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Oral History Number: 104-004, 005
Interviewee: Belle Winestine
Interviewer: Helen Bonner
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Project: Jeannette Rankin Oral History Project

BW: It was partly because I was so short and partly—

HB: (Laughter) You are little.

BW: It just seemed a little of a joke to him, I think, and he gave me a job.

HB: How did you happen to go after the job knowing they would never have another one?

BW: I majored at the University and I took Journalism, didn't major in it though.

HB: So how old were you when you went after the job?

BW: I was about 22, no, wait a minute, I must have been much more than that because...that's right, I spent several years; I had spent a year in Milwaukee working for the Socialist Paper there and then I spent a year in New York trying to tell the New York Times how I would run the paper if I were running it.

HB: (Laughter). How did that go over?

BW: They weren't awfully interested.

HB: They weren't? (Laughter)

BW: No! And then—

HB: When you worked for a Socialist Paper, were you rather rational for your times for a Montanan?

BW: Well, I think a—

HB: Or were you a Montanan then? Where did you go to school?

BW: Well, I was a Montanan, but I went to the University of Wisconsin and that was quite a

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radical University in those days.

HB: A-ha!

BW: I think my parents were quite worried.

HB: (Laughter) With good reason.

BW: My sister and I were brought up to be ladies and it didn't take somehow.

HB: It wasn't any fun.

BW: (Laughter).

HB: Did you happen to have read, when I was up to the library in Missoula, I found a little book called the story of Mary McClain. Did you read that when you were a girl?

BW: No! I was about ten years old, I think, and I heard my mother and the neighbors whispering about it. You didn't say anything out loud about it in those days. It not only had suggestive words in it, but the whole situation described were not anything you would talk about.

HB: I read it and, in a way, it was sort of charming. She talks about "I wish the devil would come and get me because I am so bored". (Laughter).

BW: It was quite a shocking book in those days.

HB: But you never got hold of it?

BW: No! I wasn't old enough to be interested in it at all in those days, but I just remember that everybody was talking about it.

HB: Aha! I've been thinking about having someone like Mary McClain in the film because she is sort of funny, you know. She's sort of funny!

BW: It seems to me a book came out just recently about her, but I couldn't be sure.

MAN TALKING ABOUT STRANGE SOUNDS ON TAPE

BW: (Jeannette)? She was different, she was very strongly focused on improving the political situation for women, and she was (I'm sorry the words don't come as fast as they used to).

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(Laughter).

HB: Fast enough for me!

BW: She was interested in human welfare and a...

HB: Even when you first met her. Tell me some more like, go back to what you were telling me about.

BW: Well, I was working as a reporter on the paper in the summer of 1914 it was, and the editor came into the reporters' room one day and he said, "Did you know there's going to be a State Convention of the Women's Federation—the Federation of the Women's Clubs?" The State Federation of Women's Clubs. And I said yes. In Lewistown and he said, "I am going to send you to Lewistown to cover that for the paper." I got scared to death, I had never been sent out of town to cover a convention and I just didn't know how you would go about it. He said, "You wouldn't have any trouble, it will last about three days, I think, and you won't have any trouble. If you do just go to the editor of the Billings paper and he'll tell you how to handle things." And as he left the room, he said over his shoulder, "Jeannette Rankin is going to be a speaker there." At that time, everybody already knew that Jeannette Rankin was the leader of the suffrage movement in Montana. I was quite terrified, but things worked out all right.

Today you go from here to Lewistown on oh, maybe an hour, but in those days it took a long, long, train ride to get there. It was quite a journey and I remember I went to the meeting the first day and they announced that Jeannette was on the program. She was one of the first speakers. The women's clubs had not been committed to suffrage one way or another, but they were willing to listen and the anti-suffragettes were very strong saying exactly what the Anti-ERAs are saying today and everybody was very much excited at hearing what Jeannette would have to say. In those days she was quite a seamstress and she made her own clothes and she appeared on this program in a tawny golden velvet gown, a suit she had made and a hat with gold plumes on it, and I remember that night what I went to talk to the editor of the Billings paper, did I say Lewistown?

HB: Yes, Lewistown.

BW: It seems funny, was it in Billings or Lewistown? I got a story in the Montana Historical Society.

HB: I can look that up to get it right, if you like.

BW: Yes, or I'll give you a copy. I have an extra copy here.

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HB: Good.

BW: And I said "That was an interesting meeting today" and he said, "Yes, and Jeannette Rankin looked like a young tiger ready to spring. "

HB: Oh, boy!

BW: And that's just the way it was. She came onto the stage and as I said before, the air just became electric when she stood in front of this huge audience. To us it was a huge audience, in those days there must have been a couple of hundred women there and she made this talk and then after that, that's the only appearance she made at the meeting. But on the next day she and I both spoke for suffrage in the park, an open-air speech there and I had forgotten all about it till I read it in the paper. I was doing some research on her. (Laughter)

HB: (Laughter)

BW: But apparently, we made up a little enthusiasm there and that was the first that I had met her. My sister had met her a couple of years before because she had established a booth at the state fair here and they passed out suffrage literature. But she had boundless energy.

HB: How did you happen to go to work for her then?

BW: Well , after we won suffrage in 1914 we were going to cast our first vote in 1916 and she called me up one morning and she said—it was around ten o'clock in the morning—and she said, "I am thinking of running for Congress , what do you think about it?" I said, "Where are you?" She said, "I am down in Wellington's office," that's her brother who is a very prominent lawyer here and I said, "I will be right down," and we started the campaign.

HB: (Laughter) You just started—right like that!

BW: And the headquarters were in Wellington's office, but it is an interesting thing how much you can depend or not depend on what you find in the history books at the Historical Library this campaign was mentioned in five different books! One of them was the one that was gotten out theoretically by Susan B. Anthony and who else? I've forgotten somebody—and then it was taken over by another person. Some of it was written at first hand by a Helena woman here who is no longer living and then there was another one written by Maggie Hathaway Smith. In her autobiography she mentions this and what I mean to say, in each of these five books, a completely different picture was given of how she started to run for Congress. One said that women in the state got together and urged her to run for Congress. Another one said that she

called the women of the state, the prominent suffragists of the state together for a meeting in Missoula where she lived at the time and asked them what they thought of it. In this account it said they said no, by no means should you run for Congress, it would scare the wits out of the men right away. Wait a few years until they get used to it. If you want to run for the legislature, all right, but not for Congress.

HB: I've read that one.

BW: Oh? And then, there was Maggie Hathaway's account. Maggie was quite a person in this state. She had been a state superintendent of schools for years and was very well known in her temperance work and in her book. She didn't write the book, as a matter of fact, they said she wrote it, but she asked a man to take the...

HB: Ghost Writer?

BW: Ghost writer, to take the name, use his name so that it would look like a third, out-sider wrote it about her rather than.

HB: I see! So which of those stories are true?

BW: And she said that Jeannette phoned her and asked her if she would help in the campaign if she ran for Congress and Maggie quotes herself in saying, "No!" and hung up the telephone. But that it gave Maggie the idea of running for Congress and of running for the Legislature.

HB: Which she did!

BW: And Maggie was one of the first women Senators in the Legislature.

HB: Wonderful! That's nice.

BW: That's three different aspects and there were two others I've forgotten what they were. But this I happen to know when she called me.

HB: She called you! And said she decided to run.

BW: She said I'm thinking of running for Congress, what do you think? And I said, "I think it is wonderful of you. I'll be right down."

HB: Had you been pretty close friends before that?

BW: No, except in the suffrage campaign, I had quite a lot of work.

HB: You worked together. She's quite an organizer, wasn't she?

BW: A wonderful organizer, a wonderful organizer.

HB: And you had to come in—

BW: And I had made a lot of speeches for suffrage and the fact that I was a reporter on the paper let me get a lot of publicity about suffrage into the paper that wouldn't have gotten in otherwise.

HB: You have some unique experiences I would like to hear about. Like if you were on a street corner as you put it, doing your suffrage speech, can you think of some of the things, can you think of any anecdotes on how people would treat you or what people would say when they would go by and things like that.

BW: Well, I remember the first speech I made was up on the corner at the top of the hill there in front of the old post office, and I thought the noon hour would be good because I would get listeners of all the men coming back from lunch to their offices. It was only the men that could vote and it was necessary to get to them.

HB: Of course!

BW: And I got to the street corner and there wasn't a soul in sight and I said to myself, "You can't talk to nobody". But then it occurred to me if you start talking, people will come maybe, so I stood on the street corner and started talking to the world.

HB: (Laughter)

BW: And all of a sudden people began thinking there is a crazy girl on the corner there. What in the world does she think she's doing, and before I knew it, I had a large body of people.

HB: Wonderful! Did they heckle you?

BW: No, they listened very politely and waited until the end of the speech. It wasn't a very long one and after two or three of these speeches, my mother (she was my step-mother, my own mother died when I was 4) said to me... (We didn't know she was a step-mother till we were grown up), but she said to me, "If you give one more speech on a street, then you don't have to come home."

HB: Oh my! Nice girls didn't do that!

BW: Nice girls! No lady would do that. She said, "I think women should vote, but that doesn't mean they have to be unladylike."

HB: Yes!

BW: So I gave another speech that day.

HB: [Laughter]

BW: And I went to the hotel to spend the night and charged it to the family. So I gave another speech that day and I went to the hotel to spend the night and charged it to the family—

HB: [Laughter]

BW: —and after that they told me I could come home.

A MAN'S VOICE: I remember that from somewhere else. I either read it or heard it on the other tape or something.

HB: Oh, really? That's a nice story. [Laughter]

BW: It was a... we had a lot of street speeches that summer. We had people from New York coming, Jeannette had arranged this thing. I can't think of the names anymore.

HB: I suppose it was Mrs. Catt, I suppose, came out.

BW: No.

HB: She didn't come out?

BW: No, Mrs. Catt was not the head of the suffrage organization at that time. Anna Howard Shaw was.

And Anna Howard Shaw came out at the end of the campaign to help Jeannette lead the parade down main street.

HB: Oh!

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BW: We had a parade of several hundred people.

HB: Did you have a good time? Was it fun?

BW: Well, I just never thought in those days, is it fun or isn't it fun? You just feel you have something to do and you go ahead and do it.

HB: Uh huh.

BW: I felt terribly responsible when I was that young. You haven't learned yet that you can't run the world and you feel as though you are really doing something that has to be done.

HB: And of course, you did. You didn't run the world but you did things that had to be done.

BW: Yes!

HB: And they got done.

BW: Yes, and I called lots of meetings in Helena and I remember going up to Augusta to speak one time. Augusta was a little town. I don't know, it could be maybe 30 miles from here; I'm not sure how far it is. And it was just a little village, it still is and I remember standing out in front of the saloon. There in those days, a lady had to walk fast past a saloon, you could not loiter in front of this unspeakable. Every saloon had a swinging door in front of it with about that much space underneath and the door was about that wide so you couldn't see who was in there, but it was open at the top.

HB: So they could see you outside?

BW: Well, anyhow it was whenever you passed a saloon in a Montana town, you walked fast if you were a lady. But there was no other place that I could see to speak and I knew there would be all men in there and they were the ones we had to talk to, to get them to vote. So I remember making this speech in front of that saloon. I went up on the train, and one by one the men began to come out and listen out in front and a couple of months later when the ballots were taken, when we voted, my mother was horrified because it had said in the newspapers that someone in Augusta had written my name in for sheriff on the ballot.

HB: [Laughter]

BW: She said, "Imagine a lady wearing a blue coat with brass buttons!"

HB & Man: [Laughing]

BW: She really thought I might be elected. [Laughter]

HB: You were a real embarrassment to your family.

BW: [Laughter] I just got that one vote.

HB & Man: [Laughter]

BW: Lucille Topping, who was the head of the Helena group of suffragists and I, drove up to Marysville twenty miles up in the mountains to give a speech to the miners up in Marysville one evening. It was quite a long drive; we had a buggy with two horses to pull us up the mountain and that's all described in this story in the Montana magazine. I'll give you a copy of it.

HB: Thank you, I would like to have it. When Jeannette got elected, she called you and asked you to come to work for her. Is that how it happened?

BW: Yes, she said, in those days you didn't call them Administrative Assistants, you call them secretaries and she had two secretaries from Montana, myself and

HB: You were the press secretary—press secretary.

BW: Well, that and also, I was her ghost writer. She had a contract with the Chicago Herald Syndicate for a weekly article and I did the articles.

HB: Did you give up the job on the newspaper to take that?

BW: Oh yes, yes.

HB: So here you were leaving Montana and going to Washington.

BW: What did you say?

HB: You had to give up Montana and go to Washington.

BW: Oh, yes, yes.

HB: How did you feel about that?

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BW: Well, it was the logical thing to do.

HB: Was it kind of exciting for you?

BW: Yes, it was very exciting and very new. In the first place, Jeannette got mail from all over the world from every other state outside of Montana, because being the first woman in Congress everybody who had odd ideas said to themselves, "Our men Congressmen would never listen to us; now we have a woman, she'll listen to us." And they began writing from all over the world. We would get a couple of sacks like that every morning from the office and it's just lucky that the Superintendent of the House Office Building put us in an office that had an adjoining empty office next to it so that we were the only Congressman in Washington who had two offices. We were busy all the time, we had four regular people in the office to attend to things and every other Congressman had one secretary and we had a stenographer because Florence Leach was the other secretary from Montana and neither of us could typewrite except with two fingers. So we had a professional stenographer there and then we had another secretary who took charge of the departmental work. She had worked for another Congressman before and knew all of the strings to pull when you wanted something done in one of the government departments.

HB: You have to have somebody who knows that.

BW: Yes, farmers, ranchers would write in from Montana. They wanted something that only the agricultural department would know about and this would only be.

HB: And she took care of all that.

BW: Yes, she took care of all of that kind of thing.

HB: Legislative Aid, we call it now. You call them secretaries then but now we call them Legislative Aids. When you told your mother you were going to Washington to work for a woman Congressman, did she still think you were not being very lady-like?

BW: Oh, no! They were quite pleased.

HB: They were pleased?

BW: They were quite pleased! People, ladies did have jobs of that kind.

HB: And that was all right.

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BW: Yes, and there was two years between the election and her getting elected to Congress and I had had a job out at the Capitol in between times editing the Education Department, not the Educational—what did they call it, the Chancellor's Office. The Chancellor of the University and the various colleges. And there were five colleges in the state and the presidents would send in their reports that had to be submitted to the legislature. And I had to edit their reports. And I was in his office for quite a while and it was from his office that I stopped and worked for Jeannette.

HB: Did you work with Jeannette's sisters too, they were always around weren't they, her sisters and mother?

BW: Well, her mother was a what I called an old lady at that time. She must have been...

[END OF SIDE A] [BEGIN SIDE B]

HB: Did you know her mother? Did you know Jeannette's mother?

BW: Oh, yes. Before we went to Washington when I was still working in the Chancellor's Office, I would go over weekends at Jeannette's house and stay there over weekends writing these this is after she was elected—writing these articles over there for the Syndicate because it was just within a week or two after she was elected that the Chicago Syndicate signed her up for the articles.

HB: What was her mother like?

BW: She was a very timid, darling sort of a person, a large lady, pleasant and enormously patient. She would have to be with a family like that because each of the family was full of ideas and a lot of energy and she kept house for them.

HB: Would you say that she loved all the kids?

BW: Oh yes, oh yes!

HB: All of them! Did she love Wellington and Jeannette more than the others? That's what one of her sisters said later, that Jeannette and Wellington were mother's darlings.

BW: Well, they were the most energetic ones. I think they were the kind of people that psychologically demanded more room to get things done.

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HB: Did you ever meet Jeannette's father? He was already dead.

BW: He was dead long before that.

HB: That's right, he was already dead.

BW: He had died years before.

HB: Did she talk about him very much to you?

BW: No, not that I was aware of.

HB: Did she talk about Wellington very much to you?

BW: Well, not particularly. They were very close. I think Wellington was very successful as a lawyer though very you and I think she and her mother often consulted Wellington as to whether what they had in mind to do would be the right thing to do and I can just imagine Jeannette would ask him if such and such a thing would be the right thing to do and he would say no and she would persuade him that it was.

HB & Man: [Laughing]

BW: She was slow-minded.

HB: Did you get to know Wellington?

BW: Oh yes. Our headquarters were in his office.

HB: What was he like?

BW: He was a very charming person, very unusual kind of a person. Somebody is going to write a book about him some day but it ought to be one of the lawyers who was active in those days because he did absurd things, for instance, a friend of mine when I was in Washington, wrote me that she attended a court case where he was pointing with a pointer to a map on the wall showing... to illustrate some point in his argument and the other lawyer, the opposing lawyer of course, making it uneasy for him or something and he chased the other lawyer around the court room with this stick.

HB: [Laughter]

BW: What a shocking situation.

HB: In bad temper.

BW: Yes, I imagine.

HB: Imagine! [Laughter] chasing around the court room.

BW: And there were things like that.

HB: [Laughter]

BW: But he was very strong-minded and he played tricks. He liked to play tricks on people.

HB: Oh!

BW: During Jeannette's campaign in the office in the Gold Block where his office was, there was one room at the end of the corridor where another lawyer had his office and this other lawyer was rather a not too powerful person all by himself in this office. He used to pass our open door all the time every noon when he went to lunch and he never locked his door. He left it open all the time—very few people locked doors. We never locked our house doors in those days, and he always used to make fun of us thinking that a woman could win the campaign, that a woman would ever run for Congress! And that she couldn't possibly win. So Wellington thought he would play a trick on this man. I remember one noon, he had two assistants in his office that had just graduated from the law school in Missoula. And he and these two boys—young men—went into this lawyer's office and took out, while the lawyer was gone to lunch, took out every stick of furniture in that office and hid it in Wellington's office and the man came back from lunch, opened his door and the room was empty.

HB: [Laughter]

BW: He was just staggered and he came into Wellington's office and said, "My office has been robbed! What shall I do? Let me use your telephone right now and I'll phone the police." And Wellington said, "I don't think you should phone the police. They won't believe you over the telephone. That's ridiculous. "

Man [Laughing]

BW: "You go down to the police office and tell them."

HB: [Laughing]

BW: And so the man went down to the police office and while he was gone, Wellington and the boys put everything back in the office.

HB & Man: [Laughing hard]

BW: When that man came back with two policemen, the office was in a normal state and they thought the man was crazy.

HB & Man: [Laughing hard]

BW: But he did a lot of practical jokes like that.

HB: I think that's charming. You were a young woman then and there were other young women working there too. Did any of them get crushes on Wellington, he was a pretty charming man.

BW: Well, I didn't get any [laughter] crush on Wellington though I felt he was a powerful lawyer and a very good person and charming company. Oh, and Wellington was married.

HB: Oh! He was married then.

BW: To his first wife at that time.

HB: Oh! Oh!

BW: Yes.

HB: What was she like?

BW: Well, she had been my seat mate in high school. And it was her father that Wellington had his first job with as a lawyer. And then they were divorced—that's another whole story, but they were divorced and he remained single for many, many years before he married the present Mrs. Gait who—Mrs. Gait's father had been one of the very few Senators in the Legislature here who was for women on the jury, I remember.

HB: What a connection that was!

BW: I ran a campaign for women on the jury and I must have been a very poor lobbyist because it took twenty-five years to get it through.

HB: Oh boy! Look how long the ERA is taking.

BW: You're right! If you want a flyer that we used in the jury campaign I can give you one.

HB: I would like it.

MAN SPEAKING IN: How was Wellington regarding his own financial affairs?

BW: I can remember one day during the campaign the paper came out with a full seven column headline that so and so was being sued for a million dollars for liable and I remember Wellington saying, "My, I wish somebody would sue me for a million dollars." It sounded so established, you see.

MAN SPEAKING AGAIN: How did he handle his own financial affairs?

BW: Well, he... there were all kinds of stories, for instance people would say he never paid a telephone bill because he had something over the telephone company. Now, that could be entirely untrue, I wouldn't want to be quoted, but there were lots of places where they said he never paid bills cause he had something on them and he was such a good lawyer.

HB: But you found him generous enough around the office and paying bills around the office and things like that.

BW: He must have. He must have been, yes, and then when he became really successful, he must have made quite a lot of money. He owned more property in Montana, ranch property, than anybody else in the state, I think. I think he had well over a million dollars' worth of property.

MAN' S VOICE: Who's hotel was it he owned here in Helena?

BW: He was a partner in the Placer Hotel

MAN' S VOICE: Ya, the Placer Hotel.

BW: But that was when the Placer Hotel was already quite old and he, and I think, Kessler were partners running that hotel and he lived in the hotel quite a while.

HB: Would you be willing to say briefly without any great detail why he and his first wife got a divorce, just briefly?

BW: Well, I wouldn't want to be quoted on it.

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MAN'S VOICE: I can turn this off if you like.

BW: Yes. It was perfectly logical and reasonable.

HB: Yes.

BW: "I think progress is a sawtoothed thing." You go forward and then you come back a little bit and then you go forward and then come back a little bit, but each time you step forward, you look ahead so far that if you go back a little bit, you still are starting afresh with a new idea of progress.

MAN' S VOICE: You usually step a little too far on that first splurge and have to settle back and look at it before you go a little farther.

BW: And now I think, now here is an interesting thing we're all, we were all quite shocked and we're getting used to the fact now that young folks are living together without marriage. Now when I was young, this must have been in the 1920's possibly—oh no! It was long before. I think it was before the 1920's, Judge Ben Lindsey of Denver, you may have heard of him, had so many divorce cases that he said they ought to have a trial marriage and live together for two years before they actually got married and not have any children for those first two years.

HB: Sounds so reasonable.

BW: Because there is no point in having all these divorces and having children subject to broken homes and—well, the whole United States was shocked to pieces by this thing, but he was sensible, I think.

HB: Well, what about... here was Jeannette' s sister working on family planning and birth control that must have been a fairly shocking thing to a lot of people.

BW: Well, it was her sister' s profession, birth control.

HB: Was that considered shocking, you think, for women?

BW: Oh, you didn't say the word out loud at all.

HB: You didn't say anything? How did Jeannette feel about this?

BW: Well, Jeannette was very much pleased about it, but Wellington said if she was going to

work on birth control, she couldn't stay in Montana. He wouldn't have her in Montana doing anything as outlandish as that.

HB: Well, she must have been a very brave woman too.

BW: Yes, did you by any chance ever read the book about her?

HB: No.

BW: I forget, the woman who wrote it was here when she was writing the book. She's written some very good books. I have it here, but I couldn't lay my hands on it.

HB: I could research that one and find it.

BW: But they have it in the Historical Library and in the other libraries.

HB: I'll get it.

BW: It's called Too Many Children, Too Little Love, or something like that.

HB: Oh! I saw that title and I didn't realize that was about Jeannette's sister. I saw that title in one of my biographies.

BW: Edna McKinnon.

HB: Did you know Edna?

BW: Oh, my yes.

HB: What was she like?

BW: She was a law student at the time Jeannette was running and she helped in the campaign. She's the one that told me very openly and I guess she told everybody and anybody who would interview her that she resented Jeannette as a young person because Jeannette seemed to be getting all the attention of the family and she felt that she was not getting her share of the family attention. She never practiced law, but she graduated from law school in Missoula and then she worked with Margaret Sanger for a while. The book is interesting.

HB: Then she and Jeannette worked together sometimes.

BW: Well, I don't know.

HB: She didn't introduce any of the legislation or anything?

BW: In Chicago she worked in Chicago and Jeannette was working in Chicago too. Now I wasn't close to Jeannette at that period at all.

HB: Back to when you were close to Jeannette—did she ever talk to you on how she felt about things like marriage for herself?

BW: Oh, I think she would very much like to have been married, but I think the men were afraid of her.

HB: Why were they afraid of her?

BW: Well, they weren't going to be bossed by anybody who was as prominent as she was. That seems reasonable to me. She had men friends. Mayor LaGuardia of New York was a freshman Congressman when she was.

HB: He was a handsome young man too, wasn't he?

BW: Well, he was a very interesting person. Did you ever read his autobiography?

HB: No, it must be most interesting.

BW: He tells how after she voted her first vote in Congress, she voted no, and then the papers came out and said she fainted and cried and all that stuff that wasn't true.

HB: It wasn't true, I know.

BW: She might have wept, but she didn't faint and she walked out without any difficulty.

HB: Were you watching all that?

BW: Florence Leach and I stayed until midnight and then we quit, the vote wasn't taken till about three in the morning.

HB: So it happened after you left.

BW: So Florence and I went home. We were staying at Jeannette's apartment at the time and I

remember hearing Jeannette and Wellington. Wellington came for the vote and I remember hearing them come in the door and Jeannette was definitely weeping at that time. Wellington said, "Of course, you know you can't be re-elected after this. " And she said, "Yes, I know that." That's one of the things I said in this speech last week at the Capitol, that she knew when she voted against war that she couldn't be elected, but that she did what she felt was right.

HB: I think most people feel what she did was right, now.

BW: But in La Guardia's autobiography, he tells about getting a letter from a woman in New York asking him if it was true that Jeannette Rankin wept and disgraced the women of the universe, the women of the country. He wrote back, "Dear Madam, my own eyes were so filled with tears, I didn't see whether she was crying or not. "

MAN'S VOICE: I read that yesterday.

HB: Wasn't that a beautiful response?

BW: Did you?

HB: That was a beautiful response, I love that.

BW: That's interesting.

HB: Well, that's been recorded. I'm glad...about LaGuardia. Did she ever, when she talked to you just as a friend, did she ever talk to you about any men that she was particularly interested in that maybe she would think about marriage with if they weren't afraid of her?

BW: No.

HB: As far as you know, she never was really romantically involved with anyone?

BW: All the time after she *was* out of Congress, even whenever La Guardia came and he was a married man at the time too, he always took her to dinner because he was interested in her as a friend. Certainly, I don't think it was a romantic attachment at all, but they were very friendly. I don't know of any. She got a lot of proposals for marriage just out of publicity. A funny thing how you get a lot of publicity in the newspaper and all of a sudden perfect strangers write in and ask you to marry them,

HB & MAN: [Laughing]

MAN SPEAKING: Seep out of the walls!

BW: It's astonishing that the men would take such a chance without knowing the woman.

HB: And yet the ones that knew her wouldn't take a chance because they were afraid she was too powerful.

BW: Yes! (Laughter).

HB: Do you think that bothered her, the men that she would be interested in were a little afraid of her? Do you think that bothered her?

BW: Well, it's hard to say. I think she would have made a wonderful mother, she was awfully interested in children and very much interested in the laws referring to children. She and Julia Lathrop who was the head of the children's department in Washington spent quite a lot of time together trying to promote Julia Lathrop's work throughout the country. Julia Lathrop was quite well established, but her work still had a lot of territory to cover. And she and Julia Lathrop worked out things for Montana because in those days, Montana was way at the bottom of the list for maturity and infant mortality and I think that when Julia Lathrop's work got spread around Montana more widely through Jeannette. It brought us up to the middle. We are still not at the top of the list, but we're still up in the middle which is a long way from the bottom.

HB: Did she ever, like when you were all off at lunch or dinner or a week end or something, did you talk about anything except the causes—the political causes?

BW: Well, we never went out for lunch. We always had a sandwich in our desk drawers and ate while we worked. We worked awfully hard there. Nobody had ever heard of an eight hour day and she usually worked till around ten at night and was there at nine in the morning. The help, of which I was one, would come in at nine and we usually got off around six, quite often we would come back and work around eight at night, but not as much as she worked.

HB: So these women were totally dedicated to their work; that was the whole of everything.

BW: Yes! Yes!

HB: Everything was their work, the cause, really.

BW: Now she used to have, I think, practically every Sunday evening she would have a Sunday evening supper in her home, just a tray, not a... yes, a supper. And her mother would manage it and she would invite prominent people to come in and talk things over, but what they talked—

it wasn't so much a social affair as it was talking over what had to be done. One of the exciting things she did was cleaning up the Bureau of Printing and Engraving.

MAN' S VOICE: I heard about that yesterday too.

BW: Oh, you did?

HB: She made them give—

BW: That was really very exciting.

MAN' S VOICE: They said something about things in government can't be changed that quickly or something like that. I don't remember her reply. It was something that, "You will do." or something to that effect.

HB: Do you remember the IWW incident where Frank Little was hanged?

BW: Was hanged? I don't remember the detail, but she was terribly upset about it—about this hanging business.

HB: She was in Washington then, and they dragged him out of his room and hanged him. How did she hear about that?

BW: You would be astonished at the letters she got from miners wives who would write her about all the troubles of the minds and she went to Butte after Little was hanged and in the Butte Miner, I don't know whether you've seen the Butte Miner of those weeks that the miners struck, after the big fire. No, she went to Butte after the Butte fire in the mines not after Little was killed, but it was all about the same time.

HB: They were all connected.

BW: Yes, they were all connected.

HB: He went in there because of the fire.

BW: Yes, and when she got back to Washington, she introduced a bill that Congress should take over the copper mines during the war because they had taken over all the other mines. But, of course, Congress wouldn't do it, the company would see to it that they wouldn't do it.

HB: That would have finished her with the company...

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BW: The company! It seems to me the newspapers, the Butte newspapers, that you'd think would be on the side of the mines gave very fair reports on what went on there and there was one young man who escaped from the fire and went back over and over again and dragged out something like fourteen men and saved their lives while the others were burning. You'll get lots of information there and it says that she gave a speech at the Columbia Gardens and got the longest ovation, an ovation of twenty minutes. When she talked, she got the longest ovation that had ever been given in Butte.

HB: She really wanted to help, didn't she?

BW: She really wanted to help! She was politically ambitious, I'm sure, but not because she wanted the office like Reagan is campaigning because he wants to be President. And if you want to quote me, I don't mind. "All he wants to do is be President. I don't think he cares whether the women—I know he doesn't care whether the women get the ERA or not." But Jeannette really was politically ambitious because she thought she could accomplish something for the country.

MAN' S VOICE: Now it' s become a tool...

BW: Yes.

HB: And she did! Some of those things—she did a lot of them!

BW: And she did!

HB: How long were you with her?

BW: Just one year. After she voted against the war they cancelled the...they didn't renew the contract for the writing every Sunday that we did and I had had enough after one year there. As a matter of fact, Florence Leach and I decided that the Montana Legislature was a very much sounder institution than Congress was. [Laughter].

HB: Really, really! What was it like there? What was Congress like when you were there? You said you'd had enough—in what way?

BW: Oh there were always, of course, we were very naive in those days. Jeannette was not as naive as we were, but Florence and I were new to the game. And all the... the trading of votes for instance and the kind of lobbying, the arguments, illogicality of the procedures seemed so unreasonable to us. Jeannette took it in her stride.

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HB: I think that was one of her strengths, don't you?

BW: Oh, yes!

HB: Her goals were idealistic, but her methods were practical.

BW: You know, the week that we got there, it was a week before the first vote was taken. The Congressmen neighboring us on the corridor there would come into Jeannette's office and they said, "You're new here and you will know a lot more after you have some experience, but you have to remember that you don't vote for what you want, you vote for what will get you re-elected and you're here to be re-elected." Well, Florence and I were utterly shocked! To go to Congress in order to be re-elected was the most absurd thing you can imagine. We thought you go to congress to do something for the country. But...

HB: Idealism went out the window. How did Jeannette respond to that when they told her that?

BW: Oh, she was very tight-lipped about the whole business. She was very diplomatic, she didn't say one thing or another, as a matter of fact the night the vote was taken.

[END OF TAPE #104-4]

[BEGIN TAPE #104-5]

BW: You don't need to worry about.

HB: Oh, that's a good way to be brought up, isn't it?

BW: I wasn't really of facial beauty.

HB: Oh, I think you were so pretty.

BW: Oh, I'm glad to hear that.

HB: You were just lovely. I bet the men around that Congress were just hanging around the office all the time.

BW: Oh no, no!

HB: All business, huh?

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BW: It was all business.

HB: Of course, men were probably a little bit afraid of those women were in feminist jobs.

BW: Oh, I'm sure they were. I know the young man who was secretary for the Congressman across the hall from us, called us all "Reds". We were so on the outside of what we should have been doing.

HB: Anybody who was different was a "Red".

BW: That's right.

HB: That's just amazing to me because there was nothing you were doing that made you communist.

BW: I can remember one morning I was crossing the big park in front of the Capitol to go to the Historical Library and quite a ways on another path, quite a long ways from where I was, was Elizabeth Watson—this is during the summer of 1917—was Elizabeth Watson whom we had brought down from New York to do the investigating at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing and she called across to me, "Did you read the paper this morning?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "Isn't it marvelous Russia has rebelled?" And we were so excited, it was the morning that Russia declared no more Tsar.

HB: No more Tsar!

BW: It was really an exciting minute when she called across the park there.

HB: Oh, my goodness!

BW: We weren't Communists but we knew there should be a change in government because the old government was doing terrible things.

HB: And that sort of made you look like Communists to the neighbors.

BW: Yes, and it was that general attitude that made them call us "Reds".

HB: It didn't seem to bother any of you very much.

BW: Oh, no! That's just the way it was.

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HB: No.

BW: Life is what you're living and you just do it. [Laughter].

HB: You just do it! I think you and Jeannette are a lot alike because that's the way she talks too. You just do it! You just do what you have to do and you don't worry much about what people think.

BW: Well, one way, yes. But she had the personality that was just marvelous.

SMALL CONVERSATION - BELLE IS INTRODUCING HER HUSBAND.

BW: I found him [her husband] in Washington at that time.

HB: Is that right? At that time were you still working?

BW: He was with President Hoover's Food Administration and I was with Jeannette.

HB: And you were with Jeannette. So you courted each other, he courted you, of course.

BW: And he was in the Food Administration and used to bring a piece of pie every night when he came to see me.

HB: Well, how did you meet this radical woman?

MR. WEINSTEIN: Well, I just told her about it the other day. It's a long, long story, but it's one of those things that... she came to Washington, I came to Washington, and a friend of mine said that he was going up just to call on her. He was some young man from Minnesota, someplace he knew her sister and he knew me so he introduced us.

HB: Uh-huh.

BW: And we have been married sixty-two years.

HB: Oh, that's wonderful! That's marvelous!

MR. WEINSTEIN: Well, you keep on working.

HB: & MAN: Nice, meeting you.

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HB: So when you left office, were you getting ready to get married?

BW: Yes, and I had had enough of Washington.

HB: What did Jeannette say when you told her you were going to get married?

BW: Oh, by that time, her sister had come. Her sister's husband had just died and she and her two children came to Washington to be with Jeannette and she was there. She could take over the office and the reason I left was because my writing job was over.

MAN SPEAKING: The Sunday article.

HB: She didn't try and talk you out of getting married or anything like that? She thought that was a good idea?

BW: Oh no, theoretically my job was the writing, but I incidentally—I was sort of the office manager and I dictated all the letters.

HB: She didn't really like to write, did she?

BW: She didn't write!

HB: She talked, but she didn't like to write.

BW: It's an interesting thing, she never wrote a speech.

HB: She just talked.

BW: She just got up and talked off-the-cuff and I remember there was a meeting of the National Suffrage Committee, I think. It's in that article I gave you.

HB: You said I could keep this?

BW: Yes.

HB: Good.

BW: The New York Times sent a reporter down to cover this meeting. It was the National Suffrage meeting, I think, in Washington. And I said to Jeannette, "[unintelligible] is going to be

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one of the speakers that afternoon" and I went down in the morning and the New York Times reporter, a woman, said to me, she had to have a copy of the speech by eleven o'clock in the morning to get in the evening paper and the evening edition of the times. And I said, "There is no copy of the speech. Jeannette doesn't have copies of speeches, she just gets up and talks. " "Well, could we arrange to get something they could put in the paper? " So I rushed up to our office and told Jeannette and she said, "Well, you write something; I've a committee meeting right now and I can't write anything at all. You write something and give it to them." so I wrote what I thought was a very handsome speech and gave it to this girl and it appeared in the Times the next day of Jeannette's speech. But when Jeannette got up to speak, something else had occurred in the meantime and she spoke on a completely different subject. (Laughter) It was the only time I knew that the The New York Times could be challenged. [Laughter]

HB: [Laughter] That's lovely. Can you remember any little incident that maybe hasn't shown anywhere yet about—that would have to go with her own personal response to things, you know, anecdotes about her and yourself, things that happened between you.

BW: You mean just between Jeannette and me?

HB: Or Jeannette and the others of you.

MAN' S VOICE: Something very personal type thing.

BW: No.

HB: Was she an affectionate woman with you?

BW: No, we were good friends and just as several hundred other suffragists were. I think probably the reason she asked me to help in the campaign was because I had kind of worked up a reputation by that time from working on the newspaper and I'm sure she knew it would be a good thing to have a newspaper person in the office.

HB: And it sounds like all of you were pretty much all business, weren't you?

BW: Yes.

HB: There was no time for anything else?

BW: There was really nothing more.

HB: Did she come to your wedding when you got married?

BW: No, our marriage was just a half a dozen family members, it wasn't a big fancy wedding at all.

HB: Wasn't it?

BW: No.

It was in the Rabbi's office. I'm Jewish and it was in the Rabbi's office.

HB: Just all family.

BW: It was just the family.

HB: I understand she was well ahead of her times in terms of... she already was very much against any kind of prejudice, that when she lived in the South, she fought for the rights of the blacks and that was a time when nobody would do anything.

BW: In Georgia, it's an interesting thing, this man that she knew in Georgia, can't think of his name right now.

HB: John Kirkly?

BW: That wrote the book about her, you mean? Or the one that was with her for a long time?

HB: John Kirkly was the young man that worked for her when she was...

BW: No, this isn't the one.

HB: Mr. Beard, was it?

BW: No, was it John Board wrote about her and she wouldn't let him publish it because he misinterpreted some things there.

HB: When did you last see Jeannette?

BW: Let me think, when was the last time? It was when she was living down in California, she was in this -- it wasn't a retirement home.

HB: She had an apartment in Carmel.

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BW: In Carmel yes, and I think that was the last time.

HB: And you visited her there?

BW: I didn't visit her, no, but let me think, she didn't come up here after that. She was up here and we had lunch in the backyard, I remember... she was still in Georgia, she had come up here for some reason. Funny, I can't remember the last time I saw her. My memory isn't very good anymore.

HB: But that luncheon in the back yard—what were the kind of things that were on her mind when you had lunch in the back yard?

BW: Oh, I had invited the reporter from the newspaper to come and meet her and he wanted to interview her. I don't remember anything spectacular was said. Have you read Hanna Orment's book?

HB: Yes, Hanna Orment Josephson.

BW: Josephson, yes.

HB: That's a very fine book. I enjoyed it a lot.

BW: There were a lot of things in there that I think were not quite accurate.

HB: Which ones do you think were not accurate?

BW: Well, I marked a lot of things, but I don't remember now what they were.

HB: Anything major that you can recall, really major errors?

BW: No.

HB: What do you think Jeannette would have to say about that statue that they just erected?

BW: Well, you know I keep thinking about that and I'm sorry in one way that they moved Colonel Sanders from up there. They moved this other big statue out in the back yard in the parking lot that had been there for a long time in order to put her statue there and I'm not sure if that was such a good thing. I would have liked to see her statue down in the main lobby. I think that's where it belongs.

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HB: Down in the main lobby?

BW: There were legal reasons why, there is some law they couldn't put certain statues there or something, I've forgotten just what it was, but in a way, here was Colonel Sanders big statue. Colonel Sanders was really one of the founders of the state. He was one of the important people and I think he belonged inside the capitol and I'm not sure putting this statue of Jeannette right at the head of the stairs there with nothing else around it. I think they should have had both of them there. I mean I like the idea of having both a man and a woman there.

HB: So would I.

BW: I don't think that ERA... I am a strong ERA person, don't mistake that, but I don't think that people should think that ERA is trying to make women more powerful than men. I think there should be an equality and it worries me that they took him out and put her there.

HB: It looks a little bit that way, doesn't it? Like the woman has to replace.

BW: Although I think it's more impressive for him to be outdoors than indoors.

HB: He's in a nice place out, but there should be a man and a woman.

BW: I think it would be nice to have both of them there.

HB: How do you think she would feel about what you just said? Do you think she would feel that way too? That it would be better to have a man and a woman?

BW: I have no idea.

HB: She might not even notice a thing like that.

BW: I doubt it.

HB: She was—

BW: I think she would have been terribly pleased to have a statue of herself up there. Who wouldn't?

HB: Yes, do you think it looks like her?

BW: It looks more like she looked... the face looks more like she looked in her second term and this is supposed to be when she was first elected because she is dressed in 1917 clothes.

HB: I see, so there was a little contradiction there.

BW: But I think the sculptor did a wonderful job of bringing a certain nebulousness into the thing.

HB: Oh how wonderful. I can't wait to see it now. I haven't seen it yet. We're going to go down now and see it.

BW: It's a very good statue.

HB: Oh, I'm glad.

BW: She has little replicas of it, the sculptor, about this high and they look much more exciting than the big one.

HB: Oh, she has them?

BW: Yes, and she sells them for something like two thousand dollars.

HB: Oh, my goodness. Oh my goodness!

BW: They're bronze.

HB: Well, if we ever get an Emmy for this movie, we will ask for a... instead of an Emmy, we'll ask for a Jeannette. [Laughter]

BW: I told her, I think she should make little paperweights. Paperweights, she could sell them much cheaper and that I thought a lot of people would like to have a paperweight.

HB: She could do that, I think, by making the mold. She could - I would love to see this.

BW: But the sculptor is a delightful person, have you met her?

HB: I have talked to her on the phone. I am going to work with her. We can't stay in town any longer so I am going to have to work with her with tapes and over the telephone, but she just sounded like a wonderful woman.

BW: But she's a delightful person.

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HB: I would like to rely on the telephone. There are so many good people this whole trip has been talk to people who might have known Jeannette and people have been just wonderful.

BW: Did you see Kevin Giles?

HB: No, but I am going to try to this afternoon.

BW: His book ought to be coming out any minute.

HB: That's right, it's supposed to be out in August...

BW: I was so sorry that it wasn't out at the time of the dedication.

HB: Wouldn't that have been a wonderful thing?

BW: Oh, yes, they could have sold many of them.

HB: They would have sold hundreds. I have to talk to him this afternoon. OK, let me see if I have got any notes here that haven' t gotten answered. Any questions I haven' t gotten answered. No, I think we have done a good job. Oh! One more question.

Since this is going to be a screen play, it is necessary to have characters who are colorful and occasionally in conflict. Can you think of a person from those years who might have been a colorful opponent to Jeannette?

BW: It's too bad you can't get Wellington in the picture.

HB: Oh! I'm going to use Wellington.

BW: He was wonderful.

HB: I am going to use everything I can on Wellington and I am going to work with his wife to get more information on Wellington.

BW: That's good.

HB: He seems tremendously colorful to me.

BW: And his wife is a delightful person; have you talked to her?

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HB: No, but she'll be back in two weeks, and I am going to try and work it out. She is at the Republican Convention and so in two weeks—

BW: I don't know why the Republican Women let what's his name doing what he is doing for ERA.

HB: Reagan is almost unstoppable, I think. I think Reagan is, I was in California when he was Governor and he is one of these people, he is charismatic. People who think they couldn't stand him will go in and listen to his speech and they'll come out going, "Ah, he's wonderful." I think he is unstoppable.

BW: I am just beginning to understand the motives of the assassins, I think. [Laughter]

HB: I feel that way myself. I think he is a dangerous man, I do, but I think he is unstoppable. I'm afraid he'll win, that's how I feel. [Laughter]

BW: Oh my, that would be a catastrophe!

HB: I think so too and of course, that will set ERA back ten years. We at least had some cooperation with Carter, but we wouldn't with Reagan.

BW: Well, you know, it's a funny thing. I think Anderson was a marvelous person.

HB: I do too.

BW: I think not belonging to one of the parties, all he'll do is split the vote.

HB: But wouldn't it be wonderful if he could be. There's always a possibility, he's idealistic like Jeannette was. People are so fed up with a system where they don't really feel they have anything to say about the candidates that maybe they will vote Anderson and maybe he'll pull in enough to be significant. If so, that would be the first time in history—

BW: I think it would be an historical thing. Personally, I feel a great deal of gratitude to Carter for not plunging us right into war on account of the Iranian business.

HB: I feel that way too.

BW: I think Reagan would have had us right in the war.

HB: Reagan would have been bombing.

BW: The first think that would happen if we were in war, they would first shoot the hostages and then they would shoot all of us.

HB: That's right!

BW: And we would shoot all of them and people that are not responsible for the situation at all.

HB: That's pretty ridiculous.

BW: I feel a great gratitude to Carter for keeping us out of it.

HB: I do too. I feel that way too, and coming from El Paso, Texas which is a military town, it has a huge Army base there, when that all started, they all said, "Well, they can't do that to us." You know, and they were ready to go to war. Automatic, conditioned response Pavlov's dogs.

BW: Right, right! [Laughter]

HB: Well, I know that we have probably tired you out and you have more appointments this afternoon, but you have been just wonderful.

BW: Well, I'll probably think of lots of things when it's too late.

HB: May I keep this? Well, I tell you what, I would like to drop you a little note. I am going to go back to California now and I'll be working on this and I know that as I work, I will think of things that I am not clear about and I would like to drop you a little note to see if you've thought of any other things that maybe you'd forgot to tell me and maybe to ask you questions that I have at that time so you will probably be hearing from me in about a month. Just in case

BW: Just in case.

HB: Just in case. [Laughter] That was the end of the interview with Belle Weinstein, Mrs. Norman Weinstein, in her home in Helena, Montana on July 14 , 1980 and except for a few small comments from the issues of Montana Historical magazine which had some articles in them about Jeannette and about her - that was the end of the interview.

A very healthy, alert, spry, involved woman who must be approaching 90 and married 63 years. Still very involved in the ERA and local politics, in her own work, her own writing. She was hoping to hear from the ACT' about a play that she had written some years back and was just

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now getting some interest in, called, which is evidently an Indian word meaning something similar to our Indian summer, a period like summer in the middle of colder times. A beautiful woman, a pleasure to get to know and I couldn't help but think how much she herself was like Jeannette, like the tapes of Jeannette at age 92.

[END OF INTERVIEW]