthy family, and going to prison was a real sacrifice for her. After all, I came from a very poor family. But our food was always clean. This was the first time I was confronted by worms.

These were outstanding because there were so many of them [worms]. I know that often I'd just leave the food; I just couldn't eat it. I just couldn't go through the job of picking out the worms, weevils, or whatever they were. It was really miserable in that fashion. Otherwise, we weren't punished. There was nothing the superintendent could do if you refused to work.

Gluck: Everyday you would go to the workroom and refuse and just sit there the whole day?

Kettler: We'd just sit there all day long, except when we went out. I think twice a day we went out for our "constitutional."

Gluck: Was there any beating of the women besides that one occasion?

Kettler: That was the only occasion. As I said, that was the only brutality that we suffered. But the next group that came in went on a hunger strike, and they were brutally treated. Groups of women who were arrested after us were really brutally treated. They received very severe treatment. They were beaten and dragged across the - I don't know what you would



Kettler: call it - patio or driveway or something from the office to the cells. Some women had broken ribs and were bleeding profusely and they weren't treated. Others had all kinds of lacerations. Have you read about that in Doris Stevens' book?

Gluck: Yes. I also remember the incident that you were talking about, when the deputies were called in. It's either in that, or the National Woman's Party book - I'm not sure which.

Kettler: That was in the book? I don't remember. I know that what was not in the book - and evidently wasn't considered important to mention - was the fact that it was my group who decided to declare all suffragettes political prisoners.

That really gave quite a different tinge to the whole struggle. We were political activists, and when we were arrested, we were political prisoners; arrested on trumped-up charges - obstructing traffic.

Gluck: Do you recall how the group arrived at the decision?

Kettler: How we arrived at the decision? Peggy Johns was the truly political person in that group. She's the one that suggested it, and we all agreed with her. I'm surprised that the trade unionist didn't mention it first, but a trade unionist doesn't necessarily find their experience in political prisoner activities. Peggy Johns evidently knew quite a good deal about political prisoners and mentioned it. I didn't even think of it - if I thought at all. Actually, I was immature in many ways and mature in other ways. I had a very unbalanced type of mind at that time.

Gluck: Was the decision made before your sentence or once you were in the city jail?

Kettler: No. After we were sentenced, we were taken to the city jail and kept there overnight and taken to the prison in a bus the following morning. I think it was their [the prison] bus. It might have been a public bus, but I don't remember.

One of the experiences we had was that we talked quite at length with one of the other prisoners at the workhouse who had been there, or who had been



Kettler: arrested, I don't know how many times; we asked how that happened. She said that first of all, she was a drug addict - a heroin addict - and that she would be arrested and given a sentence and sent to this prison.

Then, when her sentence was over and she arrived in Washington, the first person she met was a policeman. "What's your name? Where do you live?" Well, after you've been in prison, you have no address. Immediately, she was hauled back to the courthouse and given another sentence and sent back to prison again.

She told us that this would probably happen again unless she could be met by someone; someone who would claim that she was a relative or something. We arranged to have one of our women at headquarters declare her as a ward or a custodian (or another word that's common but I can't think of it). That happened.

We took her to the headquarters and she was there two or three days. One day she wanted to go for a walk. They couldn't stop her. I mean, after all, you can't stay in one building all day long. They chose me to go along with her but told me not to let her - under any circumstance - leave me, that she should walk with me - and come back with me. You know, I lost her.

I knew that I couldn't keep her. She was a big woman - she must have been a whole foot taller than I am and heavy-set. We came to a building and she said she wanted to see somebody. She was only to be gone a minute. And I argued with her until I saw that it was hopeless. I had to let her go. There was nothing I could do, absolutely nothing I could do. She never came down. I came back and told the people. They knew there was nothing they could do.

Aside from which, these prisoners are never without drugs in the jail. She was given drugs; she bought drugs somehow or other. In some way or in some fashion, she was able to get drugs at the workhouse so that she really had drugs whenever she needed them.

Gluck: How did the other prisoners at the workhouse react to the suffragists?

Kettler: As I said, when they saw we weren't working, they took heart; they could be real courageous. They wouldn't work either. That's what bothered the superintendent. He wouldn't have cared so much if they worked, but it was the fact that we were inspiring these women to be brave and not work either. We probably said "Don't you work, either. Join us." So they joined us. I imagine this is what we told them, I don't really know.

Afterthoughts

Gluck: When you got out of the workhouse, they sent you the last three days back to the city jail. And then you got out of there and you went back to headquarters?

Kettler: To headquarters. I don't know how long I stayed there. I think I was in Washington another week or two. I was even tempted to go back again on the picket line. But actually, I just couldn't stand the thought of going back to that workhouse again. The food almost killed me, and some of the women were really quite sick from it; some of them almost starved themselves to death.

Gluck: How did you feel about it all after you were released from prison?

Kettler: I felt in a sense horrified by the different things that could happen to you in a prison. It wasn't as exciting as I thought it would be; it was exciting in a frightening way but not exciting in a joyous way. That was one reason why I decided not to go back again on the picket line and then be tried again and sentenced again. I would have been sentenced the second time, and may have even been given sixty days though I doubt it. I probably would have received thirty days.

But after thirty days of that dreadful food and the fear of what might happen to the next suffragette contingent that was arrested, I didn't want to go

Kettler: back. I just wasn't courageous enough, because it did take courage to go back again. None of the four women in my contingent signed for another [commitment]; none of us did.*

Gluck: Did you keep in touch with the other women at all?

Kettler: The only one I kept in touch with was Peggy because she lived in New York and so did I. I saw quite a bit of her in New York until I went West. Then I didn't see her again until about twelve years ago. I visited England. I got her address through a man who was writing a biography of Eugene O'Neill. He had a letter in all of the newspapers throughout the country asking for anyone who knew Gene, who had any information; that he would be very pleased to receive it because he was writing this book.

So I wrote him, and in the correspondence mentioned my prison experience. He wrote back and said, "You know, Peggy Johns is still alive; she's a sturdy old lady." I tell you, I was thrilled when I heard this. I wanted her address right away. I got it and I wrote to her. She wrote back, "Dearest Ernestine." But she wasn't so impressed with me when she saw me in person. To me she looked like a grand dame.

I went with her, and the writer left us - he had work to do. She took me to the bars in the Village, it was just merely walking around from one bar to another. In one of them, I noticed that every time a young girl came in she'd go over and kiss Peggy on the cheeks. I thought it was so delightful to see that sort of thing - nobody ever did that to me. [Laughter] But they did it to Peggy. We weren't impressed [with one another]. Although she invited me to come and visit her, I didn't.

Then, I met an old, old boyfriend of mine whose name I've even forgotten. This was after so many years. I was a young girl in those early days. And she was disgusted with me.

*Editors note: There is some independent evidence that Peggy Johns did return. See Doris Stevens' Appendix.

- Gluck: What were your impressions of Alice Paul at that time?
- Kettler: She was a very serious woman. My impression of her was of a very serious, dedicated person. This is all I could tell you about her because there was nothing else that I could think of that stands out in my mind.
- Gluck: Was she charismatic?
- Kettler: I wouldn't say so. As I said, she was extremely serious. I have the vision of a very serious, dedicated suffragette. If she had charisma, I hadn't noticed it.
- Gluck: Do you recall any of the other women at the [National Woman's Party] headquarters that you met?
- Kettler: Yes, I recall a number of them but I don't remember their names anymore. I could recognize them if I had the book and saw their names.
- Gluck: But you didn't keep up any associations?
- Kettler: Only one other woman in our group besides Peggy lived in New York - the trade unionist. I didn't keep in touch with her at all.
- Gluck: The experience of being in jail together didn't create any bonds?
- Kettler: I don't know. It just didn't; except with Peggy. Peggy was a little woman - she wasn't much taller than I am. Maybe we just stood together and supported one another; it gave us this additional muscle that we needed.
- Gluck: When you went back to New York, then, you had no thoughts of any continuing involvement with the women's movement?
- Kettler: No, I really didn't. I mean I would engage in any parade they had or any big affair they had. You see, I wasn't even in favor of citizenship; I wasn't political in that regard. The only thought I had in mind was that voting didn't help the working people; that all that would happen is to add so many more votes; but that nevertheless it had the illusion of equality in it. It really was an illusion; because Alice Paul has been fighting for equal rights ever

Kettler: since then, and we only gained it just last year.

It's funny. You see, this is where some of my own revolutionary zeal ceases to be revolutionary. I should be the first to criticize any discrimination of that nature at anytime in my life. And yet, I didn't do it. For the life of me, I don't know why. The [denial of the] vote struck me as very undemocratic. There was such a lack of democracy regarding women that I should think I would have fought in it - that I would have continued in that organization. And yet I didn't.

The trouble was that I really wasn't political. I was in a political group, but most of them were writers or artists of one kind or another - musicians, teachers, professional type of people with other interests besides politics. So, really, my interests were fragmented. I didn't choose politics until almost recently.

FEMINISM, RADICALISM, AND SUFFRAGE: REFLECTIONS

Gluck: I would like to go back now and discuss that whole early notion of feminism. At that time, there was a group of feminists in Greenwich Village, like Crystal Eastman and Ida Raugh.

Kettler: I knew them.

Gluck: You were involved in that circle, weren't you?

Kettler: I wasn't involved in their circle, but I knew them.

Gluck: Did you use the word feminist in those days, do you recall?

Kettler: I really and truly don't remember. I think so. What other word could they have used?

Gluck: Some of the women, of course, who were not radical just talked about being a suffragist because they didn't have a larger feminist vision.

Kettler: Both men and women seem to have taken thousands of years to understand that there was a rupture between

Kettler: the male and the female sex; that women were assigned certain jobs and men were assigned other jobs, and that out of this assignation of jobs developed the idea of male superiority - the man was taller, stronger, brawny, and could beat the woman unconscious. But this is the way the human race has always acted. In all the tribal wars the victor has a perfect right to humiliate and subjugate the losers. This is the way their attitude was towards women.

This is what women have failed to understand. The vote was nothing; even the men had it. The men misused the vote and the women misused the vote. This is one of the misfortunes of a democracy; people can't judge - have no way of judging - what would be to their benefit and what turns out to be to their loss.

This is the way I have always thought - in those terms. My group of anarchists and Wobblies and socialists - the women especially - thought as I did. To an extent the men did, but to a large extent they felt very superior to the female sex. Women were still not in the forefront as writers or as artists or as philosophers or as teachers. Women themselves wouldn't go to the forefront. There were very few women - like George Elliott. Or what is this other one in France who wrote "a rose is a rose is a rose"?

Gluck: Gertrude Stein?

Kettler: Gertrude Stein. There are very few such women. They were unusual, in the sense. We mistakenly say they are like men. We say that because we have no other comparison. We compare one existence to another to arrive at some conclusion. That is why the saying is: "that she is just like a man." But actually she's not like a man. She's just like a human being; with certain talents and aspirations and development. In that sense, both men and women have them.

Gluck: These thoughts are those that you had in those early days, too?

Kettler: Yes. I've always had them. I had philosophical ideas about feminism; not political ones. The political ones arose only when my political consciousness realized that I was ignorant - that I was really

Kettler: illiterate politically. I began to read very rapidly and then sort of joined all my thoughts together and realized that society is political, economic, philosophical. All knowledge is tied up in our society, and you can't solve any problem along a specific, narrow line. You have to take all these ideas into consideration in order to arrive at some tolerable conclusion or solution.

Gluck: Were you influenced at all or did you have contact with that Greenwich Village group?

Kettler: Oh yes. Oh yes. I was in it for about three years, I guess, maybe longer. Until I came West. I was in it about two years because I came West in 1918 and I was in the Village, I remember, in 1916 and 1917 - or maybe even before 1916.

Gluck: That's where the very active radical feminists were, isn't it?

Kettler: As I say, they were mostly dilettantes and they were mostly non-political. You see, that was the time that I was interested in the theater and I was interested in writing. I'd done a great deal of writing. I was interested in art. I was a bohemian, in the real sense of it. The politics were sort of brought into it because you live in a political society. Because certain ideas would be expressed about which I felt offended and, if I corrected them, I would try to correct them politically as well as philosophically. Politics did not play a role in my life; it was a part of the general life I lived.

Gluck: The feminism?

Kettler: Feminism was a part of my general life. Feminism was not outstanding in my life; all of these were outstanding. I can't pick on any one subject and say that is the subject that had a certain influence on me. They all had an influence on me.

What I'm trying to say about feminism is that I did not play a distinct feminist role. I argued when the subject came up in a discussion - but only when the subject came up in a discussion. I wasn't fighting for feminism. I don't know why. I was too young, really, to fight for anything. I was having a good time.

- Kettler: I was really young in those days. I was young not just in years. I had an immaturity and I enjoyed living and arguing and discussing. Actually, seriousness didn't enter my life until quite a few years later. In fact, I don't know when it entered my life. [Laughter]
- Gluck: The atmosphere was of that Greenwich Village bohemian radical, then, essentially?
- Kettler: It had to be radical. I assure you, I couldn't have tolerated conservative people. We'd meet them and argue with them and go away.
- Gluck: The Provincetown Players were all tied up with feminist issues; people like Floyd Deli and Max Eastman were involved in that, weren't they?
- Kettler: I don't know. You'll have to read The Liberator to find out. They wrote for The Liberator at that time, but I haven't seen a magazine in years. I suppose they're in some university's archives.
- Gluck: Did you write for The Liberator at all?
- Kettler: No. I didn't publish anything; two or three poems - nothing.
- Gluck: Were you familiar with their ideas? Henrietta Rodman had a plan for an apartment. Actually they were implementing a lot of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's ideas about how lives could be organized so that women were freed from very rigid roles. Were you familiar with any of those ideas?
- Kettler: I was familiar with single tax and with the ninety-nine year lease. In fact, it was someone from the single tax colony somewhere in Massachusetts (the people who owned this land and leased it to those who worked it) sent me to college. Of course, that's how I learned something about it. But that's the only interest outside of my regular radicalism that I had. I think I read Henry George at that time, but I don't remember.
- Gluck: When you went to Washington, D.C., did you talk to the suffragists there at all in terms of feminism? Were they very narrowly defined, do you remember?

Kettler: I don't know; that was another one of my adventures, you know. Actually, I went there as an adventure - not seriously but as an adventure. I became far more aware of it and conscious that going to jail is not an adventure - it's an adventure but not an amusing one and not an entertaining one. I had much more awareness of feminism and suffragette-ism after I came out of prison than I did before then. Before then - it isn't that I didn't hear about it, but I didn't become overheated about it.

You see, joining organizations or getting excited or enthusiastic about certain political adventures wasn't my - what is that old expression? - I can't remember. It just wasn't in my nature to do that. I didn't understand organization until I joined the political organization, or until actually I joined the union organization.

But a union organization has a sense of responsibility which you cannot escape. You have to pay your dues and you're supposed to go to meetings. You just don't escape those - the dues-paying especially. In a political organization there is a different idea. You may or may not pay your dues; you can't be expelled or suspended. Something could happen to you but generally it doesn't. There is a lack of total responsibility and dedication, really.

Those things I learned when I joined them. In my early youth, I didn't join anything.

Gluck: And you don't recall what kinds of ideas the other suffragists with you [in Washington, D.C.] had?

Kettler: There were really liberal-conservatives. They were not radicals. That doesn't mean there were no radicals in the group - there were. But they were not effective and they would not waste their time there. Like Peggy Johns, who was a socialist or an anarchist or a radical - she certainly didn't go back or didn't join them afterwards. I don't think that the woman who was connected with the trade union joined them and went back to them afterwards. It was really a conservative group of women.

Many of them came from fine, rich families with very good minds and a willingness to fight for their ideas; to endure prison and the food and to even

Kettler: starve if they couldn't eat the food there. Some of the women did just virtually starve. They lost quite a bit of weight in jail.

But, you see, women like that are not only dedicated. Having come from a well-to-do home, food was an essential quality to them. To me it was a quantity. The quality disturbed me very much, but I had to make a choice between quantity and quality. I had to have something to eat, and you can't live on bread. At least, when soup is served you, you want to eat the soup. When cereal is served you, you want to eat the cereal. Before I could eat, I had to dig out all the bugs. This is terrible. But I had to do that so I could eat the food. You know, for about thirty years afterwards, I couldn't eat oatmeal nor soup in a restaurant. You couldn't get me to eat soup in a restaurant. It just sickened me. To this day, I keep searching for things in it. This is the lasting effect that jail had on me.

I sure felt awfully sorry for those women. They weren't poor like I was and they could be very choosy about their food and very demanding, and I couldn't.

Gluck: So their vision was basically really not broader?

Kettler: No, their vision was quite limited to voting rights for women. The fact that Alice Paul, for so many years, fought for the ERA just shows that she didn't have much support. That party organization [N.W.P.] should have spread throughout the country and should have really been the national organization that was organized only about six years ago. But it wasn't. I didn't even know where Alice Paul was.

When I talked to the League of Women Voters here to see if there were any other women in this area who had served time at Occoquan, they didn't know. And none of them - simply none of them - referred me to Alice Paul. None of them. It would have been very interesting to correspond with her.

That might have gotten me interested in it. But I don't think so - because I had been asked to join the League of Women Voters and I just couldn't stand

Kettler: what I call capitalist politics. I can't stand it. I have enough arguments within my own group; for instance, about the last presidential election - voting for McGovern, of all candidates.

Gluck: The suffrage thing was just sort of an adventure, but-

Kettler: Well, it was part of my radical background; as a radical, I believed in justice. It was very just for women to vote. It was highly undemocratic and it was an outrage that so much opposition has been placed against them getting the ballot. I mean - when I think of it - it's just incredible! I can't believe it. I condemned it! This is the way I felt.

That's why I went down there [to Washington, D.C.]. It wasn't just an adventure. Since I was not a political person, I might have been taken as an adventurer. But I was actually outraged that women didn't have the vote! There were, after all, as many women in the country as men. What is this business? Is a woman so far below a man intellectually that she's not fit to vote?

Those were my thoughts. But I would think the same way about other issues - and there were many other issues. Poverty was a distinct issue in those days and so was war. So was unemployment - all the issues that crop up and have continued throughout human history. You take them up; you just don't forget them. You take them along with you as you go from one development to another.

Some people may be radicals today, but if they get a good job might not be radicals tomorrow. In a sense, though, part of the radicalism would stick. They would be able to discuss certain issues from a liberal or even a radical point of view. But they may not agree with it.

Gluck: During that early period in Greenwich Village, what were your attitudes and beliefs about sexual freedom - which was one of the other big, important issues at that point?

Kettler: I've always had an attitude toward sexual freedom. Not necessarily free love. You think in terms that love should be free. Nevertheless, in favor of it

Kettler: for the very reason that engaging in it was considered an immoral, puritanic issue. It was so puritanic, it was so false I couldn't accept it. Unless you were legally married, you were not a moral woman. Naturally, in those days, we talked about the legal prostitute; that a woman would marry a man for money, therefore she was a legal prostitute. I was very much opposed to that.

Of course, I also believed that women should work after their marriage. That would give them more independence. If they wanted a trial marriage, they could try it - provided they had sufficient knowledge about contraceptives, you know.

Two issues bother me very much in this free love business; one is getting pregnant and the other is getting a disease. People - girls, especially - have no right to engage in it [sexual activity] if they are not properly trained, if they are not educated in how to prevent those two situations. They have no right to sexual freedom with that kind of ignorance.

This is my idea about sexual freedom, and I've always had it. There's never been any period in my life that I had it and another time that I didn't have it.

Gluck: That was certainly a contrast, though, to your background, wasn't it?

Kettler: It was not a contrast; it was part of my background. My whole background from childhood was a radical background.

Gluck: But didn't your mother have rather victorian attitudes?

Kettler: She had a victorian attitude toward sex. She hadn't overcome her own mother's training about sex and she turned it on me. It took me years before I found out how children were born. I was so mad at her for lying to me that I went home and gave her quite a lecture. She was in tears. "She thought I would learn." I said, "Where would I learn? You kept telling me constantly it was dirty! How could you and father do a dirty act? How could you convince me that you were doing a dirty act?" I thought sex was an unnatural act.

Kettler: She said, "I thought you would find it out in the street." I said, "I did," I was already fifteen at that time - that's a pretty old age to find out about sex. I said, "I did. I just did. And I'm balling you out for telling me lies all my life."

She started telling me lies when I was four, five, six. You see things; you hear things. Children are very curious; they're rabidly curious. I found that out when I grew up and had contact with children. In the first years of their life, they're very interested in sex. They're awfully curious. They have a period of years of quiet. From maybe six to about eleven, they are no longer interested in sex. They they begin to wake up again.

To what extent the lies parents tell their children bring on that amnesiac period between six and eleven, I don't know. But I had no amnesia about it; I was curious about it my whole life. That's why I was angry at my mother for telling me lies when I had to have the truth. The truth would have been very good for me.

So you see, my mother had mixed ideas. Actually much of my radicalism I learned outside. But I already had a mind that was capable of handling abstract ideas. I had an above-normal intelligence. It isn't that I was conservative at one time and radical at another. I was always radical. When I could begin to think and talk, I talked as a radical. That was at twelve, thirteen - maybe before then. I don't remember.

Gluck: So your association with the radicals, along with everything else, probably helped formulate your ideas on sexual freedom.

Kettler: You know, my ideas on sexual freedom started before I was fifteen; when I asked all the questions and was told all the lies. I began to analyze the whole sex subject in my mind. I would say, "How is it possible that men always have love nests if sex is abnormal? Is it possible that men are abnormal?" I began thinking in that fashion and straightening out my own ideas on it. I couldn't quite accept the fact that if sex was dirty, my father and mother engaged in it. I couldn't accept that. I would go so

Kettler: far as to analyze the love nests. The papers were rampant with those stories, especially in those very early years of the century.

When you talk about sexual freedom to me, I had sexual freedom before I reached fifteen; when I was already rebelling against much of the stuff that I didn't know and some of the stuff that I had already figured out for myself. I couldn't coordinate them. I could not coordinate them until I found out that sex was not only normal but that, without sex, there would be no human life. This I was able to grasp very quickly.

Within one year, I developed so rapidly that everybody remarked about it. I could not have developed without a brain, an unusual brain. I'm talking now, in a sense, philosophically. I'm not talking politically or economically. I'm saying that my philosophy, my philosophical attitude, was of a nature where I had to analyze ideas. I couldn't analyze them from one point of view and shut off the other points of view.

When I analyzed capitalism, I analyzed it from both sides; from the point of view of Marxism, and from the point of view of capitalism. Because I couldn't understand socialism otherwise. I wouldn't say that capitalism was evil, and I certainly don't say it. Capitalism is not evil; capitalism is a misfortune because it has outgrown its usefulness. I mean, capitalism today is a misfortune but capitalism was very necessary at one time for the development of the economy and technology of our society.

AFTER JAIL: THE MOVE WEST

Gluck: What were your plans, then, when you returned to New York from Washington, D.C.?

Kettler: After I returned - I don't know how - I met this Katherine Hodges again. I don't think she was in New York. She felt very guilty for having sent me to Washington. She felt that she was responsible for my being arrested and given thirty days in jail. Jails had very bad reputations for anyone, especially for women. That is, if you were a jailbird, you were a fallen woman.

So I don't know how I contacted her or how she contacted me; it must have been through correspondence. She wrote and asked if I would like to come West. I don't think the idea had ever occurred to me, but, again, I was very adventurous. I wrote and told her I'd love it but I had no money. She said she'd be very happy to pay my fare there. I packed up and I went West. Of course, my mother was very heartbroken about it - which is normal for mothers, to be heartbroken.

Gluck: So that was in 1918?

Kettler: That was in 1918. I think it was - when did we enter that war?

Gluck: 1917.

Kettler: You know, I don't know what year I picketed - whether it was 1917 or 1918. I think 1917 was when most of the picketing was done, because I was there quite a few months before I went West.

Gluck: Why did she want you to come West?

Kettler: Well, I wasn't doing anything. Probably it was my own suggestion, too; it probably worked both ways. Another thing, she was married and she'd never had children. I was just about that young age, you know. I didn't even look twenty-one - you should have seen the scowl on the judge's face when he asked me how old I was and I said twenty-one. I'd just become twenty-one. He scowled because he didn't believe me. On the other hand, the suffrage party

Kettler: wouldn't have taken me otherwise. I had to be twenty-one. They couldn't be bothered to have a legal action on age matters.

Anyway, I went West. I stopped in a number of places. I stopped in this place where this old girl friend of mine was. That's where our conversation started. I said if it hadn't been for the activists in Washington, we would never have got the vote. The funny part of it is, that we didn't get the vote yet. So I'm getting it mixed up. It must have been when I saw her about five years later.

But I had this argument with her because she said, "You didn't get the vote because you picketed the White House and went to jail; you got it in spite of your activity there." Of course I disagreed with her because the Congress was beginning to get quite frightened and worried about those women being beaten up, you know. Some of them were wives of the congressmen; some of them were daughters of congressmen - if there was anyone young enough in there; some of them were sisters of congressmen, or relatives of some kind.

They really became frightened because those women were beaten up. This is not a story, not a sob story. This is a true story. Those women were really beaten up and injured. Anyhow, I think that my friend was wrong about that. But I think that this happened a few years later.

Gluck: It would have to have happened after 1920.

Kettler: It was really about 1924 that I saw her, but I also saw her on the way West in 1918. I visited her for a few days and then went on and stopped in Butte, Montana - I don't know why. I think that Katherine told me to stop there and get her a pint of whiskey. The state of Washington was bone dry, and I didn't even know it was illegal. Here I was - they were examining the bags in the train and I didn't even know. [Laughter]

When I heard that I told somebody next to me: "My god, what am I going to do? I didn't know it was illegal because I was just told to get a bottle of

Kettler: whiskey and I'm bringing it." He said, "Stick it at the bottom; they won't go that far. You're too young to be suspected." So I stuck the bottle at the bottom.

That was quite an experience, you know - to learn about bone-dry states. I suppose that there was rum-running taking place between Montana, Idaho and Washington. Washington, I think, was the first dry state in the country.

Anyway, I arrived there in Everett, Washington. I didn't stay there long. I stayed there a number of months and it wasn't working out. I wasn't terribly experienced in office work. I had a public stenography business. I wasn't very happy, anyway. Katherine Hodges belonged to the Socialist party, so I met a number of socialists there and became interested in it.

I went to Seattle, and in Seattle I worked in unions. That's when my union experience really began.

Gluck: When was that?

Kettler: That must have been in 1918, when we entered the war.

Gluck: Were you involved in the trade union movement at all before you went to Washington?

Kettler: No, I wasn't. You see, I'd gone to school. I don't believe I worked until the first World War. Then I worked in some defense industry. I don't know where else I worked because in 1918 I came West.

THE CURRENT FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Gluck: When did you become involved in the current women's movement?

Kettler: About two years ago. I don't know why. For instance, some people would try to persuade me to join the League of Women Voters, and I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. It felt like a foreign element to me.

But I went with a friend to the NOW organization (National Organization for Women) about two years ago. Then I used to attend all their meetings. They had them at a restaurant on Eighth and Vermont; in the back, in a large banquet room. We used to eat our dinners and hold our meetings there.

I think that I attended those for about six months before I joined.

Gluck: That was in about 1970 then?

Kettler: It must have been, yes. I got known right away. It's always my way. For instance, the first time I went in there, I spoke to the young woman at the desk who was giving out literature in and name tags to people as they came in. I said, "You know, I spent thirty days in jail for the vote." She said, "You did?" I said, "Yes." This is how I connected the National Organization for Women; as a continuation of the voting struggle.

It took a long time for it [the information about the jail term] to really penetrate the membership. It didn't penetrate until - when was it when we had that big march? - '71?

Gluck: No, that was '70, on August 26th.

Kettler: Was it '70? Then I joined it in '69.

Gluck: So you'd been involved before that big celebration?

Kettler: I was a member at that time.

Kettler: So that was in August, 1970. Is it really two and a half years? It's difficult to believe. Well, I was a member then in '69 and maybe even in '68.

Gluck: How did you happen to go to that first meeting?

Kettler: A friend of mine - a member of the Socialist party - told me about it and I said I'd like to go. She took me the first time, but after that I went on my own.

Gluck: You were probably one of the few women of your age, weren't you?

Kettler: There were very few. I think at that time there were more women of my age than there are now. The women of my age seemed to become disgusted with the sexual concentration of the NOW organization. It was much more concentrated then. They had a play about it, most of which I couldn't hear - my hearing is very bad.

This woman, who must have been in her seventies, got up and said, "Can't you girls think of anything else but sex? This whole meeting has been devoted to sex and I think that's filthy." Boy, you can't imagine what it did to us. We tried to pacify her. It's one of the things I've fought against my whole life; my mother and father also told me that sex was filthy.

Gluck: So you really reacted to this woman getting upset at that play at the NOW meeting.

Kettler: Well, yes. I wasn't upset. I thought, "My god! Is it possible that people would come to a NOW meeting and still hold those views!" But I don't think she considered it dirty, really; she considered it as an extraneous subject, an extraneous activity. That's not true of the NOW movement; they take a special interest in sexual freedom. They just don't have those kind of old women any more. If they do, they're like me - they recognize that we've been sexually maligned as well as mistreated.

We want the right to understand sex and then to use our own option as to whether we want extra-marital relations or whether we want pre-marital relations; to at least be given an education on birth

Kettler: control and against venereal diseases and so on.
I've always been very open about sexual subjects.

Gluck: What kind of activity did you get involved in with NOW?
Just going to their meetings?

Kettler: Just going to the meetings. Most of those girls have cars. They can go here and there; they don't need to exercise their feet. On the other hand, my feet hurt very badly and I have no car. If I go to a meeting, I have to go out in the dark and the city has become dangerous in the dark. It's dangerous enough in the day. I'm actually infirm in that regard. Also, my eyes are not very good. I can't go to the headquarters and spend some hours there answering the telephone and meeting anyone who may come in during an afternoon or during an evening. I just can't go anyplace. If I go to a meeting, I have to beg a ride from somebody.

Gluck: But you're quite committed to that?

Kettler: I'm committed to NOW, yes. I'm committed much more to NOW than to the women's liberation movement, because I've met some communists in the women's liberation movement. And I'll tell you, I've gotten frightened of them. This is very foolish of me because I really don't have any fear of them.

Women's liberation started out, in my opinion, badly, but they're recovering from it now. Now it may not be women's liberation, but just certain members of the women's liberation movement. They started badly in the sense that they focused on issues that were not the important ones. To me there are very basic discriminatory issues that we have to fight. Whether you wear a bra or don't wear a bra is immaterial to me. It's healthier to wear a bra, which was discovered in modern society, than it is to let the breasts move up and down which may cause a breakage of some of the muscles if you're too heavy or cause other disruptions in the breast.

There are certain things like that. And then, also the freedom of using four-letter words. I have no objection to them except that they're misused. They are meaningless. We have some very good words in the dictionaries that mean much more than those

Kettler: four-letter words. I've had a certain objection to them all my life for the reason that they're used without discrimination.

Gluck: What do you see the goals of the current women's movement being?

Kettler: The goal of the current women's movement is to get all the clauses within ERA passed. It'll be a piecemeal struggle, absolutely piecemeal. You have to fight for each thing separately. It may take hundreds of years, but we have to fight.

Wage discrimination will be one of the hardest of all the battles that we have facing us. Aside from the fact of negotiating wages, unions will have the hardest fight of any other demands made. Really the differential between male and female wages is much too great to tolerate. So many women are aware of it and just take it for granted; that that's the division of sexes.

Of course, to me, the worst of anything to which I have great objection is the intellectual inequality between the sexes. I mean, the belief that the male brain is more equipped to think than the female brain. You meet so many men and so many women; you find them both ignorant and you're not equipped to talk to either one of them. They are not equipped to carry on a conversation with anyone who's had some education. I'm talking generally now - the average public.

The Progress of Women: Two Waves of Feminism

Gluck: Ernestine, what do you think has happened to women since the very early feminist and suffrage movement? What kinds of changes do you see, if any?

Kettler: I see changes especially since the women's rebellion six years ago.

Gluck: Before then, did you see any changes?

Kettler: Before then, the only fight was in unions. Union

Kettler: women were the only ones who were really fighting, and that was almost solely an economic issue. But I do not remember. You see, I've been a member of a union for many years.

I do not remember that there was much discussion of feminism among them. And, because it was not a principal issue with me, I didn't raise the issue unless it arose in some fashion. Then I expressed my views and, to my knowledge, none of them criticized me or disagreed with me. A lot of the members liked me and they liked my ideas and they liked the way I thought and so on.

Gluck: So really until the new feminist movement, you don't think that women, generally, changed much in terms of the roles they were playing and in terms of the attitudes?

Kettler: I think so. But when you live through periods, you don't see the changes unless they're very violent. Actually, the feminist movement today started out violently and has been violent throughout. I don't mean they fought physically but they did fight intellectually. Also, their persistence in changing the status of women and changing their image in society is very sharp today - to an extent where men cannot ignore it any longer. It's comparable to the fight for women's suffrage in 1917 and 1918. It's really quite comparable to that.

Gluck: Why do you think the early feminist movement failed in terms of really changing women's status and roles?

Kettler: First of all, when you ask me questions about my feminism, I have to say that I had a very wide concept of feminism. The voting right was only a minor right to me; I was something of an anarchist and I had no faith in capitalist society. What did it matter whether I voted or not; what did it matter whether a man voted or not? That's why it wasn't a major issue with me.

I think that what happened is that they put so much importance in the vote for women that when they got the vote they felt like they had a victory - a tremendous victory. Well, it was a tremendous victory, but it was a one-issue victory; and that one issue was not enough. Through the votes, they should

Kettler: have had all kinds of civil codes changed. In some states, they did. As a matter of fact, the common property laws were changed in many states. I don't think it ever became a federal issue. A number of other rights women have gained. But the major ones -

For instance, in the economy of our country, women are so underpaid in similar work with men that it's a disgrace. It's a disgrace; you can't think of it any other way than as a disgrace. I can't think of a stronger word.

Today, so many needs have arisen, like childcare. Where both parents work, the child has to be left someplace. There is no satisfaction in hiring somebody to take care of the children. Those children could be spoiled that way. Actually, having contact with their own age is much more preferable. So you need childcare. Whether the parents can afford the childcare has been the principal issue in that business.

Today, what we've discovered is that many women are either single - the husband has escaped or the husband has died. Anyway, many women are the sole supporters of the children. They have to have a childcare center where they could leave them and pay a nominal sum of money for the children to be taken care of while they're working. This is one issue; this is the economic issue.

There is also the social and the personal issue. The parents are actually enslaved to their children, and it's good neither for the children nor for the parents. They're in bondage; the moment they have a child, they're in bondage. They have to re-define the word "responsibility." To what degree are they forced to be responsible? Should they be responsible? Both of these issues - the degree and whether they should or not be responsible - is a part of the bondage system that parents have been forced into for as long as they've lived; since the human race came into existence.

It was easier in tribal days, when all the parents took care of all the children; where the children were the responsibility of the whole group. Today, children are the responsibility of a single group, and it's not even a group - two people cannot be called a group.

Kettler: They're the total responsibility of two people, instead of a tribe of about thirty or fifty people.

Gluck: So you don't feel that any of these issues were kept alive, though, after that early struggle?

Kettler: They fought for them. Alice Paul fought for this amendment - for the Equal Rights Act - ever since the voting rights were won; because the voting rights didn't give them equality. There were many areas - not only in employment but in society, education, and politics - where women were quite restricted. You couldn't tell whether they were capable of learning or not capable of learning so long as those areas were closed to them.

The voting right didn't quite grant them the right to run as a candidate for some political job. It was years before women timidly entered the political field. Only today, we notice that they are aggressive about it. But women have been very timid about their rights for many years. It was surprising that the states went so far as to vote for them in 1918, 1920.

The men, I think, didn't want a repetition, a continuation, of the female struggle for voting rights. They feel the same way about the Equal Rights Amendment. It becomes corrosive, this idea of equality. All right, so you have equality. Now what else do you want? And this is only the beginning of the struggle for women! Now they have to fight for equality in specific areas. It's going to be a fight for as long as they live.

For as long as society exists, women are going to fight for their rights. But so will men fight for their rights. Men are also in bondage though they may think they are superior to women; not only economically and politically, but socially. You're in bondage if you are not free to make a certain decision or if you are brainwashed all of the time. We are brainwashed all the time; even the most intelligent of us are brainwashed.

Fighting for freedom is a very esoteric phrase. Then you ask, "What freedom?"

Kettler: Can we endure freedom?" You really go into very abstract questions regarding freedom.

But what women have to fight for are the specific needs of herself as a human being, not as a sexual object. Whatever she gains, men should also gain. If she gains something that men do not have, men are entitled to the same gain.

For instance, the protective rights for women now in industry; men are entitled to it, have always been entitled to it. They didn't get it, but some industries have established them now. They're very effective - like coffee breaks. The only thing they don't have is how heavy the bundles should be that your job demands you should lift.

Gluck: Ernestine, do you think that we were in any different position six years ago, when the new movement began, than say when you went to Washington and when the feminist battle was raging?

Kettler: You can't compare the two. You really can't. That was just simply one issue; the voting rights. Actually, the struggle that began six years ago had many issues in it. The Equal Rights Amendments is not one issue; it's an issue with about fifteen clauses in it. And, you know, that the women will have to fight for each clause - one at a time.

Gluck: Do you think that men's attitudes towards women have changed since the twenties? In what ways?

Kettler: I think so, yes. They realize that women have been discriminated against in jobs and education. Even the attitude men have that women have no brains and should stay in the kitchen. There is amongst the more intelligent men a change in attitude towards women. Whatever we know has been instilled in us from our parents and from society; schools, newspapers, streets, organizations we belong to and so on. And, they have been extremely prejudicial.

The realization that prejudice is a very bad form of thinking has struck men as well as women. But mind you, it'll always be a minority of each sex that will fight for social gain, never a majority. The majority will win by default, and they will benefit.

Kettler: Like the vote. Women think that they always had the vote. They don't know.

When this came up at the NOW meeting and it was discovered that I was one of the suffragists who spent thirty days in jail, you have no idea how, afterwards, those women came to me to shake my hands. Two young girls - of all things - came over. They were just so grateful for what I did for them. I didn't realize how little is known of the voting rights, of how they were won.

Gluck: It's not part of our history.

Kettler: It's part of our history, but we don't know the history. That history isn't taught in school.

Gluck: There were in those days, like yourself, a lot of women who were feminists in a much broader sense, and yet that all disappeared, or it all died out.

Kettler: I don't think it disappeared. I meet women and know women now who have very much my attitude towards it. Amongst the radicals, you'll find a greater tolerance for a more universal concept of feminism than we had fifty years ago. Even amongst the conservative women, you'll find an acceptance of the fact that discrimination is quite widely affecting their lives and development.

Gluck: In those early days, did radical men call themselves feminists ever?

Kettler: I don't remember. As I said, feminism is a new word.

Gluck: Not really.

Kettler: It was then, to me. I don't even remember the word feminism. I remember the word suffragette - that's what I was called.

Gluck: You don't remember using the word feminist in those days?

Kettler: I probably did because I was a feminist. I was a feminist in a much broader sense than a suffragette was. As I said, the voting rights didn't mean anything

- Kettler: personal to me, but the women in this country were quite justified in fighting for it and demanding it.
- Gluck: Ernestine, what about the flappers?
- Kettler: I don't know; the flapper came during the twenties.
- Gluck: Did those women really represent any kind of new freedom for women?
- Kettler: I don't think so. Flapper was something that was attached to them because they flapped. [Laughter] I don't know why really; I don't know the definition of flapper. Do you know?
- Gluck: I'm not really sure.
- Kettler: -- in the 1920s. The Charleston, for instance, is one of their symbols.
- Gluck: There was supposed to be a whole new sexual freedom of women involved. They bobbed their hair, etc. I just don't know if it meant more than that.
- Kettler: Flapper was not a very flattering term, if you ask me. But men were not very flattering to women when they wanted to designate them symbolically as a part of a generation. So, at that time, they had flappers. I don't know what they were during the thirties, except very poor.
- Gluck: The people you associated with, the flappers weren't viewed by them --
- Kettler: We didn't use that term in our crowd - never.
- Gluck: And they weren't viewed as people who were really striving for some kind of freedom for women?
- Kettler: Freedom for women was something that existed all my life. Every year of my life, freedom for women was an essential necessity. But it was a wider issue than just one specific one like the voting rights, like the same pay for the same type of work, for both sexes, and so on. It meant getting rid, most of all, of men's attitude that women were an inferior creature;

Kettler: while they leered at them and wanted them. How on earth could they leer and want an inferior creature? I used to think in those terms.

So that there was never a period in my life that I would forget about the freedom for women. Freedom for women also meant political freedom, economic and social freedom, educational freedom. It meant all the freedoms that people needed.

From Jailed for Freedom by Doris Stevens (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920)

To the Commissioners of the District of Columbia:

As political prisoners, we, the undersigned, refuse to work while in prison. We have taken this stand as a matter of principle after careful consideration, and from it we shall not recede.

This action is a necessary protest against an unjust sentence. In reminding President Wilson of his pre-election promises toward woman suffrage we were exercising the right of peaceful petition, guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, which declares peaceful picketing is legal in the District of Columbia. That we are unjustly sentenced has been well recognized—when President Wilson pardoned the first group of suffragists who had been given sixty days in the workhouse, and again when Judge Mulloony suspended sentence for the last group of picketers. We wish to point out the inconsistency and injustice of our sentences—some of us have been given sixty days, a later group thirty days, and another group given a suspended sentence for exactly the same action.

Conscious, therefore, of having acted in accordance with the highest standards of citizenship, we ask the Commissioners of the District to grant us the rights due political prisoners. We ask that we no longer be segregated and confined under locks and bars in small groups, but permitted to see each other, and that Miss Lucy Burns, who is in full sympathy with this letter, be released from solitary confinement in another building and given back to us.

We ask exemption from prison work, that our legal right to consult counsel be recognized, to have food sent to us from outside, to supply ourselves with writing material for as much correspondence as we may need, to receive books, letters, newspapers, our relatives and friends.

Our united demand for political treatment has been delayed, because on entering the workhouse we found conditions so very bad that before we could ask that the suffragists be treated as political prisoners, it was necessary to make a stand for the ordinary rights of human beings for all the inmates. Although this has not been accomplished we now wish to bring the important question of the status of political prisoners to the attention of the commissioners, who, we are informed, have full authority to make what regulations they please for the District prison and workhouse.

The Commissioners are requested to send us a written reply so that we may be sure this protest has reached them.

Signed by,

MARY WINSOR, LUCY BRANHAM, ERNESTINE HARA, HILDA BLUMBERG, MAUD MALONE, PAULINE F. ADAMS, ELEANOR A. CALNAN, EDITH AINGE, ANNIE ARNEIL, DOROTHY J. BARTLETT, MARGARET FOTHERINGHAM.

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SUMMARY

The life histories of the women in this volume present a picture of five very different women who participated in the suffrage movement. The variations among them are reflected in the sources and the nature of their belief in suffrage, and in the form and duration of their activities on behalf of women's issues. It is valuable to discuss the differences and similarities among these women so that the diversity of women caught under the single label "suffragist" can be better understood.

This interviewer is also led, on the basis of her interviewing experiences, to make certain observations about the failure of the suffrage movement to continue as a force for feminism after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

For Sylvie Thygeson, suffrage for women was part of the basic belief in the inevitability of progress towards human justice, in the process of evolution. It was derived from her own family background, a background which included a grandfather who assisted the flight of slaves on the underground railroad. Her involvement in the suffrage and birth control movements was part of the multi-faceted vision of reform that flourished in the progressive era. It is she whose interests remained the most tied to women after the suffrage amendment. Perhaps because she was a wife/mother/reformer and did not seek a career, she stayed in touch with the needs of the majority of women--among which was the need to control their own reproduction, still an unfulfilled demand of the modern women's movement.

Jessie Haver Butler, like Sylvie, was raised in a relatively primitive environment, the frontier community of Pueblo, Colorado. Although her parents were forward thinking and had shared in the delight of Bellamy's Looking Backward before their marriage, the frontier conditions did not allow time for her mother to engage in intellectual pursuits. She had, before her early death, planted the concept of feminism in Jessie--through campaigning for woman's suffrage and in urging her young daughter to seek an education. Thus Jessie's ambition and her determination to have a life better than her mother's brought her into the semi-professional fields which were expanding for women in the early 1900s, leading her eventually to a job with the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission.

Her earlier experience with the hard life of frontier women coupled with her later observation of the exploitation of women in factories kindled her interest in women and in suffrage. Since her career was her primary commitment, it was through her work that she sought to alleviate the suffering of women.

In contrast to the more simple and traditional--though liberal--backgrounds of Sylvie Thygeson and Jessie Haver Butler, Miriam Allen deFord was brought up in an environment which, on a daily basis, demonstrated an alternative to the traditional woman's sphere. Her mother was one of the second generation of female doctors in the United States; the generation trained by the "Elizabeth Blackwells" of the mid-eighteenth century. It is no wonder that at the age of six Miriam responded to the abuse of a woman with all the rage of a feminist. By the age of fourteen she became her busy mother's surrogate-suffragist. Her suffrage commitment preceded her later commitment to radical causes.

These three women came to suffrage, naturally, as it were. Their mothers either presented direct models for them--as in the case of Jessie Haver Butler and Miriam Allen deFord--or provided the kind of thinking that made the cause of suffrage a natural outcome. The mother, even while she remained within the traditional female sphere, seems to have served as a role model for many of these women activists. Other suffragists I have interviewed have also discussed the influence of their mother. Though some letters, diaries and other material is available on this previous generation, unfortunately they are not of a sufficiently broad cross-section to help us understand the ideas and motivations of the many unknown women who influenced their twentieth century suffragist-daughters.

In contrast to the backgrounds of the three older women, Laura Seiler came from an old American family where tradition reigned. The only evidence of a flaw in this ideal family pattern was her mother's divorce. However, following the separation from her husband, Laura's mother returned to the family home with her children, rejoining her parents and a maiden aunt, and proceeded to live the proper life of a Victorian woman. While in high school Laura was exposed to her older sister's feminism, particularly through the visits of Nora Blatch (the daughter of Harriet Stanton Blatch and granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton) to the household. Her acceptance of woman's suffrage, however, remained unconscious until she was provoked by male teasing.

Ernestine Hara Kettler is the only immigrant, working-class woman represented in this collection. She is also the youngest and was the most radical at the time of the suffrage struggle.

Coming to the United States from Roumania, in her youth she lived in the tenement atmosphere that defined life for most European Jewish immigrants. She also lived in an atmosphere of political radicalism. Her father, who had died when she was a child in Roumania, had been an anarchist and had, according to Ernestine, imbued his wife with his ideals. As a young teenager, Ernestine was involved in the socialist circles in her neighborhood. More educated than most of the young immigrant working-class women, she identified more with the radical bohemian sub-culture than with the women working in the sweatshops. She questioned the double standard and was furious at the way in which women's intellectual capacity was belittled. Her brief, but highly committed, participation in the suffrage struggle reflected her feminist outrage.

These differences in background affected both the beliefs about woman's suffrage (ideology) and the kind of activities (tactics) in which each participated. Sylvie Thygeson was involved in a very "lady-like" aspect of suffrage. She, more than any of the others, represented the respectable middle-class matron in the reform movements, including suffrage, of the progressive era. For many, participation in these movements provided them an opportunity to expand the boundaries of their very narrowly defined spheres. Sylvie, in fact, is quite conscious of the fact that she received recognition for her own activities. Usually, a woman in her position would receive recognition only as the wife of a prominent and respected attorney, but not in her own right.

In Sylvie we also observe the different strains of the club movement/reformer's arguments for suffrage. Though there was an effort to repudiate the then-prevalent notion of "woman's sphere" and to argue for her larger participation in society, many of these women still adhered to the belief in women's moral superiority. Sylvie, herself, thought ridiculous the notion that women were morally superior and even implies that it was a deliberate tactic to adopt this argument. Nevertheless, she did believe the justification for women's greater participation in society rested on their special roles as mothers.

Perhaps representative of other women like her, she did not want to change women's role--only to achieve recognition for its importance. Women already had a great influence in society through their role in the socialization of the children. That influence, she apparently believed, was denigrated by the denial of its public counterpart, the right to vote.

Regardless of the specific arguments that Sylvie employed, she viewed woman's suffrage as part of a broad historical movement, an inevitable evolutionary process. As a result, the tactics to be used would basically revolve around educating people; speaking to them about suffrage. She saw her contribution as merely helping the natural process.

To some extent, Jessie Haver Butler also viewed suffrage as a natural and necessary process toward democratization. Unlike Ernestine Kettler, the radical, Jessie Haver Butler and Laura Seiler were both true believers in the American system. To Jessie this meant a commitment to what she referred to as "Carrie Chapman Catt's polite, legislative manner"--though she acknowledged the greater effectiveness of the more militant tactics of the National Woman's Party. Jessie believed in suffrage for women as a simple, obvious concomitant of democracy. Her own activities were primarily focused on legislative issues that affected women, both with the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission and the D.C. Consumers League. When she became more directly involved in the suffrage battle, especially during the ratification drive, she continued her focus on the legislative issues. Traveling with Carrie Chapman Catt, she spoke on a consumer issue as an example of the kind of concerns that women as voters would be facing.

The three women who were younger at the time of their suffrage involvement--perhaps because of their youth--were more audacious in their participation. Beginning with Miriam Allen deFord, they all defied convention to stump for suffrage, boldly speaking out in public places or defying the law and being jailed. Despite their tactical similarities, there were great differences in ideology among the three younger women.

Laura Seiler did not define herself as a feminist, and in this respect was more like the two older women. She did believe that there were issues in which women were distinctly qualified (e.g. those relating to children, public welfare), an acceptance, really, of the notion of women's sphere. Despite this, she did share with the feminists a belief in women's right to economic independence and in her own life pursued an active career even while fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. The guerilla theater-like tactics in which she engaged were perhaps a reflection of her youthful enthusiasm and also that of an organization which believed in using any tactics necessary to keep the issue of suffrage before the public eye.

Miriam Allen deFord and Ernestine Hara Kettler were both self-defined feminists, even in those early days. From the beginning Ernestine's feminism was closely tied to her general radical philosophy. She did not and still cannot separate the two. Her brief, though highly committed, activity in the cause of woman's suffrage were integrated into her total radical philosophy. Joining the White House picketing at the risk of being imprisoned reflected the outrage she felt over the position of women in society rather than an ultimate faith in the democratic process.

Similarly Miriam Allen deFord had a deep-abiding belief in feminism--a belief which led first to suffrage and later to broader radical political activity. Suffrage was part of an issue relating to women's rights. As an independent working woman living away from home, she joined a suffrage group in Boston which nightly engaged in street-corner meetings. This participation was an extension of her background and her own independence. Her radicalization occurred concurrently with her suffrage activities, when she met the man who later became her first husband and was introduced into the anarchist circles in which he travelled. The meeting of the feminist consciousness with the anarchist philosophy led to the espousal of ideas beyond suffrage, i.e. acceptance of sexual activity for single women, a basic questioning of the institution of marriage, etc.

All five women, coming from various economic, regional and social backgrounds, became committed to the cause of woman's suffrage and honored that commitment through some form of active participation. Two of the women, Jessie Haver Butler and Laura Seiler, remained active right up until the point of final ratification in 1920. The other three did not. Sylvie Thygeson, Miriam Allen deFord and Ernestine Kettler all moved to states in which woman's suffrage had already been granted.

Miriam Allen deFord and Ernestine Kettler became involved in various radical groups, especially the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World), after moving to California and Washington, respectively. Without a radical, feminist movement, i.e. one which very basically challenged the structure of society, radical women like these would, instead, continue to place their energies in other movements. The failure of any suffrage group after 1920 to transform itself into such a feminist group (as Crystal Eastman had

urged the National Woman's Party to do) contributed to the death of the early twentieth century women's movement. Basic social change, not token legislative change, was the goal of many feminists who had rallied to the suffrage cause. Their commitment to suffrage was partially because it was symbolic of women's position, not because they really believed that the enfranchisement of women was going to restructure the society in a way which would free women. Thus, their involvement was only transitory. For women like Ernestine Kettler and Miriam Allen deFord this meant that their feminist consciousness would continue to affect their lives, that they would assert it in these other radical groups. (It is interesting that these two women participated in many of the same groups on the west coast and became life-long friends.) Only with the emergence of the modern women's movement was there a movement with which they could again identify as feminists.

Sylvie Thygeson, though not motivated by a feminist consciousness, seemed to be more in touch with the needs of the "ordinary" woman. Her interests led her to help found a Housewives Union in Palo Alto (about which, unfortunately, she had no recall) and to continue her support of the birth control movement. She is really the only one of the five women whose activity showed a continuous commitment to women's issues.

Jessie Haver Butler and Laura Seiler, in the decade following the passage of the suffrage amendment, became part of that process which might be described as the privatization of women's lives in the 1920s. Laura Seiler became preoccupied exclusively with her own career in advertising and Jessie Haver Butler devoted the next fifteen years to her family and home life, with outside interests in the women's club movement which, by this time, had turned away from its commitment to women's rights issues.

Of the four women with whom I discussed the demise of the women's movement in the 1920s, it is interesting that none of them really personalized it. They spoke rather abstractly about how "women had let their organizations go, paid no further attention," and how there was a slump in women's participation in the professions, how there was no movement. Though each in their own lives represented that move away from women's issues, they neither explained it nor connected it with the demise of the early women's movement.

Jessie Haver Butler, despite the privatization of her life in the 1920s, returned to a career in the mid-1930s which she defined as being dedicated to the women's movement--training of women in public speaking. This work represented her earlier,

deep-abiding belief in the system. It was merely necessary to train women to take their rightful places--though she knew they would not be able to do so without a struggle.

Despite the discontinuity in the participation of most of the suffragists in activities related to women's issues, all but Sylvie Thygeson are quite aware and supportive of the current women's movement. Though they do not all understand the issues raised today, they see the women's liberation movement as being more complex and "revolutionary" than the movement in which they had participated.

This perception of the current movement as being more revolutionary is no doubt accurate, as these interviews clearly indicate. Suffrage groups were rigidly and hierarchically organized while, on the other hand, the current women's liberation movement is firmly opposed to hierarchical structure. Further, suffragist did not necessarily mean feminist. There is some evidence that even among suffragists, feminists were seen as man-haters. (When asked if she were a feminist, Laura Seiler responded she had always gotten along with men.) Moreover, the National Woman's Party, the group then considered the most radical, gained its reputation not because of radical ideology but because of militant tactics.

The National Woman's Party was not unlike the other suffrage groups. Like them, it was unwilling to become involved in other feminist issues. An example of this can be found in the story related by Jessie Haver Butler about the dismissal of an active suffrage worker because of her decision to have a "eugenic baby," i.e. to remain single and to choose a "good genetic father."

This unwillingness to expand beyond single-issue orientation partially accounts for the failure of any suffrage group to survive as a feminist organization into the 1920s. The National Woman's Party continued to function, focusing its attention on a new single-issue, the Equal Rights Amendment. But, because of its continued single-issue orientation and its failure to address itself to other facets of women's existence, it could not build a broad base of support, especially among women outside professional groups.

Though current research is pointing to wider participation of working-class women in suffrage than had been originally believed, most of the large suffrage organizations were primarily middle class. Ernestine Kettler, though a working-class woman,

was more closely identified with the radical bohemian sub-culture than with the women who worked in the sweatshops. From her description of the group with whom she picketed the White House, it is obvious though that working-class union women were among the participants. Groups like the Women's Political Union (of which Laura Seiler speaks), Wage Earners League, The League for Self-Supporting Women, all more localized organizations, made obvious and direct appeals to working-class women. Yet, among the many labor union women whom we have interviewed, including several among them who defined themselves as feminists and who fought for women within their unions, none were involved in the suffrage movement. For the most part, they did not define this movement as relevant to their needs. From the interviews included here, it appears that only the Women's Political Union made conscious and deliberate efforts to speak to the needs of these women. It would be important to locate and interview working-class women who were identified with the suffrage struggle to further clarify the meaning of their involvement and their relationship to women's groups after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Although these interviews with "ordinary" suffragists provide a vast array of clues helpful for a study of suffrage and suffrage organizations, their value lies beyond this. Each of the interviews is important in contributing to our greater understanding and appreciation of women's lives. Taken together, they begin to form the basis for what might be described as a collective history of women.

Sherna Gluck
Director
Feminist History Research Project

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Sherna Gluck

Graduated from Shimer College (affiliate of College of University of Chicago) with B.A., 1953; from University of California at Berkeley with B.A. in Sociology and Social Institutions, 1965; and from University of California at Los Angeles with M.A. in Sociology, 1959.

Research Director of Alcoholism Project at Olive View Hospital, County of Los Angeles, 1961-1968. Ethnological consultant and editor, Fernwood Films, 1969-1970.

Active in the Women's Liberation Movement in the Los Angeles area, helping to found a Women's Center and coordinate a research group for women leading to the founding of the Feminist History Research Project, 1972.

Developed and taught an oral history women's studies course at U.C.L.A. and produced a tape/slide program on woman's suffrage based on oral history interviews with suffragists.

As Director of the Feminist History Research Project, conducts interviews with women about their lives and activities in the early 20th century, (suffragists, feminists, labor women, professionals, "everywoman"); facilitates workshops in oral history/women's history, and lectures on women in the early 20th century.



