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Interviewee: Mae Nan Ellingson
Interviewer: David Brooks
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David Brooks: It's July 12, 2002, and I'm David Brooks interviewing Mae Nan Ellingson. Would you begin by telling me a little bit about your initial involvement in what you would consider activism or feminism?

Mae Nan Ellingson: Could you repeat the question?

DB: Or just some of your personal history leading into what you consider your involvement in the political realm that led you to activism in the state of Montana or elsewhere—

MNE: When I was in high school in Texas I was always interested in government of all kinds. In particular, I started off in student government. I was in student council and then was the president of my class and was the second girl to ever be student body president. So, I don't know, some people are just sort of born with tendencies or interest in government or public service. Sometimes it does seem to me to happen that way, just in observing other people and their life paths and career paths. So I think I got started fairly early, really, in terms of being an activist or being a leader.

Certainly in those days, in the '60s, things weren't particularly defined for me, at least in high school, as being feminist issues or non-feminist issues. But the fact that I was a girl and doing these kinds of things just seemed natural. I mean, it didn't seem to be a brand of feminism or anything, which is sort of interesting, I think, in retrospect, because Texas and the South in particular are not places where I think of women being fully accepted into all realms of the world. It challenges me a little bit to maintain that stereotype when I think back, "Well, I am a product of that, so something must have been going on." But after high school I went to college, I married very early, at the age of nineteen, married a person from Montana who was stationed at the helicopter school in my hometown. The situation is very reminiscent of the movie *The Officer and a Gentleman*. You know, married to leave the hometown, what seemed to be a pretty dead end kind of situation, moved to Montana, and started school in the University Campus in 1967. Things were still pretty quiet here in terms of activism.

DB: By here you mean The University of Montana?

MNE: Here, the University of Montana. Things were still pretty quiet on the campus here. My first bout of real activism was in the environmental area. Shortly after I moved here I became involved in an organization called GASP, Gals Against Smog and Pollution. We began demonstrating out of the Horner Waldorf Plant because it was emitting these unbelievable amounts of sulfuric and other pollutants into the air that made it impossible on numerous days

of the year to even see the M, let alone the problems caused by the smell. So environmentalism was my first foray into activism.

I should sort of back up a little bit. In with all of this, or during all of this, the Vietnam War was going on and my husband had been a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. So I had a little bit different view at the age of twenty and being a student on campus than a great many of the other people on the campus did, in terms of the war in Vietnam. A lot of the activism in 1969 and 1970 here on campus was related to the Vietnam War. That was not something I was involved in at all just because of my perspective, I think. What turned that around for me a little bit was my husband was killed in Alaska in a flying accident in January of 1969. I came back to Missoula and resumed at the University. Shortly thereafter, and my dates are not totally correct I'm sure, the incident at Kent State erupted. I remember, irrespective of my feelings about the war, that I became pretty mobilized by what happened at Kent State and joined in to some protests and demonstrations on our campus in support of the students at Kent State. So that was an interesting turnaround for me in moving from environmental activism more to just bigger issues, bigger social justice issues I guess I would call it. Respect for people having different points of view.

I think it must have been, oh, probably...well, in 1971, Montana decided to call for a Constitutional Convention. You had to be twenty-four to be eligible to run. I filed to seek one of Missoula County's eight seats at the Convention. The election was held in November of '71 and the Convention convened in January of 1972. I, at the age of twenty-four, was actually the youngest delegate at the Convention and out of a hundred delegates there were nineteen women. I feel, in some ways, a big part of a historical shift in Montana during that time because prior to that probably the maximum number of women who had ever been in the legislature at one time was two. To have nineteen women elected for the Constitutional Convention was a very, very big shift. And certainly throughout the campaign, while women's issues per say were not the things we were talking about, in terms of rewriting Montana's constitution, greater empowerment of women brought about by the women's liberation movement was really behind the scenes, if nothing else. I mean it was something that was inspiring and encouraging more women to become more directly involved. You know, why shouldn't we be running for office? Why shouldn't we be having more of an influence directly instead of indirectly?

What is so interesting to me in doing the research about the calling of the Constitutional Convention, it was groups like the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women who had really done the lion's share of the work in documenting the need for the Convention and doing research papers and putting the focus on it. It was all the behind-the-scenes things, through volunteer efforts. Really it wasn't until the Convention itself that so many of the women who had been so involved in the League and these other supporting organizations were actually provided an opportunity to serve and be elected in their own rite, instead of just providing the assistance. Is that, I mean I guess I could go on all day but I don't want to limit your questions because that was sort of an opening question that you gave me. Does that answer the opening part anyway?

DB: Certainly. I guess I'd like to ask you a little more about that Convention. You say you decided to run. Did you have particular influences, or what made you come to that decision at the age of twenty-four with so little precedence of women in official capacities?

MNE: Well, you know, as I say, I had this history of running for office even in high school and I suspect that I've never had any real doubts about my own abilities. Even though I grew up in the South, I did have encouragement from teachers and from my father, even, who, you know, just made me think I could do lots of things. So, sort of irrespective of the lack of role models, I'm not sure I perceived as much of a barrier. What I think really compelled me to do the Convention was I was a graduate student working on a Master's degree in political science and I had been working on a thesis on the legislature. So I had spent the better part of the 1971 legislature in Helena working on my project, which had to do with the role of political parties in terms of how people made decisions. So I was very much interested in government, felt I knew a fair amount about government, and so I felt like I could make a contribution to the Convention.

DB: Being one of nineteen women out of a hundred people at that Convention, could you talk a little bit about specifically being a woman there?

MNE: Well you know, we just had our thirtieth reunion of the Constitutional Convention in Helena a couple of weeks ago and I did give a talk there. One of the things that's interesting to me to reflect on, because in some ways this was the really early days of women's political activism. We, as women, I don't think ever met more than one time as a group of women. And that was to maybe get our picture taken. You know, in many ways, given subsequently what happened, with women's caucuses being developed, of which I was a part of at the Law School, and other things, even at that time and under those circumstances I don't think we felt a need to organize ourselves in terms of a group of women. What I think about in retrospect is that women, any minority group, needs to organize themselves when they feel like they don't have access to power, or whatever, to access to the spoils of whatever it is under the current system or existing regime. Even though there were nineteen of us only, I don't think any of us as individual women felt that our influence, our committee assignments, our ability to contribute, was in any way hampered by being a woman. So I think that is a real interesting recognition on my part or acknowledgment that I don't think that we felt the need to collectively organize.

Now, I do think that there were a few issues which were very, very important to the women at the Convention. And I do think that women tend to view a lot of things different, although I think that that would become more evident in a legislative setting where you were dealing with nuances of laws and more minute issues of public policy as opposed to the basic structure of a document. I don't think, for example, that men and women have differing viewpoints based on gender that relate to the legislative branch of government or the judicial or the executive branch or the initiative or referendum and those kinds of things. I do think that where the different approaches to women's issues are issues on which men and women may differ, and

maybe that is the definition of a women's issue, I'm not totally sure. Had to do in the Bill of Rights, and, in particular, the equal rights and equal dignities of the Montana Constitution.

During this period of time, 1972, the federal legislature had passed the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution and had proposed it to be ratified by the various states. Montana had ratified the initiative, I believe, for the first time in 1971 but in 1972, of course, the Equal Rights Amendment was still not a part of the Federal Constitution and, as you probably know, is not yet today a part of the Federal Constitution. That was one, where certainly all the women were united, that there be an Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. Now, having said that, there really wasn't much debate about it either. Of course, I mean, I haven't gone back and checked the roll calls but I can't imagine any men, even, opposing an Equal Rights Amendment under the Montana Constitution for women. There may have been concerns about including equal rights for other categories that are in our constitution, but in terms of the women's issue, there was really no debate, no controversy.

Unfortunately, the resounding support for the Montana Equal Rights provision did not end the question on that in Montana. And certainly, I suspect from that day forward, I became to some people, probably, an ardent feminist, at least with respect to the Equal Rights Amendment, because for every year subsequent to 1972 there was introduced into the Montana legislature a bill to repeal Montana's ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. To this day, it just galls me that that Equal Rights Amendment was never ratified. I'm happy that Montana never rescinded its confirmation of the amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but I became very much of an activist on the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. And that sort of consumed four years, five—three sessions, I think—six years.

During that I think I went through one of the most unpleasant experiences I've ever had in my life, which was the conference in Helena of the International Women's Year. President Carter convened the International Women's Year and asked that every state host an International Women's Year Conference to consider issues of importance and concern to women in the United States. And so calls were made and arrangements were made and throughout that summer—and we need to make a note to check what year that summer was—I think it might have been '75—different states were having their calls. In Montana, our conference was taken over by the Mormon Church. It was unbelievable. I mean, none of...I don't think the rank-and-file Montana women who attended that Convention or meeting had any inkling of what was going on or what could have happened, or had ever had the experience of being such a minority. Because somehow, sort of unbeknownst to anyone, the Mormon Church, through all of their wards across the state, did a grassroots organization that was unbelievable in terms of getting people there and in terms of being organized and in terms of running caucuses and controlling meetings.

I remember the first day going in and signing up and getting registered I started seeing all these people around with little beehives on and wondering where do you get those, what does that mean? Before long we realized that was the insignia for this group. They had men organizers

there with walkie-talkies directing them to be in all of these different meetings because the way the thing was broken up was that there were sort of platforms, if you will, or statements of rights or issues. So the status of women in the military might be a topic so there would be a committee or a group that would work on that. There would maybe be an equal pay committee. There might be a child care committee. There might be an education, a quality in education. These groups would be meeting throughout these two days working on platforms. People could introduce resolutions and you'd try to develop policies, ultimately, then to make recommendations to the federal government or state government as the case may be on all of these different positions, things like child care policies at work, benefits packages, flex time, all of those kinds of issues that were of concern to women. The directions were such that they were able to virtually stymie any real discussion of any of these issues in any of these groups and to preclude any policies or recommendations or platforms that came out that were in any way, I would say any way pro-women, or any way that contradicted or might be in opposition to a woman's place being in the home and taking care of her children. I mean, that was the response to everything about quality day care. You don't need quality day care because women should be at home taking care of their children. You don't need to worry about pay equity on the university system because women need to be at home.

I mean it was very much a no end, no access...I felt, for the first time, what it must be like to live in a totalitarian regime where you can't express your views, you don't have any chance to influence because the numbers are so against you. I mean it was such an eye-opener. It was just unbelievable.

The crowning blow of that whole thing for me was having to debate in front of everybody that was there, several thousand people, the Equal Rights Amendment with a woman from the Eagle's Forum, Phyllis Schlafly's group. Almost any time I had ever debated or talked about the Equal Rights Amendment, I'd felt at least respected or at least allowed to get my sentences out or advocate my positions. This was the most unbelievable experience. I mean, I would just say one thing and there would be all these hisses and boos and it was the longest hour of my life I think. So that really galvanized me even further, I think, to not try not to ever let that kind of oppression be a part of any situation that I would be involved in.

And actually, you know that was '75, and certainly between '72 and '75 I'd been active in setting up a chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus and then I started law school and that's where it was much more difficult to be a woman. There were seven women in my law school class starting in 1973, seven out of seventy five. Given the attitudes of a lot of the law professors, that was a lot more difficult than having been in the Convention or having done anything public. The law profession, I think, was still pretty much regarded as the domain of the white male. So it's important to have a women's law caucus, clearly, because there was so much work to be done—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

MNE: Clearly, because there was so much work to be done. I went to a few national conferences because at that time almost every law school had a women's law caucus on campus because all the women law students were facing the same issues: access to jobs. Almost the only jobs women could initially get graduating from law school were public jobs, going to work for the state, the city, or the county. Private firms weren't hiring women and, you know, then just this panoply of issues. I can fully attest about how much progress has been made. It's phenomenal how much progress has been made over the last twenty-five years in that respect through things like Women's Law Caucus just educating law firms. You know, the world doesn't fall apart when a woman gets pregnant. All of those kinds of issues. So. I'm off track. Put me back on track.

DB: Can we rewind a little bit, back to the Constitutional Convention. It seems like such a significant thing to be a part of. Can you talk a little bit about what your actual activities or duties were as an individual being involved in something like that?

MNE: Well the Convention itself was divided in substantive area committees based on a preferred interest. So there was a local government committee, there was an executive branch committee, there was a revenue and finance committee, an education committee, and on down the line. I was on the legislative committee. So part of your responsibility as being a member of a committee was to develop a legislative article to be submitted into the constitution that you felt was an improvement over what we currently had. And the legislative branch was a branch, to my way of thinking, that really needed some bolstering up. At that point in time there were no interim committees. I felt that the legislature was really the weakest of the three branches of government when it should be equally powerful. It had no paid staff, it was then and still is to some degree pretty much a citizens' volunteer legislature. Some of the positive changes that we made were an interim staffing mechanism. We also recommended annual sessions, which we did have for two years until the constitution was amended. So there was deliberation in the committee meetings.

In addition to that, we submitted delegate proposals for other things in the constitution, aside from our own article, that we wanted to be dealt with. So I think I may have had 20 or 25 delegate proposals of my own that would then have hearings at all of the other committees to which they were assigned. One of my things would be to go to that committee, make a presentation about my proposal, and try to lobby and orchestrate support for getting that particular provision included in the constitution. A good example of that was the Equal Rights Provision that was under the jurisdiction of the Bill of Rights committee. So I had drafted an Equal Rights Provision for the constitution and went to the Bill of Rights committee and argued and tried to make sure that it contained everything I wanted.

Another example was in respect to revenue and taxation. One of the things that was going on in Montana at that time is that property, all property, was being taxed at its highest and best use.

And what was happening was you would see incredible tax pressure generated by the state for farmers and ranchers, to sell because based on the tax value, the highest and best use of their farm might be a subdivision. I wanted to make sure that there was nothing in the constitution that dictated that our tax policy would be based on highest and best use. That was real important to me and I think it's been real important to the state not to have highest and best use as the basis of taxation. I had others. So it was following up on that.

Then after the committees met each day and heard testimonies from all of these different people, and it wasn't just delegates would come and make presentations. Citizens would come and make discussions and offer comments and suggestions. Then the full Convention would convene each day to start reviewing and acting on recommendations that were coming out of the committee. So in the early days of the Convention the floor debates and time we were together was fairly small because we had to get our work done in committees to recommend things out for the full floor to consider. But shortly thereafter we were able to start acting on and debating the provisions of all of the articles themselves one by one. Toward the end of the session, the whole day was spent on the floor because the work of the committees was all done and we were just debating the provisions.

The environmental articles were other articles that were very important to me that I worked real hard on. So at night you were preparing for debate, doing your research, strategizing with other people. Particularly the environmental sections were sections that required...They were the most hard fought and they were the ones that required the most strategy. So at that point different groups would get together to figure out how to get things implemented.

DB: Could you talk a little bit about that sort of work? As you mentioned after-hours...Were things partisan? Who were you meeting with? How were you making decisions on issues?

MNE: I think that's such an excellent question. One of the things that I think has set our Constitutional Convention from the way the legislature normally acts or conducts its business is that even though we were elected on a partisan basis—people were able to file as Democrats or as Republicans or as Independents—people were elected with a party designation. But early in the Convention when we were organizing, it was decided that we were not going to organize along party lines. We didn't seat ourselves on a partisan basis. If you go to the legislature you see that the Democrats sit on one side, the Republicans sit on the other. We made a conscious decision up front to seat ourselves alphabetically. Aside from apparently one partisan caucus that was called at the early organizing stages, at which time we were electing officers, there were never any party caucuses called.

The parties did not take positions on any of the issues in front of the Convention, which I think is remarkable. But logical, too, in so many ways because the issues separating people at the Convention were not partisan issues. They really had more to do with urban and rural. It was sort of a way of life, a change in the demographics of the state, a shift from the farming and

ranching economy to a more urban sector. So those were the issues, not necessarily Republican or Democrat.

So the special interest groups, if you would say, and that has such a pejorative to it I hate to use that term. But the groups around which we did strategize in caucus were environmental. There was a group of us that felt so strongly about making sure that there was a right to a clean and healthful environment written into the constitution that we ended up having to get together and strategize, but it was an ad hoc getting together and strategizing about it. It was ad hoc in the sense that we'd had a full day of debate and we kept getting knocked down and we would need a motion for someone to reconsider so we could get it back on the floor the next day and try a little different tack. So it wasn't really this ongoing group who were meeting regularly to make sure an interest was represented or a position was represented. It was more on an ad hoc thing. As you would see what you wanted to go into the Convention was struggling or you weren't having the success you would sort of regroup and see if you could get somebody to join you.

The environmental issues were one where that really happened, for me. And I guess to some extent—I'm not totally aware of what else was going on for any other groups—but I don't think there was a lot of that. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that there were some meetings among some of the ranchers trying to think, how do we do this or that? There was sort of a younger persons group that met a little bit. Now in looking back I wonder what were we really meeting about. Maybe it was just an excuse to have a party or something. But there really were some issues, like wanting to make sure that the age of majority was eighteen, that whole issue about not being able to vote but being subject to the draft. Those kinds of things were of great issues. Being off at college but not being, you know...so, the right of adulthood at eighteen was something that the younger group really felt strongly about. Making it easier to register to vote, poll-booth voting, poll-booth registration, I should say. Making sure that the ages for running for the legislature were reduced. So we had a younger group that worked on that.

DB: How about continuing that kind of idea about your individual duties or activities into when you were in law school and you talked about the women's caucus. How did you research what women's issues were in law and how did you go about promoting those things or making a change in them.

MNE: You know, it's interesting. There were sort of two aspects of women's...Now that I think about it...I mean I haven't really thought about it totally until you phrased the question. In the women's law caucus here, and then in all the meetings that I attended—I went to one in Philadelphia and one in Los Angeles and I think one in Spokane—there were two tags or two focuses of issues that a women's law caucus dealt with. One of them had specifically to do with being a lawyer. How do you break down the discriminatory barriers of getting in law school? How do you break down discriminatory practices of getting hired by firms, promotions, that kind of thing? And then also practices within the law school. But mostly, what were the barriers or challenges to us as women in being lawyers? Another aspect was what were some of the real

problems unique to women in law that it may take someone like the Women's Law Caucus or the National Women's Coalition, NOW or someone, to really focus on?

But it was pretty clear what the issues were: no equality of pay, disparate treatment in all kinds of areas in addition to pay, promotion, glass ceilings, child care. Some of those continuing things were addressed at the International Women's Forum, including women's status in the military and the whole issue of no fault divorce. No fault divorce was a very, very big issue at that point. The whole notion of adequate alimony and compensation and child support and the lack or willingness of courts to enforce child support. Those kinds of things were so-called "women's issues."

Another one, which was very interesting to me: at every conference I went to there was a group that always showed up called Coyote. Things are just so cyclical because I see on some of the news programs, the news lawyer programs, a woman named Gloria Allred, who is a highly regarded civil rights lawyer who focuses largely on women's issues. She's a commentator and back when I was in law school she would come to some of these conferences and talk about some of these women's issues. One of the big ones was this Coyote, which was Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics or something like that. It was about prosecuting prostitutes. What a big inequity, in terms of having a law really target women, that the women practicing prostitution were the ones who were charged, never the client. So I don't know what has happened to that movement or the activity level of that very much at this point, but that was one of the things.

For me, some of my activism is continued in sort of smaller ways, and maybe a little less public ways since probably the eighties when I became a mother and things like that. To me, one of the best things I ever did, or that I'm most proud of, was getting organized in getting the city to name a park after Jeanette Rankin. The Rankin Park, right over there, was one of my brainstorms. I was influenced in a lot of ways by Jeanette Rankin coming to the Constitutional Convention and speaking to us when we were in session in 1972. I just thought we did that park in conjunction with Susan B. Anthony celebration one year.

Marge Brown gave the most amazing speech at that ceremony. I'm sure you've probably heard at this point in your research about Marjorie Brown. Her brother-in-law was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention with me, and of course, Marjorie. I consider her sort of the mother of our constitution because of all the background work she did through the League of Women Voters and position papers and so on. It was a shame that she wasn't able to be a delegate because she had more contributions to that document than any individual person that I can think of. Anyway, when I saw her sister and brother-in-law in Helena, I asked them to see if they could research her records and files and see if they had a copy of her speech that she gave dedicating the Jeanette Rankin Park because I would love to see it and it ought to be in some public records somewhere because it was stunning. I don't know if you've had an opportunity to even listen to a tape of any of her speeches but she had one of the most riveting voices and a method of delivery that was just exquisite. She delivered some other speeches in conjunction with the constitution that I hope can be tracked down and placed somewhere in the record

because they are beautifully written, beautifully thought out. She's a brilliant woman and able to analyze things and draw parallels because of her background in history that are just rich. I hope you have an opportunity to acquaint yourself with some of her work and writing in this project.

DB: I've heard that you are writing or have written about the nineteen women at the Constitutional Convention recently. You mention that you've been involved in activism in smaller ways since the seventies or since the eighties. What, reflecting back on this, do you think is still to be done or that you are still doing that you see in terms of an activist role?

MNE: I think that there are always sort of two kinds of action that a person can take. One of them is direct and one is indirect. For me, the indirect category is just being out there and being a part of the community and being involved in whatever you're doing. I think that you're furthering the role of women and the respect for women if you're just out there moving in the world in a positive way. I try to do that. To me that just sort of ripples down in terms of how I encourage my nieces and my little neighbor girl and always just trying to encourage people to do their best and make sure all the opportunities are there. Making sure Title 9, you know, little things, making sure that Title 9 doesn't go behind the screens or become weakened in any way. Voting for candidates who make sure education is a higher priority. All of those kinds of things, I think, foster the development of women, girls, throughout history in the same way that they do young men. It's just part of creating an egalitarian playing field, because I really do believe that education is the key.

Man, woman, child: education is the key. If we don't do anything else, if we create an educated populace, we will do our job for posterity. The more education we have the more all of these things become self-evident. The needs for all the things we talked about. It's only really, I think, through ignorance and fear and some of those feelings that cause people to want to discriminate, to want to hold other people back. Ignorance, fear, and scarcity, feeling that they don't have a chance. But there are some direct issues that I think need to continue to be worked on directly. I guess I'd put education in one of those too, but I still think that there are tremendous inequities in pay, in quality of life, issues for women and the children that they raise, and the vicious cycle.

And I have some family experiences that back that up for me, in terms of just access to health care. My mother died in 1971, right after I was elected to the Constitutional Convention. She had been diagnosed with cancer four years earlier. We had no access to health care. My mother was 52 when she died. She left a son of eight and a daughter of 11, plus six other kids, and she hadn't been to a doctor in eight years, since my brother was born and even then she just went to the doctor, had the kid, and went home. Didn't go the hospital. Just didn't have money. And going to a doctor was a luxury. We were self-employed. We had a little hamburger stand. No insurance. Half the kids in my family grew up, you know, rotten teeth. And I was just in Texas last week and that continues. There are still families that are caught in these webs of ignorance and poverty and it just repeats itself. So I think education is critical, and access to health care.

What happens is you have these people who just, you know...If you don't have money to go the dentist, your kids don't go to the dentist. You don't learn any of those things. So it's just this life of under-achievement and poor quality of life. It manifests itself in all kinds of ways, as you know: recidivism in prison, resorting to crime. I have one brother that I just visited who is serving two life sentences in Texas for a drug infraction. Part of it was that when he was fourteen, after my mother died, there was just no safety net and that still goes on a lot.

The gulf between, this increasing gulf, between the really rich and the bottom ten percent in this country, or maybe it's even bottom twenty, is huge. It's huge. So those are issues that I think we have to deal with. How to do it is a puzzle to me, it really is a puzzle to me. When I see what happened with Hilary Clinton on the attempts to alter the health care system. You know, I'm not a hopeless person but it makes me...I don't know, I don't know. I do certainly think that more women will bring about more changes in those areas because I really do believe that women see those things differently, put a higher priority on those things, and aren't willing to ignore it if they're in a position of power.

DB: That's all I have for you right now. Is there anything else you'd like to reflect on that I've left out or haven't given you a chance to talk about?

MNE: Let's see. We've covered a pretty wide gamut, haven't we, of things. You know, I guess in retrospect what I think is important is for people to realize, particularly this whole thing of this feminist project and what that means, and to some extent is that term in and of itself a polarizing term. Recently I went to something over at the art museum, and there's this wonderful woman, Leila Autio, who is a fabulous artist in her own rite. And her husband Rudy Autio is a highly regarded, nationally know ceramicist who was a professor here at the university and instrumental in the Bray Foundation and so on.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

MNE: She had a retrospective and she had a question and answer session and she made it clear that after she and Rudy got married when they were art students at MSU that she felt that he had more direction and more potential in his career at that point so she was going to make the decision that she'd be the primary caretaker for the four kids and support his career to the extent she could and that meant them moving a few times. But she always did some painting and so on. As I say, she had this wonderful show and she was quite happy, I think, with her life. There was a woman in the audience who kept saying, "Well, are you a feminist? Are you a feminist?" You know, it was like, "Why are you doing that?" I mean, I felt so uncomfortable. I mean, here is this woman who had apparently been, from all reports—from her own life's work, from her representations of her life—she had made these choices along the way that she was happy with. I mean, she clearly was a strong advocate of women. She was a strong advocate of herself and her art career. Why this woman felt the need to define her or make her define herself as a feminist just blew me away. Leila, much to her credit, just said, "I don't know. I don't even know what that means."

To me, what I think everything ought to be about is, one, recognizing the huge diversity among women, recognizing that we can all make huge contributions in our own way, that we don't all have to do it in the same way. I mean, I really respect and go to bat for the women who really were the bra burners, the people out on the edge. That wouldn't be my way, but I don't think their way is any less or more valuable than my way. I think we all have a way in which we contribute and there just needs to be more acceptance of...The goal needs to be making sure that women have equal access, equal choices, respect, and really equal access to the bounty of this country. I just think that sometimes the labels are frightening and harmful. In some ways when I look at the women most in need of what a women's movement had to offer are the women that are the most threatened by it. I think just the use of terms and so on just makes it harder to serve them and help them. So that's probably all I have.

DB: Great. Well, thank you for talking with me today.

[End of Interview]