Interview with Joyce Webb

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, August 25, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm delighted to be in Carbondale, Illinois, home of Southern Illinois University. I'm talking to Joyce Webb this afternoon. How are you Joyce?

Webb: I'm fine.

DePue: I'm talking to Joyce because of her experiences. I got to you because I knew that you were involved with the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA] fight.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: You were in Houston in 1977.

Webb: I certainly was.

DePue: I also found out that you've got a very compelling story about founding the Women's Center here in Carbondale as well. So there's a lot that we can talk to you about, not the least of which is a little bit of Southern Illinois University history, as well.

Webb: All right.

DePue: So, glad to be here.

Webb: My husband and I came to Carbondale in 1956.

DePue: Well, I'm going to back you way up here.

Webb: Oh, all right. All the way up. (laughs)

DePue: Yes. I usually get all of the background here, because I think that's important to understanding people. So, where were you born, and when were you born?

Webb: I am a native Seattleite, still proud of it. Wouldn't like to live there now, too much traffic, too expensive, but it was a wonderful city to grow up in. And that's where I met my husband, after I had grown up quite a bit.

DePue: Did you say when you were born?

Webb: April 18. That's the anniversary of Paul Revere's ride, of course, in 1927. So I'm a Calvin Coolidge child. (laughs)

DePue: And, unlike some presidential candidates, you probably know where Paul Revere took his ride.[1]

Webb: Yes, I know about it. (laughs)

DePue: That was not right, but what the heck. How did your family end up in Seattle at that time?

Webb: My mother was raised on a big Iowa farm. My father was from St. Charles, Missouri. They met in 1918 in Newport News, Virginia, where my mother was working in what was a service club for sailors. It was called work camp community services or something like that. My father was very musically talented and very handsome, and she met him on November 3, 1918. He made a great impression on everyone there. She married him on November 20, 1918, on her 28th birthday. (laughs)

DePue: Was he in the military at the time? That's at the tail end of the war.

Webb: He was counting coal sacks being loaded on ships going to Europe, yes, yes.

DePue: What was your mother's maiden name?

Webb: Martha Louise Moore.

DePue: And your father's name?

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[1] On the campaign trail in 2011, a syntactic ambiguity suggested to some that vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin had revised the story of Paul Revere's midnight ride, which her critics' used as an accusation of historical ignorance.

Webb: Edwin Forrest Campbell Cooper. Edwin Forrest was a famous tragedian, of whom his mother was deeply enamored when she was young. (laughs) That's how he got his name.

DePue: But in 1927 they were in Seattle. How did they end up there?

Webb: They married in 1918. They both decided they wanted to go west, following Horace Greeley's advice I presume. They went to Montana, Great Falls Montana, in 1919. In that first year, mother lost a child who died at birth. They went to Great Falls. They both worked there, he in newspaper advertising and mother probably in an office. She had been to business school. Neither of them had been to high school. They were like most people in their generation.

She didn't like the scenery, and she didn't like the weather. So they moved to Seattle. They always did what mother wanted to do. That was part of the relationship. In Seattle, after they'd been there a year or so, or two, they had a son, my older brother, in 1924. (phone rings) Excuse me.

DePue: We need to unhook that.

Webb: Let's just let it go. They can leave a message.

DePue: We'll just ignore that.

Webb: He was delivered at home, but by a doctor, which is kind of interesting. Then three years later, they had me. I was delivered at a Christian Science midwives home. My mother had wanted to join the Christian Science church, and they both did then. I was born the 18th of April of '27.

They moved over to the north end of Seattle, which is just north of the University of Washington. That's where I really grew up, turning right to go to high school and left to college. Isn't that exciting? (laughs) Walking, how I went away to school. We lost our home when I was five, in the Depression, that would be 1932.

DePue: Now in 1927, when you were born, what was your father doing for a living?

Webb: He was the assistant advertising manager for the major department store in Seattle, Frederick & Nelson, which was owned by Seattle people at the time.

DePue: Frederick & Ellston? What was the name?

Webb: Frederick & Nelson. He had started out in Seattle, working for the *Seattle Times* in their advertising department. That paper is still family owned, if you can believe it. That's unusual.

DePue: But I assume, after 1929, somewhere in there, he lost his position.

Webb: He lost it in '31. Marshall Fields came in and purchased the store. They brought their own people. They brought college educated people in and things like that, so he was out. And he really never had good, full-time employment for ten years after that.

But we lost the house, so we moved for a few years, out to what was then a very small logging town, fifteen miles north of Seattle, called Edmonds. It's now a huge exurb. But it was right on Puget Sound. We lived in a dumpy little house, but you could always go to the beach and stuff like that. It was okay with me.

DePue: I'm assuming he went there because he had some chance for employment, or was it cheaper to live?

Webb: Cheaper to live. They found a place they could get into. Both my parents then would do whatever they could to earn a little bit, when they could. We had a one acre lot. We had about a half acre garden and chickens. I found out that, animal lover that I am, it's very hard to love a chicken. They don't communicate well. (laughs)

DePue: Did they cooperate when you went to get eggs?

Webb: They were okay. Just, I wanted more. I wanted a relationship like you have with your cat, (laughs) and it wasn't possible with the chickens. My mother gave me one, a little golden chick, as a pet at one point, to try to change my viewpoint. After Goldie grew up, I said to mother, "Why don't we have her for dinner?" So we did. (laughs)

DePue: I assume there weren't cats or dogs around the house.

Webb: We always had a cat. I did get a puppy dog once, although my parents didn't really want me to. He didn't last very long. He was darling, but he ate my nightgown off the clothesline, which gave him severe stomach problems, and he died. But next door was Molly the cow. That's where we got our milk and butter. I mean right next door, at Mr. Cecil Bennett's house.

He was fascinating because he was the retired railroad man with a big, straight, wooden leg, the other one having been cut off by a train. He was very kind, and I would go over for the milking. Our cat would come; Bennett's cat would come out; the old cat from next door would come, and Mr. Bennett would squeeze milk to the kitties while he was milking Molly, who was a lovely Jersey cow. I always thought Jersey cows had beautiful brown eyes, like my dad. My father had beautiful brown eyes. But fathers cannot give their daughters brown eyes, I learned, very disgusting.

DePue: Well, you've got beautiful blue eyes.

Webb: They're not even blue; they're hazel, I'm informed. (laughs) That's what my ophthalmologist told me. So we lived there. Let's see—

DePue: Where did you go to school during that time?

Webb: Well, I had started school when I was four years old, at the school across the street from us. They let me in the kindergarten for two weeks, and I loved it. Then [they] moved me to the first grade—all day school at the age of four—just because I could read. It was in the John Dewey period.[2] That's a terrible thing to do to a child, but I was stuck with it the rest of my school years. I was always two years younger than my classmates.

So, when we went to Edmonds at five, I went into the second grade. I was there for second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth. Then we moved back into the city, into a huge old Victorian heap, rented for $25 a month, up north of the university, because it was more possible that they could get jobs that way. So when I was ten, that was 1937, dad would get a job. It would last a while, and then it wouldn't, and then another job and you know. Mother could always go in and fill in, in offices and would do that.

I started earning money early, first babysitting and then the job I hated most of any jobs I've ever had, cleaning someone's house on a Saturday. (laughs)

DePue: Did that money go back into the family coffers?

Webb: It was for me, if I wanted clothes or anything. I wasn't given money for clothes and things. There wasn't much money in the household, the same in high school and college. My parents didn't pay any of my college expenses. I lived there, but I was on my own. I was too young to go to college when I went anyway.

DePue: When you moved back into town, did the family still keep a big garden? Did you still have chickens?

Webb: We had a small garden. We always had cats. I'm glad to say that my mother seemed to think having a cat was essential. In those days, we'd have a cat who had kittens. One doesn't do that anymore. (laughs) I have a cat now, who's hiding probably, but he's not going to be the father of any kittens. And I have a dog who's not here, because he doesn't know how to behave with visitors. He's out for the day at the vet's. (DePue laughs) He's not going to have any puppies either. (both laugh)

[2] John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist, Georgist, and educational reformer whose ideas have been influential in education and social reform. Dewey is one of the primary figures associated with the philosophy of pragmatism and is considered one of the fathers of functional psychology

DePue: Well, you had mentioned early on that your mother became a Christian Scientist.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: Was religion then, a part of your life, growing up?

Webb: It was to my mother, **the** most important part of her life. I kept asking questions, the wrong questions. (laughs) When I was thirteen, I really asked the wrong question, and I got sent up to the Sunday school superintendent, who called my parents. So when I went home that time, I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't believe the way you do, and I'm not going to stay with this church."

DePue: Well, that is a more demanding religion, sect of Christianity, than some, I would say.

Webb: Yeah. Well, for one thing, there is no healthcare, absolutely none.

DePue: What brought your mother to it in the first place? Do you know?

Webb: Mother was the middle of eleven children, on an Iowa farm. She had good parents, had a good marriage. One older and one younger children died when they were young, so she ended up the middle of nine.

When she got old enough, she wanted to go into town and go to high school. Her father wouldn't let her, because there were still so many young children at home, and her mother needed the help. She never forgave him for this. That's when her seeking started, looking for something, I think. I talked to her mother a lot about this, because we lived near her in the years my husband was in graduate school.

At seventeen, finally, she was allowed to go from the farm in Scott County, Iowa, down to Cedar Rapids, which wasn't far away, because her two older sisters were in business school there. They hadn't gone to high school either. But she never forgave her father because the two younger girls were allowed to go to high school. So, she thought that was terrible.

She did get to go to business school, and she turned into a very efficient…At eighteen, she was up in Twin Cities, working in a big milling company. She liked that, and she liked the independence. She had told everyone she was never going to marry and never going to have children. Frankly, that would have been a good decision for her. It would have been an easier life for her.

But she was seeking all kinds of things; she went to all kinds of churches. I did that too, after I told the family I wasn't going to go to their church anymore. She got very interested in the health food movement, which was on all over the place, up in Minnesota and up in there, you know,

Kellogg's and Post and all that stuff. It just all tied together for her. It never occurred to her that her children didn't have to do the same thing, go look for what they thought was right for them. That never occurred to her, and she had a big problem with that.

DePue: What were the things that you had problems with Christian Scientists?

Webb: Well, I'll start out with one of their major tenets; there is no death. Well, you can't prove that by me. (laughs) I thought there was.

DePue: Is that because this world is not the real world?

Webb: It's not earth, yeah, or something like that. I never could quite understand it. I grew up sort of a stoic, because, if you hurt yourself, what mother would do would be get out science and health and start reading to you. The reason you hurt yourself is because you were thinking wrong thoughts. I thought that was nonsense, and I still think that's nonsense. I didn't break my ankle skiing because I had a wrong thought. I hit a tree when I hit an ice patch. (laughs) Broke my ski too; that just killed me; they're very expensive.

I just couldn't buy it. And the question I asked that got me in so much trouble is, so why do Christian Scientists wear glasses? We all did in my family. Oh, I didn't get an answer. I got people furious. That's what really made me…I didn't want to be anyplace where minds were closed. I still don't.

DePue: What was the family's reaction? What was your mother's reaction to this declaration?

Webb: Oh, she knew I'd end up like this. (laughs) She never, ever got over it. My father did as he was told, so he wouldn't be close to me at all either. But I knew that what I had to do was right for me, so I did it.

DePue: You say your mother never got over it, but you weren't kicked out of the house or anything like that, were you?

Webb: No, but I left at nineteen, rather than live there anymore. (laughs)

DePue: Was it just a very chilly relationship the two of you had?

Webb: Mother's experiences in life were somewhat limited. And she hadn't had a wide educational experience. For example, she was violently anti-Catholic, based on what, I don't know. The girl across the street was the only child of Catholic parents, and she [Mother] would tell me, "I don't want you to play with Betty." You know, like what's Betty going to do, pack me in a suitcase and take me to Rome or something? (laughs) We never discussed religion. I couldn't go along with that, so I would fake out on things. I couldn't date a Catholic boy.

DePue: This is age thirteen. I'm assuming you just refused to go to church with the family after that?

Webb: Yeah.

DePue: Did you reject Christianity or just Christian Science?

Webb: No, I went shopping.

DePue: At that time?

Webb: Um-hmm. I would visit around, not every Sunday, but I would visit around. There was a tiny Unitarian fellowship there, and I went there when I was in college, a number of times. I found them interesting. I am now a Unitarian, as I believe I told you. I went to the Protestant churches, but they were…You know, there's no ritual in a Christian Science church. There's no minister. They don't do weddings, funerals, anything like that. And there was so much ritual to me in the mainline Protestant churches that I found it off-putting.

I didn't go to a Catholic church. I really would have gotten kicked out of the house if I'd done that. But I did, when I was nineteen and working in Washington, D.C., just the year before we got married, with a friend who worked with me and who was Catholic. She was furious when we came out.

We had gone to the St. Patrick's in New York City, and she said, "You didn't do anything right." And I said, “Do what?” She said, “Getting up and down.” I said, "Margie, I'm not Catholic. I don't know when you're supposed to get up and down." (laughs) But I found that an interesting experience, because Jim Farley passed the plate. You know who Jim Farley was?

DePue: I think I'm supposed to. I don't recall.

Webb: Well, you're too young. Roosevelt's postmaster general and a major democratic figure at the time, yeah.

Also…That's the best church visit I remember, because also, as we came out and we walked down by Tiffany's and across the street, I said to my friend, "Look, it's the Tin Woodman."[3] Jack Haley and his wife were walking down the street. I went across, over Margie's objections, and they were delightful to me. We walked with them for several blocks. They were very nice people.

DePue: Let's get you back to Seattle and those years. You were now growing up, junior high and high school. Did you get to go to high school?

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[3] The Tin Woodman, better known as either the Tin Man, is a character in the fictional Land of Oz created by American author L. Frank Baum. In the 1939 MGM film version of the story, the Tin Man figure was played by actor Jack Haley.

Webb: Yeah. I went to junior high. It's no longer there. It was called John Marshall Junior High School. I could go there or to a little old grade school. I was ready for seventh grade when we moved back in. I looked at that grade school and thought, Oh no, that looks just like the one out in Edmonds. I'm not going there. So I walked quite a distance to the junior high, seven, eight, nine, and I was co-valedictorian of the ninth grade. I enjoyed it all right. I liked meeting people, and I'd been out of town for so long.

I walked my head off. We didn't have many books at home, and I'm a hopeless reader, all the time. I would walk a couple of miles to this school, a couple of miles over here to the public library that was closest to us, and a couple of miles home, toting all the books. (laughs) I got a lot of exercise; it was good. Then I went to Teddy Roosevelt High School. I was in a class with 750 people, if you can believe that. (laughs)

DePue: So, compared to living in a logging camp, this is a huge environment, I would think.

Webb: Well the logging town was about 1,500 people in two big…It's where they treated the logs. They brought those great rafts in, and they'd stick them in the mills and went to work on them. It's not like that any more; both the mills are gone there. Expensive shops and another ferry slip and things like that are there now. I was just out there in May. Where were we?

DePue: We were talking about going to school and high school at that time.

Webb: Okay, went into high school as a sophomore. I can't say that I enjoyed high school. When you're two years younger than your classmates, you're out of it.

DePue: Intellectually, it sounds like you were at their par, but were you socially?

Webb: Socially? Yeah, no, no. I hadn't had the chance to grow up enough. I decided to work for the school newspaper, and I enjoyed that. I also had a teacher I've never forgotten. He taught Latin and Greek, and I still use that Latin class, I swear. (laughs)

DePue: What was his name?

Webb: Walter…When I think of it I'll tell you.

DePue: Well, when we get to the transcript, you can get it down.

Webb: First name was Walter. Yeah, I'll think of it, but I'm slow at thinking of names. But he was taken away from us. I'd like to have done four years of Latin, because I learned that I was fascinated with words. I'm sort of an amateur etymologist. I always have to know…I wear out dictionaries like mad. I've got reference books coming out of reference books, and Howard got me my own OED [Oxford English Dictionary]. (laughs)

DePue: I saw that; that's impressive. Now, you said that you had jobs, and I know, later on in your life, volunteering is going to be important to you, as well.

Webb: Well, I also volunteered when I was young. The year we came back in, someone told mother that—

DePue: This was 1937?

Webb: Yeah. …that a Professor Floyd Schmid, on campus, ran documentary movies on Saturday for kids. So we went down, and it turns out you could volunteer and serve as someone to seat them. We met in a amphitheater, like a science amphitheater, and you could volunteer to be one of the ushers. I did, and he paid you. He paid you one candy bar, which was worth five cents, at the end.

I saw wonderful stuff, and that led me to go over to the museum on campus, which was old, had quite an interesting olfactory problem, because they had mummies there, like Inuit mummies.[4] (laughs) They're not there any more. But when I asked, "What is that funny smell?" they told me what it was. They have a new museum now, sans mummies.

I got the idea that you could do interesting things. I wanted to be an archeologist, so I went to the university. I went to that department, and they said, "Oh, we don't take girls. They just get married and have babies." So, I wasn't an archeology major, but I would have been happy there.

DePue: During this same time period, you moved back to Seattle in '37for the next few years. You've already said that you're a voracious reader, that you were ahead of a lot of your peers.

Webb: Always, all my life.

DePue: I'm curious, were you reading newspapers? Were you paying attention to what was going on in Europe?

Webb: Yes, yes. I get sixteen newspapers a week now, fourteen of which are…I get the local paper; I get the *Post-Dispatch*, which Howard and I started taking when we moved here in 1956, and I buy the Tuesday and Saturday *Times,* although I ought to quit fooling around and subscribe to it. The Tuesday [*New York*] *Times* has a superb science section in it.

DePue: Well the question is…You're still awfully young, but what were you thinking when you read about what was happening in Nazi Germany, in Europe in general, in Asia at the time?

Webb: Oh, it was hard to take it in. Of course, Seattle, it's the 13th Naval District headquarters. So the day that Pearl Harbor happened…It's something I've

[4] The Inuits were an indigenous people of northern Canada, as well as parts of Greenland and Alaska.

never forgotten and never will. That was my junior year in high school. We were very gung ho about the word, more, I guess you'd say. I don't know if you realize that, but in the war, we didn't get information until long after it occurred. There was no immediacy about news at all. You got news from the newspapers, and you got news from newsreels, because every time you went to the movies, they ran a newsreel, but none of it was up-to-date.

DePue: What was so memorable about Pearl Harbor? Can you flush that out for us?

Webb: Oh, I'll never forget that. Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. This was a funny old Victorian house we lived in. The bedrooms were upstairs. My parents had gone to church, and I had not. But I was awakened by sounds. It probably was about 10:00 in the morning. I thought, Something’s wrong; that plane is too close to the house. I went out on our big, high front porch—it was on a hill, like so much is in Seattle—and the sky was full of planes. It was full. Some of them are going this way, flying west; some of them are going east.

We lived several hills away from Sand Point Naval Air Station, which is on Lake Washington, that big lake on the east side of Seattle. I went then and turned on the radio and heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and that the planes were in the air because they couldn't leave them on the ground. These, of course, were propeller planes. They would land, refuel, and go up, land, refuel and go up. That went on probably about twenty-four hours. We went on Marshal Law immediately. We went on blackout immediately. And not long after that, they installed antiaircraft guns on the roof of my high school, since we were so close to the naval air station.

DePue: Did you have any Japanese living there in Seattle at the time?

Webb: Oh yes. We had kids in school, and when they'd send them off to concentration camp, we'd go down to the train, lots of us, and you know. It wasn't like California. There were areas in the state where it was kind of like California, where they wanted the people gone. But we didn't in the area where I lived. We thought it was horrible. They'd send them to those camps, then draft their sons into the Army. That was bad business, bad business.

DePue: How did it change your parents' lives?

Webb: Well, when they came home from the church that day, it was the first time I’ve seen them tear up. They weren't people who teared up about things. My brother was seventeen, so that would be enough to scare you. He was in the service for a while later on, but not for long. He didn't fit well. So they were upset about it, of course.

Everybody at school was talking. The boys were talking about joining up. People were trying to get them to quit and wait and finish the year. Most of them did. But in that huge class, we lost only one person. He was a nice

fellow. And Howard and his much smaller class, where he went to high school, they lost two of theirs.

DePue: Did you have any other relatives that were in the military?

Webb: I think all my boy cousins were, um-hmm, but no one was injured or killed. Of course, it wasn't like now. I can tune in to NPR now and the news, and they will give the names of people who died in these two wars we're involved in now. It wasn't like that then. You didn't know. You simply didn't know what was happening.

DePue: How would you describe the mood of the country during that time?

Webb: I thought gung ho described it well. Are you familiar with that term? Yeah, okay. People felt very committed about it and very worried about it. We weren't in World War II very long. It wasn't all that long. It was what, four years? And it had been going on since '39.

What was good was that there were jobs. That's when my father finally got a job that lasted for a while. He worked at one of the big shipyards—It wasn't a blue collar job, but it wasn't a white collar job either—and saved enough money so they could go into a small business after that.

DePue: Did your mother work during that time?

Webb: Oh, yes.

DePue: Was she doing clerical work?

Webb: She would have a job here and a job there, as a secretary. Somebody's secretary would go away, or they'd go to be with their husband, who was in the service or something. But she was always finding jobs like that.

DePue: Do you know what kinds of ships were being built where your father was working?

Webb: Oh gosh, no. Now that's funny. Not the kind my husband was on later, because he was on a baby flattop, and I think those were built down at Kaiser in California. That's interesting. I don't know what they were building. I do know they were working all the time. Also…you've been to Seattle, I presume?

DePue: No, I haven't.

Webb: Oh, all right. When you go there, everyone will tell you to go to the Pike Place Market, which is just up from the bay, Elliott Bay. All that area, the Bay Area, was closed off, and there were armed soldiers. You couldn't go past Third Street, down to Second and First. There was one corner you could go down,

because there was a small department store on Second that they let people go down to. But there were guards around. You couldn't go near the docks at all. The submarine pens were over, off of Magnolia Bluff, which was an upscale housing area. The people who lived there had to go through checkpoint to go to their houses and come out in the morning.

DePue: Some of the other things that define growing up and living during the Second World War, are things like rationing. Do you recall that?

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: Here you were, before that time, the family didn't have enough money. So if you were expected to have clothes or shoes or something like that, you went out and earned your own.

Webb: But she [Mother] was from a farming family. We had a half acre garden when we were out in Edmonds, and we had a smaller one there. But she was very good at making do. Yeah, all of a sudden you could get jobs. I wished I was older, because I was, theoretically, too young to get the jobs that I wanted to get. So I lied about my age. (laughs)

DePue: And got yourself a job?

Webb: Oh yeah, I got part-time jobs that way. I was still in school, yeah.

DePue: What were they?

Webb: Oh goodness, I worked in bookstores, a combination gift store and hardware store, didn't like the owner at all. I was the only one working there who wasn't one of his kids. I was in a rather disadvantageous position. (both laugh) Oh, all kinds of things. I worked at the downtown department store. I usually had a couple of part-time jobs going at the same time, to make ends meet. We didn't make very much in those days. I started at twenty-five cents an hour, and I went all the way up to forty.

DePue: Beside the relationship you had at home, was this a good time to be growing up in the United States, do you think?

Webb: Well, it was interesting. And because we were coming out of the Depression, yeah, maybe it was. I learned a lot of things by being a Depression kid. I think the most important thing I learned was, if I ever have to work to take care of myself, I can do it. I'll get a job; I'm not going to worry about it, because if you have to, you do it. (laughs) I've always clung to that.

DePue: Do you recall things like aluminum drives and rubber rationing, gas rationing, things like that?

Webb: Gas rationing, we had a C-sticker. That was the low one, so we couldn't use very much. Of course, I turned sixteen during that period, so I didn't get to drive very much. Food rationing, yes. We had a booklet for meat.

Mother never liked meat particularly well. The rest of us did, but Mother tried to win the whole war on macaroni and cheese. I can't eat it till this day. My dad would get mad at her, because she wouldn't use all the meat rations.

There was sugar rationing. Of course, those women all canned. They needed that sugar. Our next door neighbor, a matron of the Eastern Star and everything else, got herself arrested, because she had hoarded sugar in the attic. Of course, it turned rock hard, because Seattle's kind of a damp place. She got caught. (laughs)

Lots of things [were rationed]. It was hard to find woolen clothing, for example. It was hard to find shoes. Lots of things were rationed, and whenever we opened a can at home, we would remove the label, cut both ends out, put the ends inside the can, step on it, and those were recycled. I don't remember bottles being recycled. They did have some real rules about what they would take, but I'm not sure I remember all of them. I don't think I do.

DePue: You were in high school during the early years especially. You graduated in 1943?

Webb: Um-hmm.

DePue: Any extracurricular activities you got involved in, in high school?

Webb: Yeah. The paper. I was feature editor of the paper; that's extracurricular. And, as a senior, I was a member of what they call…What did they call that? The golden something. Well, I'll think of that. It was a group for people who'd been active, the women and the men who had been active in their class. You got to wear a special sweater.

By the way, on Tuesdays, we were what we called regulation. For the girls, that was a very dark navy blue pleated skirt, a midi blouse, a dark cardigan and sailor tie. It was wonderful for people like me, who didn't have much clothing.

DePue: Was this to kind of emphasize the connection with the military?

Webb: It had been going on for years in the Seattle schools. Seattle had a wonderful school system for years. I don't think they're quite where they used to be. I remember once, after I lived here, reading in either *Time* or *Newsweek*[5]. They

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[5]Both *Time* and *Newsweek* are U.S. weekly publications that provide news, analysis and opinion about international issues, technology, business, culture and politics.

had a list of what were then considered the ten best high schools in the country, and mine was one of them.

DePue: Wow.

Webb: Yeah. New Trier and mine were both on the list. (both laugh)

DePue: At that time, in the last couple of years before you graduated, what were you thinking you wanted to do with your life?

Webb: (signs) I didn't have a very high opinion of myself, and I couldn't imagine what I could do. When I got in college, I had a summer job that helped me to understand that I could do more than I thought. No, I don't know what I thought. I thought I would like to get married. Then I'd look at my parents and think, Well, I don't know. (laughs)

DePue: Was college something that you wanted to do?

Webb: It was always just assumed.

DePue: Your parents assumed that you'd be going to college?

Webb: Yes. But they never told me, until I was in my fifties, that they hadn't gone to high school.

DePue: Well, that's what I was just going to ask you.

Webb: I knew it, but they had not told me. Mother's mother had told me. Oh no, my father was cashiered out to Arizona territory when he was fifteen, because he wouldn't go to school. (laughs) And his older sister was married and living out in Globe, Arizona, a little mining town on the edge of the Apache reservation. He went there. From there, on his own, he went directly to New York City. He was a talented person, untrained but very talented. He ended up doing windows for big New York stores.

DePue: Doing windows, meaning—

Webb: Setting up the window displays. Then he was a natural born musician, had been from infancy. He couldn't read music, but he played the piano like everything. He had a wonderful singing voice.

DePue: Did the family have a piano in the house?

Webb: We always had a piano. No matter what, we had a piano.

DePue: Did the family gather round to do sing-alongs?

Webb: No, Dad and I did. Neither my mother or brother could carry a tune in a basket. (laughs) But he was very, very good. I think, if my father hadn't

married then [to] that woman—and really they were not well suited to each other—he probably would have ended up playing the piano in a bar, something like that.

DePue: But if they hadn't met, you and I wouldn't be sitting here talking.

Webb: We wouldn't be sitting here talking about it. So it's just as well they met. (laughs)

DePue: You've described quite a bit about both of your parents. Which one do you think had the stronger influence on you?

Webb: Influences can be positive and negative; is that correct?

DePue: Yeah.

Webb: Mother. My father was a go-along person. He was the kind of man…He had nice qualities about him, but if you sent him to the grocery store with a list, he came home, but it wasn't with the stuff on the list. It was with something that had caught his attention, because the package was attractive or something. (laughs) So we couldn't exactly count on him, and that intensified.

DePue: It caused strains in the marriage?

Webb: Well, there were always strains in the marriage. Actually, I think, the last ten years they were together were the best. Dad died in his ninetieth year, but by then he had completely knuckled under anything mother said. I knew I didn't want that kind of relationship, ever, with anybody.

DePue: Well you mentioned—

Webb: I'm not a good knuckler.

DePue: …that your mother was the strongest influence. She obviously had a strong personality, and obviously you expressed your personality early on. So, were there other—

Webb: They clashed.

DePue: Were there other straining points?

Webb: Other straining points. I had this one sibling. He never showed the slightest interest in me, at all. It's really kind of strange. He was an isolating kind of person. There's probably a name for what he was, but I don't know what it is. I finally asked him, when we were both in our sixties, I think, "Would you like to know anything about my family?" He looked at me, with his cold stare, and said, “No.” That was the extent of our relationship. Isn't that weird? I hear other people talking about intense family relationships. I didn't have that.

DePue: Were there any real blowouts between you and your mother?

Webb: Oh, not more than eight or ten times a week, (both laugh) but not terribly intense. I don't have much of a temper and neither did she. It was just more remarks made, things like that, why didn't I and, you know. But I knew that she wasn't ever going to listen, so I didn't waste a whole lot of time on it.

DePue: Well, let's get you back to a decision about whether or not you're going to go to college. You mentioned that your parents…You found out later—

Webb: I was **told** I was going to college.

DePue: You were told by your parents.

Webb: Yeah. It was just down the street, so.

DePue: Does that mean your father, now having a job, was in a position to help you?

Webb: Oh no, they made it clear they weren't going to help me, because they had a boy who needed help.

DePue: Did you have some resentments about your brother getting help in college, and you didn't?

Webb: Probably. (laughs) But it wasn't unexpected. I want you to know, the tuition at my university at that time was forty dollars a semester, plus you had to buy your books.

DePue: I take it room and board was provided at your parents' home?

Webb: Um-hmm. When I was nineteen, mother told me she wanted me to start paying rent. I left. (laughs)

DePue: But you started college at what age?

Webb: Sixteen.

DePue: So you were mostly through college by that time.

Webb: No. I didn't get the full three years in, because I got pneumonia at one point. I was really sick for a long time, at home. You know, no medical care. I missed virtually a whole year of school.

I worked two summers at a job I enjoyed. That was at the 13th Naval Station Hospital, just north of where we lived. They were dealing with all these fellows coming in. Do you know what the most common diagnosis was? Ulcers—we call it stress now (laughs)—duodenal ulcer. I learned a lot of interesting terms, because I had to use a Bartlett's Medical Dictionary all the

time, so I'd be sure I was spelling everything well. They loved the way I could spell, because I had Latin. Things would look familiar to me. (laughs)

DePue: The medical world is filled with Latin terms.

Webb: Oh, absolutely. I met a very interesting man there. He was a chief petty officer; he was not a line officer. He had put himself through law school, and he was one smart cookie. If I had a problem, I knew who to talk to. He would lead me through it, how to deal with this and how to deal with that. I enjoyed meeting him. I thought he was pretty impressive.

DePue: Was he a fellow student or a professor?

Webb: No, he was a CPO in the Navy. He was a long-term Navy man.

DePue: Were you just friends or—

Webb: I had been referred to him when I was trying to deal with…What I was dealing with—and others in my office were dealing with—was the discharge papers for these people, getting them ready for when they would be leaving the hospital. They could get very complicated. So I did have some questions. I wrote them down, and I was referred to him. After that, I knew who to go to. He gave me his extension number. (laughs) He was a good man.

DePue: Let's get you back to college, because, obviously, one of the first things you have to decide, once you get there, is what you want to major in, what you want to study.

Webb: Archeology. Okay, couldn't do that. So I thought, Well, they've got a famous journalism school.

DePue: Couldn't or—

Webb: Oh, they wouldn't take me, wouldn't let me…the department wouldn't. That was about par for the course in those days, Mark. It didn't help you to mention Margaret Mead. (laughs) They weren't interested. I decided I'd try journalism major. I was trying to avoid English, and I knew I didn't want education.

DePue: Avoid English. Why avoid English? You love the language.

Webb: Because that was what everybody expects you to do.

DePue: Everybody expected **women** to do.

Webb: Women to do, right. You had your choice, English or education or Home Ec [Economics]! (laughs) No, not my thing. I went for one semester in journalism, but it was so time consuming. It was a daily; plus we did a

monthly magazine. I had to work a couple of jobs just to keep going. I had to drop out of that and go into English, because I couldn't take the time.

I got acquainted with the Dean of Women—I can't remember why. Maybe I went in to see her about something—and she was very encouraging to me. She didn't mind if I was a little off the wall, (laughs) not the right age or anything like that. Everybody would say, "Are you going out for a house?" You know, a sorority. Well no, I'm not. Well, why aren't you? I would say, "Because I can't afford it. Who would pay for it? That's expensive." So I didn't, and I lived.

But then I got a job that I really liked, during the school year. That was at the university bookstore, which was a big, actually, three-story store on the main drag off campus, University Way. The top floor was used books. That's where you could come and rent or buy used books. I liked that; working with books was fine. That was better than any of the other jobs I had while I was in college, that and the one at the naval hospital. I liked that one.

DePue: This is a university in a Navy town, in the middle of World War II. How many male students were at the university?

Webb: The Navy V-5 guys, and the guys who couldn't get in.[6] There weren't a lot. The university had just built its first dormitory. It had never had dormitories before. People lived in rooming houses, if they were from out of town. The women never got into it until after the war, because the Navy took it over. We had NROTC [Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps], and we had V-5, I think it was.

DePue: V-5.

Webb: V-5 and V-12 were naval officer training programs on college campuses. Howard was a V-12. They could get some college in while they were in the training. Howard didn't finish high school. His father suggested it to him. He had a good father. His father suggested to him. He said—He was a graduate of the same college, and he knew this naval program was coming—He said to Howard, "Let's see if you can go up there a semester early and get some time in, so you know you can get in that particular program." The high school at first didn't want to do it. But he was a straight A student, so they did it. (laughs)

DePue: Well, you've mentioned Howard. You need to talk a little bit more about how the two of you met.

Webb: June 2, 1946, approximately 9:00 p.m. —

DePue: This was after the time you had recovered from pneumonia, I take it.

[6] The Navy's V-5 program provided flight training to high school students in a university setting.

Webb: Um-hmm. I was nineteen years and six weeks old that day. I was at the Junior Officers Club with a young ensign, who happened to be from the same college as Howard. We walked in, and Howard was sitting there at a table alone—a lot of people there—doing just what you'd expect Howard to do. He was reading a book. (laughs)

DePue: As a lifelong bookworm—

Webb: Oh yes, he was. So we sat down at that table. The fellow I was dating always was moving around, bouncing around, talking to people. So Howard and I started talking and found out we had a lot in common. I was taking a rather good Shakespeare course at the time. The other boy was leaving the next day. He was getting out of the Navy. Howard asked for my phone number, and I gave it to him. That was Sunday. Hoyt left Monday, and we went out Tuesday and Wednesday.

In the cab home from the Junior Officers Club, Wednesday, he said to me—He'd not kissed me or anything—He said to me, "When we're married, would it be all right with you if I went to graduate school?" I mean, rockets went off. (laughs) I said, "Yes, that would be all right. That would be fine." (both laugh) And that's how it began. We didn't get married for, well, let's see…Oh, by the way, he had his twenty-first birthday on the 23rd of that month.

He went back, and he was able to be back and graduate with his class at Denison, which was nice. He graduated in '47. I left school and went to Washington, D.C. to work, to get as far away from home as was geographically possible. That worked pretty well. (laughs) I was a long way from home.

That's kind of an interesting story, how I got there too. But in the ensuing, I think it was seventeen months, we wrote each other every day, if we weren't together. And we weren't together very much. Believe me, when we got married, we knew each other, through and through.

DePue: Via letters.

Webb: Via letters primarily, um-hmm.

DePue: You said you met him in 1946. He was an officer candidate at the time?

Webb: He was an ensign. He'd been commissioned at nineteen, sent to serve on what's called a baby flattop, which were freighters that had a flight deck added to them. They were part of the invasion fleet for Japan. They had been told by their Captain that these baby flattops wouldn't make it through the invasion. So he wasn't really sorry when the war was over. (laughs) You know, we were expecting a million casualties.

DePue: The baby flattops wouldn't have made it because of kamikaze attacks?

Webb: Yeah, yeah. They were getting the big ones even. The one thing he remembered most about being in the South Pacific was going ashore with the other junior officers one day on Guam. They had to walk across an airfield to get where they were going, and he saw, he said, the most beautiful man he ever saw in his life. It was Tyrone Power; he was a pilot. (laughs)

DePue: Oh, that's right.

Webb: And he **was** a good looker. (laughs)

DePue: You agreed?

Webb: Oh yes. He said, "I couldn't believe anybody could look like that." (laughs)

DePue: Well, the war, in the Pacific especially, ended very abruptly, with the dropping of the atomic bomb.

Webb: Yes, um-hmm. Well, two of them.

DePue: Two of them.

Webb: First—

DePue: Hiroshima.

Webb: One was Nagasaki, and the other was Hiroshima, yeah.

DePue: Hiroshima first and then Nagasaki, I think, two days later.

Webb: And just horrible damage. On the other hand, a million casualties.

DePue: What were you thinking at the time, when you heard about an atomic bomb, using that?

Webb: Well, we had no idea what an atomic bomb was. I would say it was a little while before people started to say, maybe that wasn't the right thing to do. It was quite a while. But it does come up; it still comes up.

DePue: What would be your view today?

Webb: I wouldn't have met Howard otherwise. Pretty hard for me to imagine a world without Howard. Isn't that strange?

DePue: Well, a million casualties and an awful lot of mothers and wives and sisters.

Webb: Oh, terrible. But there had been so much by that time…There had been so many casualties, so many places, and something had to stop. I had no idea what an atomic bomb was.

DePue: So 1946…You've talked about this a little bit, but I want to make sure I got this right. You met him in 1946. When did you graduate?

Webb: Oh, I never graduated from college. I left school.

DePue: But you went out to Washington, D.C. It sounds like you weren't yet married at the time.

Webb: No, we weren't married. I went there in August of 1946.

DePue: And you met him in what month?

Webb: I met him in June of '46, and I went to Washington in August, because I didn't want to live at home anymore.

DePue: But wasn't there reason enough to stay where Howard was, or did he move as well?

Webb: Oh, he went back to Ohio. He was from Ohio. He wasn't from Seattle. I'm sorry; I didn't tell you. He's from Dayton, Ohio. He'd gone back to Ohio and gone to Denison, which is in Granville, Ohio, up near Columbus, where his father had gone to school too.

DePue: Denison College?

Webb: Yes. It's now a university, but it was a college then. Yeah, he was Class of '47, and his dad was Class of '13. (laughs) We knew he had that year to finish, and Denison didn't admit married students. But, of course, they spent the whole year madly building housing for them, because they were coming. (laughs) And that was okay. He didn't want to marry me with a teen on the end of my age. (laughs)

DePue: Was he going to school on the GI Bill?[7]

Webb: Yes. He would have gone anyway, because he's from a family with some means. But yes, he was on the GI Bill then. And then he was able to go to graduate school on the GI Bill too.

DePue: Had you given some thought to moving to Ohio, at least to be close to him?

Webb: No. I knew his parents wouldn't like that. (laughs)

[7] The term GI Bill refers to any Department of Veterans Affairs education benefit, earned by members of Active Duty, Selected Reserve and National Guard Armed Forces and their families. The benefit is designed to help service members and eligible veterans cover the costs associated with getting an education or training.

DePue: Why Washington, D.C. then?

Webb: Well, I wanted to go to San Francisco. Mother said, "Blah, blah, blah." I said "Okay, I'm going to Washington, D.C." She had worked there when she was young. She said, "All right, you can go to Washington, D.C."

On the way, I had an interesting experience, because I visited with her relatives. I really didn't know my grandparents. When I left, I had just one grandparent still living, her mother. My mother was devoted to her mother, and I found that I was too. I really liked her, when I got acquainted with her. We lived near her when Howard was in graduate school, so it was wonderful. I wish she'd been my mother. I visited her.

I met Howard's family. His sister said to me—she escorted me, she was seventeen, upstairs to share her bedroom—"I hope you don't think my brother is going to marry you." (both laugh) I said, "Well, I was under that impression." (laughs)

DePue: They didn't know that he had already popped the question?

Webb: Yes, they knew. They didn't want it. They wanted one of the local girls. They lived in an expensive…Well, it's on the edge of Dayton, but it's called Oakwood. It's its own community and has schools with PhDs teaching high school and stuff like that.

DePue: What exactly did you do in Washington, D.C.?

Webb: I got off a train at 3:00 in the afternoon. Some people on the train had told me they thought Coast Guard headquarters was hiring. I think it was September. I had a suitcase and $75. It was Friday, no place to live, no job, nothing. So I asked them where Coast Guard headquarters was. They said it was on Pennsylvania Avenue, just past the old post office.

So I started walking, walked in, asked for a job, got it and went to work. (laughs) They told me where to go, where there was housing the government had built for wartime women workers, where the visitor's center at the cemetery was, you know, the National Cemetery.

DePue: Arlington.

Webb: Thank you…right across Memorial Bridge. I lived in one of these big old "barracky" places there. You had your own room. It was cheap. I made about $77 every two weeks. I didn't have three meals a day in the entire time I was there. But you don't need them when you're young. I saved up.

The National Theater was across Pennsylvania Avenue from where I worked. I would save up to go to plays there. I saw *Love for Love*, with a cast…every major British star, John Gielgud, Pamela Brown, everybody was

in it. I saw *Flower Drum Song* when…What is his name, the one who played the King of Siam?

DePue: Yul Brynner?

Webb: Yul Brynner was the male ingénue. I saw that. (laughs)

DePue: Did he have hair at the time?

Webb: No. Howard came to visit a couple of times, and we saw plays then. We both enjoyed plays.

DePue: It sounds like you wouldn't have been too far away from the Smithsonian [Institute] either.

Webb: I lived there every Saturday and Sunday. I was in love with it. My favorite was the Natural Sciences Museum. I was really hurt that they didn't have an American Indian museum, and I am now a charter member of the museum [the National Museum of the American Indian], which I haven't seen yet. I've got to get there and see it.

Oh, I loved the Natural History Museum; I really did. Actually, in later years, we took Megan [Webb's granddaughter], Amy's [Webb's daughter's] daughter, there, and Ian, her son. I learned to like [National] Air and Space too. I didn't think I would, but I did.

DePue: I'm sure that wasn't there at the time.

Webb: Oh no, that was new. And I thought they'd never get the Indian museum, but they did. I'm so glad. It's a pity they didn't have it many years ago.

DePue: Well, when did the wedding occur and where?

Webb: The wedding occurred in Seattle on November 20th—my mother's birthday and wedding day—because Howard could get away from the one-year job he had after he graduated from Denison.

DePue: This is 1947?

Webb: Forty-seven, yeah, yeah. It was extremely small.

DePue: Why Seattle? Why not in Ohio?

Webb: I didn't want to get married in Ohio. Howard's mother was very hostile towards this. So I decided to go home to get married, at which point, when I got home, my mother said, "Well, why didn't you have it in Ohio, so they could pay for it?" Thanks, Martha. (laughs) You just do what you have to do.

Howard had gotten a job when he graduated. I'd gone to his graduation, and I was given a ring. (laughs) That was fun. Going back to Washington, Washington was full of women and not enough datable men.

DePue: Washington, D.C.

Webb: D.C. I kept saying that I was engaged. "Oh no, you're not." But when I came in with a diamond ring on, quite a nice one, it made my point.

DePue: Well, that's interesting, because I'm sure the Seattle, Washington you grew up in was a great place for a nice young lady to be living at the time.

Webb: Oh yeah.

DePue: No shortage of eligible men.

Webb: Oh no. Washington D.C. was just…But I wasn't interested in other men, so it was fine for me. (both laugh) I was having a good time.

DePue: Did Howard's parents come to the wedding?

Webb: Yes. They didn't tell us they were coming until two days before the wedding, but they did come. I was perfectly aware that they didn't think he'd married well. But you know what? He did, and it lasted. (both laugh)

DePue: The two sets of parents had a chance to meet? I'm just wondering how that worked out.

Webb: Oh, well it was…tense. Then we flew to Chicago for our honeymoon, paid for by his father, and stayed at the Palmer House. We repeated that many a time over.

DePue: Right there on Lake Michigan.

Webb: Oh, it was fun. We had fun. We had a couple of interesting experiences there. We went to a play, it was Lunt and Fontanne.[8]

DePue: Oh.

Webb: Yes. Harold always believed in going first class for these things. Another night, there was a movie we wanted to see. So we went. I'd never been to a big city movie theater as big as the one we went to in Chicago. They had a stage show, and these two comedians came on. They were to be on for twenty minutes or something like that. They just slayed the whole place. They were on for over an hour. Nobody had ever heard of them. Their names were

[8] Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, an American husband-and-wife acting team who performed together in more than two dozen theatrical productions, are widely considered the greatest acting team in the history of American theatre.

Martin and Lewis.[9] (laughs) They were hysterical, and the crowd wouldn't let them leave. It was something.

DePue: Where to after the honeymoon?

Webb: Dayton, where we lived for a year, and to my great surprise, I got pregnant in about a month after the wedding. Our son was born there on September 15, 1948.

DePue: Your great surprise…That was a little bit earlier than your schedule?

Webb: Well, fortunately, it was legal. (laughs)

DePue: I mean, you weren't planning to get pregnant that soon.

Webb: We were both so dumb, we hadn't thought about it. (both laugh), and, you know, they didn't have good birth control in those days. So we got Howie. When he was born—It was a hard birth; I had some recovery to do—let's see, Howard had to leave when he [Howie] was three days old; he had to leave to go to Iowa for grad school.

DePue: Is this Howard junior then?

Webb: My husband is Howard junior. There were three of them. My son was Howard William Webb III. So I had to stay there, oh dear, with the family, with the baby. It wasn't an easy experience. His mother was a very difficult person. I liked his father, but his mother was very difficult.

At one point, the woman across the street came over. She was a doctor's wife, big bosomy, outgoing woman, and she said, "I want to speak to you privately." I thought, Oh my lord. I didn't know anything about having babies and taking care of them. She said, "I think we've all been terrible to you. So I'm just going to tell you, I think you're doing fine. Don't pay any attention to what anybody around here says to you." (both laugh) Isn't that nice? It really helped me. So I got to go out to Iowa around the 1st of November.

DePue: What year was this?

Webb: Forty-eight.

DePue: So you had spent about a year there.

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[9] Martin and Lewis were an American comedy duo, singer Dean Martin and comedian Jerry Lewis. They met in 1945 and debuted at Atlantic City's 500 Club on July 25, 1946; the team lasted ten years to the day. They performed in nightclubs, and starting in 1949, on radio. Later they branched out into television and films. In their early radio days they performed as *Martin and Lewis* but later became hugely popular as *Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis*. These full names helped them launch successful solo careers after parting.

Webb: We spent about a year in Dayton, yeah. He got a job. He needed a job for a year, and he hadn't had any job experience like that, except his Navy experience. He got a job at National Cash Register, then the biggest employer in Dayton, a company famous for its altruism and everything. He enjoyed the job.

The fellow he worked with, they became very good friends. Bill, whose last name I forget, and his wife, were very active in the Yellow Springs Little Theater group at Antioch. We went to all the plays up there. John Lithgow, his father, was the one who directed. Lithgow's father was the director of the plays there. That was a good experience.

DePue: What took Howard to Iowa City? You said grad school.

Webb: He had applied at Harvard and Iowa, and he was accepted both places. But there wasn't any kind of student housing or housing we could afford at Harvard. He decided to go to Iowa, in part because they were just starting a new PhD in American studies.

He thought he was interested, but he started out in English. He came home at the end of the first semester and said to me, "I can't stand this." He said, "I'm not in the right program." So I said, “What are we going to do?” I said, “Why don't you shift into the other program?” He did, and that's where he belonged, and that's where he stayed.

DePue: Now I know that he kept his passion for English, but what was different about the American—

Webb: Well, it was American literature. That was his real passion, not English. It was a tripartite program: American history, literature and art. He enjoyed all of it very much. Howard was one of those people you just want to kick. You'd say, “Who was vice president under so and so?” And he knew. (laughs) And he knew when the term was. He was handy; he was my online.

DePue: Did you enjoy living in Iowa City?

Webb: Loved it. Up in Stadium Park, there was a sixteen-foot, jerry-built chicken wire fence out in front of the little lane, in front of our half barracks we were in, because there was a golf course there. Those Iowa golfers were very good at hitting balls over a sixteen-foot fence that was supposed to protect us and our kids.

But no, I liked it. We met a lot of interesting people. Our closest friends, we kept for a long time. All the men are dead now, and all three wives are still living. Met those in school. We were the only ones with a child. I had a child when we went there, and I had two when we left. Howie's sister was born at the university hospital [University of Iowa Hospitals] there, the same

hospital my maternal grandfather had died in many years earlier, because they lived in Cedar Rapids.

DePue: And your daughter's name?

Webb: Amy.

DePue: That's Amy, okay.

Webb: Yeah. I have another daughter, Sarah.

DePue: While he was there, he had been in the Navy before. I assume you were in Iowa City when the Korean War kicked up.

Webb: Yes, and he was called back. I don't know if you know this, but they couldn't get out of the Navy. They were in the Reserve as long as the Navy wanted them to be in the Reserve. We got a twenty-four hour notice for him to report, and so did Earl Beard, who was a friend, getting a doctorate in history. He lived a couple of barracks down from us. Earl was told to report to Scott Field. He had a wife and child there. He left.

But Howard's father called and said, “Don't go.” He said, “I'm in touch with Senator [Robert A.] Taft's office.[10] There is a bill, passed by the House, and on the Floor of the Senate now, that if you are within one year of completing your doctorate degree, you don't have to go.” Both Howard and Earl were. So we waited. In about an hour, the call came. The bill had passed.

So then, we went down to Earl's wife and said, “We've got to get Earl back.” And we did. We called Scott Field, and we gave them the license number of his car and everything. He finally got on the phone, and we say, “Come on back. You don't have to go.” (laughs)

DePue: I suspect you were more than a little bit relieved.

Webb: Oh. Then this woman who ran housing, married student housing at Iowa, who wasn't a very pleasant person, had announced that anyone who went back, their families had to move out within twenty-four hours. Well, where are you going to go within twenty-four hours? (laughs) Anyway, that got stopped by the president of the university. But we got through that one.

DePue: What was his dissertation topic?

[10] Robert A. Taft was an American conservative politician, lawyer, and scion of the Taft family, eldest son of former president William Howard Taft. A member of the Republican Party, he represented Ohio in the United States Senate and briefly served as Senate majority leader.

Webb: Ring Lardner[11]. Boy, Howard tarred down that thing too.

DePue: How long were you folks at Iowa City?

Webb: We were there a total of five years.

DePue: So, masters and all the way through the PhD.

Webb: Yeah. The first semester didn't really count, because he changed programs. We had enough GI Bill to cover four full years. So did our friend, Earl Beard, whom I just mentioned. Then he and Earl tried for…Well, it was a research fellowship that paid the same as GI Bill. They gave two every year, and he and Earl got them. So we were able to finish. We had assumed we'd be able to stay and finish somehow, but we were very lucky; we were very lucky.

DePue: Were you working during any of these five years?

Webb: I typed dissertations and theses.

DePue: For pay?

Webb: Oh yes, twenty-five cents a page, three copies, carbons, no mistakes. That was hard work.

DePue: I would assume that sometimes you're typing from somebody's handwriting?

Webb: I typed one in French and one in Spanish, and I don't do either one. (laughs)

DePue: I would also guess that you have to keep a dictionary and thesaurus pretty close to hand?

Webb: Oh yeah, but we live with reference books, both of us. I found, in looking at the foreign languages, these had some English in them too, but they were mostly not. The woman who did the Spanish one lived next door, in the barracks next door to us. She brought me a Spanish typewriter, so the tilde and everything were on them. I got used to that, and that was good. The one in French was harder for me, but I soon learned.

I thought about, How do you read? Well, you're just looking at something; you're seeing it. So that's what I did. I stopped trying to understand what I was looking at when I was typing in French or Spanish, although I could get some of the Spanish sometimes. (laughs) I just looked at it for what it was, some letters. I'd found that I could move at a really good rate of speed that way. But I couldn't think about it. (both laugh)

DePue: Were you involved in any volunteer activities?

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[11]Ringgold "Ring" Wilmer Lardner (March 5, 1885 – September 25, 1933) was an American sports columnist and short story writer best known for his satirical writings about sports, marriage and the theatre.

Webb: Yes. Let's see, when Howie was four, a bunch of us started the University of Iowa Cooperative Playschool on campus. They would give us room but nothing else. So, we managed to get someone who would come and be the teacher and everything. It was kind of fun. In fact, I was co-chair with the wife of the fellow who discovered black holes, at one point. He was going far; it was obvious. (laughs) That was an interesting experience.

DePue: I'm trying to remember who that is, Van Meter?

Webb: That's not the right name. I know his name, but I can't think of it either.

DePue: It was Van Allen.[12]

Webb: I met a lot of interesting people there, the chairman of Howard's program in the department, which…Of course, the American Studies program was in the English Department. His wife was very active in the League of Women Voters. She started a group up in our housing area. I'll never forget something she said at the first meeting. She said, "Now you understand, you're so young you may not believe this." (laughs) "You understand, you may call me Jean at these meetings but not anywhere else." You know, it was Mrs. so and so; Kern as a matter of fact. But she was a nice woman.

I got interested in the league in that way. I was a league member. When we left there, we went to a community where there was no league, so I just joined as a member at large. I kept that up until I came here, where there was a league.

DePue: And the charter, the purpose of the League of Women Voters, at that time?

Webb: Well, essentially to study what needs to be done and then to try and pass that information on to your elected representatives.

DePue: For policy issues?

Webb: Anything. They would decide on what to work on, local, state, federal.

DePue: So it had a political—

Webb: Yeah. It was political but it wasn't partisan political, although it usually ended up that way in individual leagues. This county had a league in '26.

DePue: When you say this county, you mean?

Webb: Jackson County.

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[12] James Van Allen was a well know nuclear physicist and space scientist who taught at the University of Iowa. He is best known for the discovery of the Van Allen radiation belts which surround the earth.

DePue: In Carbondale.

Webb: That's very early.

DePue: What were the leanings of the Iowa City League of Women Voters, at the time?

Webb: Liberal. And I already knew I was one, (laughs) if I wanted to stay married.

DePue: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions then, because religion has been an important part of your life up to this point. You said you were seeking for a while. Where were you and Howard at, religiously, at this time?

Webb: Howard had been raised in a northern Baptist family. His father was always very devout. His mother wasn't, particularly. He [Howard] decided he did not wish to belong to a religion, and he never did again. But he didn't object when we came here. I said that I wanted the children to understand about religions and to be free to make their own choices when they grew up. So, I started them in the Unitarian group when we came here.

DePue: Again, that would be in Carbondale.

Webb: That would be in Carbondale.

DePue: So in Iowa City, you weren't going to any kind of religious services at all?

Webb: No, we weren't. I was usually working for him on the weekends. (laughs)

DePue: But also, it sounds like you both had figured out where you were politically in your lives.

Webb: Yeah, yeah we had, pretty much so. I knew that Howard was perfectly…Well, Howard and I were both feminists. This is defining feminist the way I define feminist, which is the dictionary definition, just someone who believes in equal legal rights for men and women. He was fine in that area. I'm glad of that.

DePue: Already by the mid-'50s.

Webb: From the beginning. He never treated women as though they weren't capable of being his equals. (laughs)

DePue: But would also describe himself as liberal, politically?

Webb: Oh yeah, very much so.

DePue: And voting Democrat?

Webb: Yes, and the first election was kind of interesting.

DePue: The first election.

Webb: Harry Truman.

DePue: You're talking about 1948?

Webb: Forty-eight, yeah. I had lived in Ohio for eleven months. I was going to have lived there for eleven months when that came up. You had to live in Ohio for a year to vote.

There was a cocktail party one night, and a friend of my father- in-law was there. He was a Democrat—the only Democrat they knew—and a judge. I went up and said, “Frank, can I ask you a question?” He said yes, and I said, "I'm going to miss my first presidential vote, because I've only lived in Ohio for eleven months." He said, "Come down to my office, and we'll make it a year." And he did. He registered me to vote, bless his heart. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, the statute of limitations might be expired on that one by now.

Webb: By now, and I think he's dead. I'm pretty sure. (laughs) That was neat.

DePue: What did Howard want to do, once he got this degree in this unique new field of American Studies?

Webb: Teach. And let me tell you, there weren't any TAs [teacher’s assistants, usually graduate students] in those days. He had never taught a class in his life. After much difficulty, he did get a job. Jobs were very few and far between for those first PhDs after the war.

DePue: In that particular field or in general?

Webb: All fields, all fields. The expansion of the colleges hadn't gone on yet. It was just starting. I wrote 100…I typed 100 letters to 100 different schools. It couldn't be copies, you know? We didn't have Xeroxes in those days. We sent them all out and he got two answers. One was from Denison. By this time, I had a second child—Let me see—eight weeks before he was to graduate.

They offered us $3,100 a year to come to Granville. Howard said on the phone to the chairman—whom he’d known for years—he said, “We can't live on that. I've got two children.” He [the chairman] said, “Well your family money will take care of that.” Well, we didn't have family money. We didn't ask the family for any money, and we didn't expect any. (laughs) And he said, “I can't do that.”

The other call was from Ada, Oklahoma. I've never forgotten that one. It was the president of whatever school is in Ada, Oklahoma. This was in 1953. He said he wished to talk to Howard about something. He said, “Under religion, you put none.” And he said, “That can't be. You can't have no

religion." (laughs) He [Howard] was on the phone for an hour with this fellow. He said, "No, I don't belong to an organized religion, and I don't plan to belong to it." The man was horrified. I'm sure he thought we were evil people.

I thought it was the end of the conversation. [What] I was hearing was interesting, because Howard never got upset. He never got angry or anything. He just explained that, no, that was the way it was. And I didn't want to live in Ada, Oklahoma anyway.

Then, Alex Kern, who was chairman, heard about a job in Missouri. We looked into it, and that was Howard's first job. It was at what is now called Central Missouri State University, but it wasn't called that then. It was a college.

DePue: It was what?

Webb: A college.

DePue: Oh, Central Missouri State College.

Webb: Everybody's gone to university now. He started teaching on a Friday. He came home, and he said, "I can't do this," he said, "for a whole hour at a time." (laughs) He went back Monday, and came home and said, "I'm going to be happy doing this the rest of my life." And he was.

DePue: What caused that turnaround for him?

Webb: He made himself think about it over the weekend. We talked about it a lot, and I pointed out to him that he knew everything he needed to know. He just had to decide how to present it, and he did. He spent a lot of time preparing for classes during his entire career. And he was good at it. So, we were there three years. It was a very small town, (laughs) fifty miles from Kansas City. That was our big city nearby.

DePue: This is Warrensburg?

Webb: Warrensburg, um-hmm. And when we had to have a city fix, we'd go into town once in a while. (laughs) It was pre-air conditioning too. Our first summer there, we had a week when it never went below 100 degrees, day or night, and the last day it went to a 116. We had no air conditioning. I just had to keep the kids in the bathtub and keep pouring water over them. It was awful.

DePue: What were the subjects that Howard especially liked to teach, that he was especially good at?

Webb: The first few years, of course, it was a lot of comp [composition]. He liked that all right. He got interested in the language he was hearing, because [there were] a lot of rural kids there. They were from—a lot of them—down in the Ozark areas of Missouri.

I wish we'd kept this list. We kept a list of different spellings of Jesus, after they'd been asked to write about the most important experience in their life, which tended to be when they found Jesus. But they couldn't spell his name. We had quite a list. I think we had something like twenty variant spellings of Jesus and quite a few of variant spellings of others things, as well. It was interesting.

He knew that he wanted to go on, that he would prefer having an opportunity to teach at the graduate level, which is where he ended up doing his best work.

So, in three years, we heard about coming here. This place was just exploding. Morris was…he was going to make it what he wanted it to be. And he did do that.

DePue: Morris?

Webb: Um-hmm, Delyte Morris, who was president of the university. He had become president, I think, in 1947. We came here in 1956.

DePue: When was Southern Illinois University founded?

Webb: Eighteen sixty-nine? I'm going online.

DePue: That's okay; we've got you wired up.

Webb: Oh, all right; I forgot.

DePue: So, it had been around for a long time, but it started as a teachers—

Webb: As a teachers…two-year teachers college. There are still people around here who call it "The Big Normal." (laughs)

DePue: The Big Normal, after Normal, Illinois, where—

Webb: No, a normal school is what they called teachers colleges. Of course, it was on the IC, the main line.

DePue: The Illinois Central Railroad.

Webb: Actually, Carbondale was started because it was a division point on the Illinois Central. It was founded in 1852.

DePue: So, that was you're pipeline, from all the way up to Chicago?

Webb: And from the Deep South. From the beginning, we had African American students coming in at a higher level than many places. And that's still the case.

DePue: So in the family, there's—

Webb: There are now four of us.

DePue: Tell me about Carbondale, when you first got here.

Webb: Oh (laughs) A) I didn't know Illinois came down this far. (laughs) When he said he was 100 miles south of St. Louis, I said—I was on the phone—"Howard you can't be. I don't think Illinois goes that far." (laughs) But it does.

DePue: And quite a bit farther south than that.

Webb: Quite a bit farther than that. When we first came to look for housing—which was interesting—there was one house for rent. We rented it. I refused to live in student housing again. I'd been in that for too long. Well, it looked kind of dim. We were terribly shocked to find that schools were segregated. I said, "This is Lincoln's state; this is Illinois. How can the schools be segregated?" But they were. It was just a little old town, but the campus was interesting, and that's where our interests lay.

DePue: The campus is on the southern part of the town, at that time?

Webb: The southern part of the town, and most of the buildings that are here now weren't here. But it was pretty obvious that people were excited about it. We were meeting people who'd also come recently, in recent years. So I said to him, being big about it, "Well, I'll stay three years." (laughs) And that was fifty-two years ago.

DePue: Was it new at being a university at that time?

Webb: Well, at the level, yes, at the level that it was. What had happened some years before was that Morris started bringing in people with real PhDs and MDs and things like that. He wanted a classy faculty, and he went for it. He had the money to go for it, and he had the connections in Springfield to go for it. It was fun; it was fun. The place really boomed. Howard's first office was a desk on the third floor of Old Main. He didn't like the steps very much, but other than that—

DePue: Old Main being one of the first early, imposing structures on the campus?

Webb: It was the replacement for the original campus building, which had also burned. Of course, the second Old Main burned in—

DePue: Well, we'll get to that in a little bit.

Webb: Yes, yes. But it wasn't the original building. There were a handful…There was Old Main; Shryock Auditorium was there.

DePue: Shrack Auditorium?

Webb: Shryock, S-h-r-y-o-c-k. Almost everybody mispronounces it. I discovered, maybe two years ago, that one of my uncles, one of mother's brother's wife's maiden name was Shryock. Now that's an unusual name, so there had to have been a connection somewhere.

Let's see, Old Main, Anthony Hall—There was nothing like a student center or anything like that—Shryock, which is the auditorium building, what's called the Old Baptist Building, because the Baptists were in there, on campus in a state university. We thought that was a little unusual. Next door to it was a white frame house where Dr. and Mrs. Morris lived, and then a bunch of wartime things, not Quonsets—[13]

DePue: Framed housings?

Webb: Yeah, where some overflow stuff was. Anthony Hall and two other brick buildings on the east side of the campus were there. That's about it.

DePue: Did Southern have an ROTC program, dating back to the Second World War era?

Webb: I think so.

DePue: I know, later, they had both Army and Air Force ROTC.

Webb: Yeah. We have ROTC now. I worked at the college bookstore Monday and Wednesday, because emeritus members do that to take care of book bags, when they're buying books. There were some uniforms. They didn't look like regular ROTC uniforms to me. They looked like NROTC, but I'm not aware that we have that. I'm not sure. I think we had ROTC when we came here.

DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question, but what was the geography of the town at the time? You mentioned that it was segregated schools.

Webb: Absolutely segregated.

DePue: Was there a large African American population?

Webb: It was in four quarters. Yes. Well, about 11, 12 percent probably. It's probably about the same now. It was sort of divided by Main Street, which is Highway 13, and Illinois Avenue, which is North/South Highway 51. In the northeast

[13] A Quonset hut is a lightweight, prefabricated structure of corrugated galvanized steel having a semicircular cross-section.

quadrant, it was primarily black families; in the southeast quadrant, working class families; southwest, a lot of academic families. Northwest was starting to get a mix. We were one of the first faculty families to buy a house there, because it was cheaper than here. (laughs)

DePue: Was it very much a town that was defined by the university?

Webb: Yeah. There wasn't much else here…and the railroad. The railroad was still big then. It was the university and the railroad, I would say.

DePue: Was it expected that the blacks would stay in their part of town?

Webb: Yeah, well pretty much. Some of the towns around us had sunset laws. I know Carterville did. But we didn't.

DePue: Sunset laws, meaning that blacks were expected to be—

Webb: They have to leave town before the sun sets.

DePue: Oh, leave town.

Webb: They can come and work in the houses, but they have to get out. Isn't that ridiculous?

DePue: How would you describe the politics of Carbondale when you first got here?

Webb: Oh, good gravy. Ridiculous. (laughs) Just a few good old boys, helping their friends out. That was about it. And bad planning, nothing much had happened in years. I believe I mentioned, at one point, to you that there was no zoning. In fact, people were horrified at the idea of zoning. It's their land, right? No zoning, there were no crossing gates or lights on the railroad, and there were two…three crossings that were important. People would get knocked off there every once in a while.

DePue: Knocked off?

Webb: Killed. The one police station and fire station were on the east side of the tracks. The major part of the population and the university were on the west side of the tracks. So, if a long freight was going through, you had a distinct disadvantage.

DePue: Was it a Republican or Democratic town?

Webb: I think it was Republican. I'm not sure. I'm not sure in a party sense what it was then; I was so busy trying to get things changed. (laughs) It was what it was. It was way behind the times, is what it was. And this influx of new people at the university was very unsettling, I think, to a lot of people. Here

are all these people who think they're so smart, you know, that are coming in here.

DePue: You're talking about the university crowd.

Webb: I'm talking about the university crowd, right. We bought a house the second year we were here, up in the northwest quarter of the town. There weren't any other faculty around. It was a little tiny house. We had to have bookshelves, so one whole end of the living room, we put bookshelves on. Boy, I heard about that from the neighbors. "Did you know they ruined that house? You just wouldn't believe what they've done in the living room." (laughs)

DePue: Did you block windows or something?

Webb: No. It was just a blank wall, full of books. But, live and learn. We got to be friendly with a lot of the neighbors. Our next door neighbor on one side was a retired miner. He and his wife married at sixteen. I never got to talk to her, because she was stone deaf, and she couldn't hear anything you said. But he was always so gentlemanly.

The day we moved, when we built a new home, he put on his button-up shirt and came over and knocked on the front door and said, "Ms. Webb, I want you to know, your chillun [speaking in Southern US vernacular] are the only chillum that never ran through our yard." I wouldn't let my kids run through people's yards. (laughs) It was so nice. He and his wife lived long enough to celebrate their seventy-fifth wedding anniversary.

DePue: You said that with a bit of an accent, in terms of how he pronounced children.

Webb: Oh, a bit of an accent, oh yes. He was a countryman. This area was settled from Kentucky and Tennessee, essentially, because Kentucky and Tennessee were in the United States, and this was the Northwest Territory.

DePue: And that lingered on in the politics to a certain extent. Parts of Southern Illinois were kind of like southern Democrats in their political views.

Webb: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure that's true. It was a different world. But we were tied up in the university community, and we were really enjoying it. So, here we are.

DePue: Did the university community then start to influence the politics of the town later on?

Webb: Well, we put in a different form of government. But it wasn't all university people who did that. We got local businessmen involved too, which you have to do, if you're trying to change something in a town. We went for a city manager government, and we managed to get that done.

DePue: When was that?

Webb: Oh, my gosh. Claire is out of town; she could give me all these dates. I'll get it online.

DePue: Into the 1960s, I would assume?

Webb: Probably, yeah, maybe towards the end. We worked hard on that, and the day that the town was going to vote on it, my phone rang at 7:00 in the morning. By then, we had moved over to Glenview. We moved over to Glenview in '68, yeah. The phone rang about 7:00. It was Jane Harris, a friend and one of the workers on this, and she said, "Get the kids up and get in the car and get out of the house. They're flying over, dropping leaflets all over." She said, "We want them all out of sight before people go to the polls."

So I went out. My yard was covered with them, and this plane was flying over. The leaflets, I laughed when I read one, because they were highly ungrammatical. (laughs) But I want you to know that these women were so organized. I mean, we were used to doing things. There wasn't a leaflet to be found, within an hour, anyplace. My car trunk was completely full of these leaflets. My kids had more fun. We were picking them out of trees; we were picking them out of bushes, and they never figured out what happened to their leaflets. (laughs) We won the election.

DePue: You said the election was 1968, you believe?

Webb: It was after '68. I'd have to go online again to find out, but I was living in Glenview, because we moved over there when Howie was fourteen.

DePue: What kind of volunteer activities did you get into after you got to Carbondale?

Webb: The league. The first volunteer job I had with the league here was assembling their “Know Your Town” booklet. Every league has to do that at some time in their existence. It was a good booklet. It was down at the printing shop, down on East Main. They wanted someone to do it, and I said, “Well, I've done that kind of work when I've had jobs, a lot,” you know, knowing how to assemble things quickly. So that was fun; [I] did that.

Just about everything I did at first is with the league. I did join the fellowship, the Unitarians, when I came. I did the newsletter for them. I always end up doing everybody newsletters. (both laugh) Back in my typing days, I'd kill to have a good typewriter. I loved typing. I don't like the keyboards on these things very well, but my cat does. He's taken it over. If I go on, and he's around, he comes, and he lies down on all the letters. I say to him, "How do you expect me to work?" (laughs) Amy's cat does that too.

Okay, we got that in. Then we had to get together a slate of candidates. Oh, I know one thing I did then as a volunteer that was really interesting; that was that the league would ask you to work at an election, at a polling place, to

watch what was going on, because a lot of electioneering went on that wasn't legal and everything. We were supposed to tell them.

I was down at the Old City Hall, which had a steep flight of stairs up. It was on East Main. As I tried to go in, one of the very few local policemen came up to me, "Where do you think you're going?" I said, "Well, I'm the league observer. I'm here just…" He pushed me down the stairs. (laughs)

DePue: Physically pushed you?

Webb: Yeah. Fortunately, I could hang on to a handrail. One of the things I found out was that lots of people were voting in two places. Another time, I was at a polling place, and the woman came in who owned the best dress shop in town. As she asked for a ballot, I said, "Mrs.…Excuse me, but don't you live in Ana?"

"Yes, everybody knows that."

"Do you vote in Ana?"

"Yes."

I said, "Well, you can't vote in two places."

"I can too. I have a business here. I've always voted in two places."

Well, that doesn't happen anymore. (laughs) I didn't see these people as ignorant. I saw them as cut off. They hadn't moved along, modernized in a sense, until the university started to really grow.

DePue: Speaking of changing times, do you recall when the schools were desegregated?

Webb: Yes, and it wasn't as soon as we had hoped. I don't know the date, but I can get that again for you. The black teachers held it up for a long time, because the school superintendents wouldn't agree to hire them. And until that got worked out, it didn't happen, and it did get worked out.

DePue: So that they were hired.

Webb: Black teachers had a…Yes, yes. So it took a while.

DePue: Sounds like, perhaps, it didn't happen until into the 1960s?

Webb: Oh, I'm sure it was into the 1960s, yeah. Then the university school had some black students. That was a grade in high school, in Pulliam Hall on the campus, which I still call university school. (laughs) Our son got in there in seventh grade, and our daughter Amy got in in first grade, and Sarah got into

preschool, because I registered her the day she was born. That's what it took to get her in. (laughs) So when we could, we sent them there. That school eventually closed, and the girls had to go to public high school. It was a big change for them. (laughs)

DePue: Was that something you had to pay for, to get your kids to the university school?

Webb: No. You just had to get on the waiting list.

DePue: Was it considered a more progressive school?

Webb: It was considered that. What I thought, after my son graduated in 1966 from high school there, that the best thing about it was that the kids were competing against each other. They were smart kids, and they came from all kinds of different backgrounds. But, they were smart, and they were working at it; they really were. I know, when our son went up to Washington University, he didn't feel he'd missed anything. He was prepared. So that was good.

DePue: One of the other interviews that I've conducted is with Kathryn Harris. She's now the chief librarian at the Abraham Lincoln President Library.

Webb: Oh yes, yes. I know I knew the name.

DePue: And her mother, her parents, are well-known within the black community here, because she grew up in Carbondale and remembers those segregated schools. Her mother was Eurma Hayes.

Webb: Oh yes. The Eurma Hayes Center is named for her mother, here in Carbondale.

DePue: Yes. That's the reason I mention it.

Webb: I did know her. Yes, I'll be darned. One of the things that really surprised me, when Howard died, my sister in-law was here from Seattle, and she hadn't been here much, and she was extremely aware that there were a lot of African American people around—There aren't any in the neighborhood where she lives, which is my old neighborhood in Seattle—and how people were friendly. People said hi to each other and everything. I said that's one of the things I've seen take place here, and I think it's wonderful. If you say hi, no matter what color anybody is, then they're going to say hi to you. I said, “I think a lot of people simply never get to have that experience.” We not only have that experience, we've had so many foreign students here that we've had experience with just about every different civilization you can think of. (laughs)

DePue: At what point in time did Southern Illinois University get the reputation of being a party school?

Webb: Oh, about the time the others did. Listen, Howard Dennison University, where Howard went, had to close the Sigma Chi fraternity that both Howard and his father belonged to, because it was so out of control. That was just unheard of in the old days, a Baptist school. (laughs)

DePue: Well, I might be wrong, but I thought at one point in time Southern was known as the top—

Webb: It was the Halloweens.

DePue: …top party school in the country.

Webb: Well, I don't think it was. Frankly, I think all of them were pretty bad. There was a big Halloween bash that got started here, and it got completely out of hand.

DePue: Was that in the '60s, that was going on?

Webb: Yeah, I think so. They had to stop it. They had to just close down. The bars still can't open on Halloween. I think that's still true. It was out of control. College students drink a lot more than they used to.

DePue: This being a segregated town, but also a university town, do you remember the climate of the community during the early '60s and the civil rights era?

Webb: I had contacts both with African Americans and with the university community, more than I did with people who were not university and not African American. I wasn't hearing a lot of ugly stuff, but then I might not have been where I would have heard it. There was a big reaction when the campus went in 1970. There was a big, ugly reaction, people driving in with pickups, with axes, saying they're going to get students. But it was all students. (laughs) It didn't matter what color they were.

DePue: Now, this is something I should remember, and I can't recall the year. But I'm going to mispronounce this, Cairo, Illinois; it looks like Cairo.

Webb: You mean Cairo [pronounces with an emphasis on the "a"]?

DePue: It's pronounced a variety of different ways. They had some serious riots in that community.

Webb: Um-hmm. And they have a much larger African American population—it's not a big town—and they're poor. Everybody down here is poor. This and Marion are the towns with the most money. The only reason Marion…Well maybe Benton and Mount Vernon, because they're on the Interstate. But the rest of the area…There are a lot of rural poor people, black and white. And those things lead to problems.

DePue: Getting back to the volunteer work, did you ever join the AAUW?

Webb: No. I've been asked to join. I said, “I'm not a college graduate,” and they said, “Oh, we don't care.”

DePue: American Association of University Women.

Webb: Yeah, the local group said, “We don't care if you graduated or not. Did you go to school?” I said, “Yeah.” But I'm not much of a joiner. I belong to the Unitarian Fellowship, the Board of the Chamber Music Society. I'm just not a joiner.

DePue: But you believe in volunteer work.

Webb: Oh, absolutely. Oh, and I did long years at the hospital.

DePue: Well that's a little bit ahead of the story as well. I want to get you into the later 1960s. Again, you've got this university environment in a place like Carbondale, but this is also the time when a lot of things are starting to happen on university campuses.

Webb: Oh, yes.

DePue: And not just because of the Vietnam War, but that seemed to be accelerating things. Talk about the university environment in the later ‘60s. Was there a students’ rights movement here in town?

Webb: Yes. Actually, when Kent State finally happened, it just blew.

DePue: Let's go back then to 1968.

Webb: The first I remember of things getting bad was someone calling and saying, "They're breaking the windows out of Woody Hall." I didn't believe it.

DePue: They, who was they?

Webb: Students. They're always a “they,” you know? So I drove over near there. The girls were in the car. When I saw what was going on, I said, "We're going directly home." (laughs) We didn't get out of the car. But the windows were gone.

DePue: Do you know when that was?

Webb: Amy might remember.

DePue: Sixty-eight was an important year, a memorable year for most Americans, because it starts with the Tet Offensive, and then you've got Martin Luther King's assassination, around the April timeframe.[14]

Webb: Oh, yes.

DePue: Of course, there were riots through so many cities in the country. I think shortly after that or about the same timeframe, LBJ [President Lyndon Baines Johnson] announced that he wouldn't be running for reelection. Then you've got, I believe in July, Robert Kennedy's assassination, and then the August Democratic Convention, up in Chicago.

Webb: Oh, yes. Well, I know we had students up there. (laughs)

DePue: Was Carbondale a lively place that year, with everything that was going on?

Webb: Yeah, I would say that it was, that we were starting to get a lot of unrest on campus.

DePue: And you've got ROTC programs on campus at the time.

Webb: Yeah.

DePue: That was oftentimes kind of a flashpoint.

Webb: But I don't remember that being a flashpoint here. It might have been, but not that I was aware of. I never connected those years with that, particularly, in my head.

DePue: Before we started, I think you jumped on the Internet and read up on Old Main. You said that was 1969.

Webb: Yeah, that's when it burned, and there was already unrest. So the immediate thing was, well, the students have burned Old Main down. But the fire department wasn't sure of that. They never found out who started that fire. It was arson.

DePue: Can you give us some more background, what was going on in the campus and what the result was, in terms of Old Main getting burned down?

Webb: Okay. There were meetings going on all the time, kids and things. I never went to any of them. There was concern that meetings would get out of hand. But then, when the building actually was burned and it was arson, then

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[14] The Tet Offensive by North Vietnam and the NLF, was one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War, launched on January 30, 1968, by forces of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam against the forces of the South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam, the United States Armed Forces and their allies. It was a campaign of surprise attacks against military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam.

something interesting happened; everybody came together. You should have seen the people going in that burning building and bringing things out, some of whom were my children. They did, everybody. All the students were trying to help people get their things out. People's whole careers things were in there. That was okay for a bit.

Then there was all kinds of speculation about how the fire started, which just added to the mix. But I can't remember if the windows went out at Woody then. So many of the people who remember this stuff well are gone, permanently now, that's it's hard to—

DePue: Was there any talk about outside agitators, like Students for a Democratic Society or other—[15]

Webb: Oh, yeah.

DePue: …radical elements coming in to organize the students?

Webb: Well, one of the Students for a Democratic Society board members was from here.

DePue: Who was that?

Webb: Jane Adams—

DePue: Oh?

Webb: (laughs)…now a City Councilwoman and retired professor from SIU.

DePue: Would you say that the politics of the university or of the town became more liberal or radicalized, like it did in some places?

Webb: My view of the politics of the faculty, for example, is it's just like everyplace else. It's not all one thing or another at all. It's liberal, conservative, in between. What's that other group called? I don't mean progressive, the ones that don't want taxes and all that stuff.

DePue: Libertarian?

Webb: Libertarian. I couldn't think of the term. In the same departments, you're going to find people who have very different views. And as far as I can tell, it's always been that way.

DePue: Where was Howard, in terms of what was going on in the campus?

[15] Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a student activist movement in the United States that was one of the main representations of the New Left. The organization developed and expanded rapidly in the mid-1960s before dissolving at its last convention in 1969.

Webb: He was worried about (laughs) what was going to happen, and when things fell apart, he was with the vice president every night. They went out and worked with the students. He would come home at 3:00 every morning. That was when things were the very worst. I don't know if I should say this, but President Morris was having some problems during this period, and the vice president was kind of seeing to things.

DePue: Was Howard generally sympathetic with what the students were wanting?

Webb: He wasn't sympathetic with rioting. (laughs)

DePue: Were the students seeking more control over curriculum?

Webb: No. It was bigger than that.

DePue: Was it mainly focused on anti-war protests?

Webb: Yes, I think so. Then, when Kent State happened, of course, it was a bomb.[16]

DePue: And that was in the spring of 1970.

Webb: Yeah, that was something. That was really something. It was frightening.

DePue: Where were you and Howard, in terms of your views about the Vietnam War?

Webb: We didn't think it was a necessary or defensible war. And look what's happened since. (laughs) We finally got rid of World War II. We finally got out of Korea. And now we're in all over the place. No, we didn't think it was…And we were worried because our son was in college at the time. He had to take his exam for the draft the week of final exams at Washington U.[17] Washington U's a tough school.

DePue: That's where he was attending?

Webb: Yeah. He was a good student. He called and said, "Would you come up and hold my hand?" I went up. We went to this huge armory someplace. They didn't even have a place for anybody to sit down. He was gone for about an hour. Then I saw him coming, way down a distant hall, leaping into the air. I thought, Oh my God, he flunked. He came back to me; he said, "Mom, I want you to kiss my football knee." (both laugh)

When he went in for that exam, the doctor was drawing peace symbols on a blackboard. So he didn't have to go, and he did have a bad knee. If he sat, like in a movie for a while, and stood up, it would go out. It was from playing

[16] In May 1970, students protesting the bombing of Cambodia by United States military forces clashed with Ohio National Guardsmen on the Kent State University campus. When the guardsmen shot and killed four students on May 4, the shootings became the focal point of a nation deeply divided by the Vietnam War.
[17] Washington University in St. Louis, MO is a private research university, founded in 1853.

football. I was grateful to that knee. (laughs) But I wouldn't let him come home. I told him if he went over to the demonstrations on campus at Washington U, he was going to hear a hell of a lot from me. (laughs)

DePue: Why? I would think you were generally sympathetic with what they were protesting.

Webb: I didn't want him hurt, and I didn't want him arrested. I was his mother! (both laugh) He behaved. They went over, but he said, "We stayed on the outskirts."

DePue: Again, this was the late '60s, into 1970. I know 1970 was a very tough year for you otherwise, as well.

Webb: Yes. When you drive down Walnut Street, which used to be a two-way street, it was completely lined with National Guardsmen, with rifles. We had a 7:00 curfew. I would drive Howard over to campus before 7:00. I went right down Mill Street over here. We lived over here on Glenview. The first time I took him down, he was to meet Mack there, the vice president. Mack wanted Howard with him. Howard was good at dealing with people; he was. He didn't get mad; he didn't get excited; he just tried to deal with them.

DePue: Was he well respected by the students?

Webb: Yes, he was, by the students. We got down…There was a mob, right down at Mill Street. I said to Howard, "I don't know how I can get through this." And all of a sudden…I had the car window open, and one of the kids yelled, "It's okay; it's the Webbs." A bunch of kids came, surrounded our car, and they said, "Let these people through." Then they saw me back through that mess, so I could go home.

I started getting phone calls that night. He [Howard] wouldn't get home until 3:00, 3:30 in the morning, because they were dealing with stuff all the time, with the police and with the students and everything. And these phone calls were nasty; they really were, "We're going to kill all you communists. We're going to kill your communist children." I thought, Oh God, there's nothing like a Christian whose mad, right? (laughs)

So what I did was, I went and got my King James Bible. The next call came, and I said, "Oh just a minute," and I started reading a Psalm to him. This person got all upset and hung up. (laughs) It worked every time after that. But I was awakened repeatedly at night with these threats. I wasn't afraid. I was annoyed. I had seen some people from the telephone company, up working in the wires behind our house, the day before this started. I realized afterwards that they had tapped our line. I told one of them I knew it. He said, "Well, we didn't mean anything." That's what he said. (laughs)

DePue: This was an anti-war protest going on at the campus, and then there was a counter protest from the community or what?

Webb: No, these were individuals. I know one of them worked at the place where I took my clothes to be cleaned. These were individuals who just wanted all these God-damn students out of here, "God damn it, we're going to kill all of them." (laughs)

DePue: But the line that you went through, that was anti-war protestors?

Webb: Yeah. At that point really, it was anti-everything protestors. It was a mob, and it's hard to say what everybody in a mob is protesting. But it was a mob, and mobs are scary.

DePue: It sounds like this was ugly on both sides of the equation.

Webb: Yeah. There were people coming into town, threatening students and things like that. But there were never enough of them. You can understand that that happens.

There was a letter—I think it was in today's local paper—written by a man who writes letters to the paper a lot. Why they print them, I don't know, but he's telling all of us, we're all going to hell, everybody but him. Boy, he tells us in big ways we're going to hell, us so-called Christians, us so-called this and that. Eh, people are like that. I think there's probably some fear element involved when people get that carried away.

I've been very lucky, in that I'm not a fearful person. I don't assume the worst, and I don't get very excited. So I just figured we'd get through it. (laughs) And we did.

DePue: Well, I think this is the point in time where you had another very difficult chapter of your life.

Webb: Oh gosh.

DePue: Is it 1970 that your son passed away?

Webb: Um-hmm.

DePue: Is that something you're willing to talk about a little bit?

Webb: I can try. Just give me a minute. (emotional) Sunday, November 1, 1970, (sighs) Amy had gone down to the Unitarian church to baby-sit the kids. I was still at home, and the phone rang. It was a man; I didn't recognize his voice. He asked to speak to Howard. Howard answered, and I knew at once something terrible must have happened. I thought it might have been that his mother had died or something, but it wasn't. It was our son, in an accident.

He had graduate cum laude five months before from Washington University. Howard is the one who wrapped that up perfectly at some point that day. He said, "It's just the end of the known world." And it was.

It never occurred to us we would lose a child, certainly not a wonderful, bright man. It was terrible for all of us. His sisters were…Let's see, he was twenty-two; his sisters were seventeen and twelve. Well, it was just awful. People were wonderful. (laughs) I had to get Amy home, so I went across the street and got Bill, the neighbor across the street, and asked him to go to the church and get Amy. Bill was Catholic, and he said, "I don't even know where that church is." (laughs) So, I told him. He went in, and he told the congregation, which wasn't a big congregation, and then they got Amy. She came home. By then, we'd told Sarah. People from the church were there in no time. I still remember. (laughs)

But, oh my. (blows nose) We had three grandparents to tell and other people to tell. Howie was in love with a wonderful girl, and we had to call her parents and tell her [mother] to find her. It was awful. But everybody pitched in to help. At one point, one English Department wife, Marie, called and said, don't worry about fixing dinner," she said, "I have them lined up for the next month." And she did. Every day for a month, someone would call at about 5:00 and say, "I'm bringing dinner. Do you like so and so." I've never forgotten. (laughs)

I answered the door one afternoon, and Milt Oberwaun (?) was at the door, carrying this huge rack of clothes on hangers. Milt said to me, "You didn't know I could iron, did you?" (laughs) after he had washed, done all the laundry and all the ironing. That's the way people were. We were lucky we were in such a community, where they just won't let you fail. (laughs)

That Christmas was very hard, and we decided to try and have a regular Christmas. We did it. We didn't enjoy it, but we did it. Then, the day after Christmas, we went with Howard to AAUW meeting [that] was in New York. So we went to New York City with him, to get out of town. Before we left town, Bruce Appleby, from the department, was over. He'd gotten show tickets for the girls and me, so we could see some shows while Howard was in meetings and things. That's the kind of things people did. We didn't, at that time, know anyone who had lost a child in that way. I know a lot now (laughs), but we had each other.

I will never forget reading something in the *New York Times*, not long after that. It was an article about the effect—it was in the *Times Weekly Magazine*—the effect of losing children, that 50 percent of the couples who lose children get divorced. We knew that wasn't going to happen. (laughs) But isn't that sad?

DePue: One of the other of the spouses ends up blaming the other one, or just—

Webb: Or can't live with it, I don't know. They really mentioned all kinds of different things. You kind of go through a self-blame, you know? Maybe if I'd been standing there holding his hand, it wouldn't have happened, but that's not real life, and things happen.

So, I break up when I see them doing the pictures on NPR, of the young men who are being killed, because I know they've got families. It's very hard. As you can see, it is…Howie would be sixty-three in three weeks. He was twenty-two when he died, and I bust up when I talk about him. (catches her breath)

DePue: Was there some way, something that helped you cope in that next year or two?

Webb: We had two other children, and we didn't want this to ruin their lives, because we couldn't be parents. We knew we had all this backing. Howard's students were wonderful; oh they were wonderful. No, we knew we had to do it, and do it to the best of our abilities. And I think we did. We've never forgotten him. You just don't; you don't forget them.

So, I know now. When I'm with someone who has lost a child, I know what they're going through, and I know how hard it is. Without all the help we'd had here, I don't know what it would have been like, if we had been someplace, isolated or something.

Howard got a Guggenheim, right after Howie died.[18] We would have gone to Denmark. He said to me, "I'm going to turn this down, and I want you to understand why." He said, "This is no time for us to take the girls away from home." He said, "And it's no time for us to be away from home." He was right.

DePue: I think this is also about the time that you decided to volunteer someplace else?

Webb: Oh, that was something. That occurred on December 26, 1972, which is two years afterwards. Times were still tough, and at the Women's Center, I'd gotten involved with helping fix the house and everything. The Women's Center had opened on November 1, 1972.

The morning after Christmas that year, I woke up, and I thought, You're losing it; you are losing it. You have got to get out more, do something; do something different. So, I said to Howard, I'm going to try to think of what are the two most different possible things I could do in this town. He said, "I think that's a good idea." I said, "Well, I'm going to

[18] Guggenheim Fellowships are grants that have been awarded annually since 1925 by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation to those "who have demonstrated exceptional capacity for productive scholarship or exceptional creative ability in the arts."

volunteer at the Women's Center and at the hospital." He said, "You couldn't get more different than that." (laughs) So that's what I did.

I was at the hospital fifteen years, and I will, in November, have been at the Women's Center, volunteering, for thirty-nine years. But it was a good thing to do, totally different groups of people, totally different milieus. They were both great for me; they were both great for me, very good.

DePue: I think this might be a good place for us to stop today.

Webb: Okay.

DePue: And to pick up tomorrow. Then we can get much more of the story about the Women's Center and about your involvement with the ERA and the rest of your life.

Webb: Okay.

DePue: Except for the last few minutes, this has been a lot of fun for me.

Webb: (laughs) Well, I'm glad I was at least able to do it. I'm sorry, I couldn't do it without breaking up, but I can't. (laughs)

DePue: That's perfectly understandable.

Webb: He was a great son; he really was. Life is not quite the same when they're gone. I hope to God that doesn't happen to either of my kids.

DePue: Well, thank you very much, Joyce. We'll pick this up tomorrow.

Webb: Okay. So what are you going to do the rest of your time in Carbondale?

DePue: I'm going to get ready for our interview tomorrow.

Webb: Oh, okay. (laughs)

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Joyce Webb
ISE-A-L-2011-036.02
Interview # 02: August 26, 2011
Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, August 26, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, Director or Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I have my second session today with Joyce Webb. Good morning.

Webb: Good morning.

DePue: We just visited the Women's Center, because I needed to go there to get my updated outline printed out. It was fun to go there with you.

Webb: Oh well, we're going to go back, I hope, this afternoon, so you can really see the whole thing.

DePue: Very good. You wanted to start with maybe a comment about living in Carbondale and what that's meant to you.

Webb: I got to thinking about this last night, after we'd talked yesterday. I feel that living in what may look like kind of just a small city and not very important to other people, has given me the richest life I could possibly have had. I have enjoyed the university community and the town community very much. I've had a lot of wonderful experiences and met a lot of wonderful people.

For example, many middle class people—and that's what I think I am—don't get an opportunity to meet people in much worse circumstances

than they are. If you're involved with the Women's Center, you do. You can learn how hard they have to work just to live. It makes a difference in my life.

DePue: Why don't you tell us…We're sitting in your home; it's a lovely home, lots of trees. It looks very rural as you look out at the backyard, but you're right in the middle of town.

Webb: Yes, it does.

DePue: Where exactly are you located in town?

Webb: I'm across the street from SIU, Southern Illinois University. The lot across the street, they own most of that block. It's not fixed up very nicely, but this is the main artery into the campus on the west side. Carbondale is not a big place, so I'm very close to everything. It's very nice.

DePue: Would you say it has something of a small town atmosphere to it?

Webb: The people do. They're friendly; they interact well. We also have a first class hospital here. We have, of course, a university and a few miles away, a community college. So we have a great deal to offer. This is the largest town in southern Illinois, south of I-64. We have beautiful…The Shawnee National Forest is down here. We have students who come down here from school and find it so beautiful that they never leave. (laughs)

DePue: It's not as rich farmland as you would find in the central northern part of the state.

Webb: No, no. The Grand Prairie starts about fifteen miles north of our airport, and you can see the difference.[19] When I start to drive, for example, from Carbondale to Springfield, I'm leaving the beautiful hills and stuff that we have down here, and I'm out on the prairie. The heights that I see are drumlins, a place where a glacier dropped some debris. Somebody built a farmhouse up on top of that little hill, for the view probably. (laughs)

DePue: So maybe a more hardscrabble life for the farmers, but was there a lot of coal mining in this area?

Webb: Yes, soft coal mining was the big thing, and there's still mining going on. When we first came here, the mining schedules were on the front page of the newspaper every day.

DePue: So soft coal, meaning that there would be high sulfur coal?

Webb: Yes.

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[19] The Grand Prairie Natural Division of central and east-central Illinois is a vast plain, formerly occupied primarily by tallgrass prairie, now converted extensively to agriculture. Natural drainage of the fertile soils was poor, resulting in many marshes and potholes.

DePue: So that's the demise of a lot of the coal mining in the region.

Webb: Well, actually it's still being used, I think, at power plants in the area. It's still being mined, but it's open mining more, which is not so good. When we first came here, there had been no laws requiring the mine owners to restore the land. Now there has been, finally there was, and things have been made better. But a lot of the southern Illinois is damaged from coal mining.

We are the only town I know of that isn't undermined. I got a notice from some government office very recently, about undermining. I called and said, "I don't think I'm undermined." They said, "Just a minute, and we'll look. No," they said, "the nearest undermining to you is one and a half miles away."

DePue: Wow.

Webb: That's pretty close. (laughs)

DePue: Well, as a homeowner though, just the thought of that makes you very nervous; doesn't it?

Webb: Oh yes, homes have been lost; schools have been lost. So, in some of the smaller towns around here, that's a very serious problem.

DePue: Well, let's get back to your story. Yesterday we finished with what I would imagine was the most painful and difficult part of your life.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: The next chapter is maybe a response to that. You alluded to that yesterday. But I wanted to start with the founding of the Women's Center, here in Carbondale.

Webb: All right. In December of 1971, there was a meeting of…What was that outfit called? It's a national women's meeting. People all over the country, women, were meeting, with a sort of renewal of interest in the feminist movement. We had a meeting here at the local Presbyterian Church. It was very, very well attended. Speakers in the morning and in the afternoon.

We divided into groups. Clara McClure, who is the long-time social worker here, said, in the group I was in, "Where does a woman go when she has no place to go?" That's a pretty big question. It's not one that a lot of those of us who were middle class women had thought about.

DePue: I wanted to back up just a little bit. National Organization for Women [NOW] was founded in 1966. One of the founders was, of course, Betty Friedan, who wrote the *Feminist Mystique*.[20]

Webb: Yes.

DePue: Were you an early member of the National Organization for Women?

Webb: um-hmm, yes.

DePue: Had you joined prior to that time?

Webb: I was interested. I realized I'd always been a feminist, in the sense that I believe firmly that men and women should have equal rights under the Constitution and still believe it. Yeah, I was interested. Things were complicated by what had happened in our lives, in a sense, so I was trying to deal with interests and feelings at the same time. (laughs)

DePue: This is going to be part of the debate. I probably should have mentioned beforehand, I wanted, to a certain extent, for the purpose of doing the interview, separate the issue of the passage of ERA from the founding of the Women's Center, although you can't necessarily.

Webb: Not exactly, because I think the need for an Equal Rights Amendment was in all of our minds.

DePue: And that's what I wanted to start with. Why was a national organization for women necessary in the late '60s and early '70s?

Webb: Because there was no centralized voice for women. The idea of feminism keeps rising and falling. We are aware of it starting in the 18th century. I'm sure it was around before that. (laughs) There had to be women who were unhappy with their lot before that. What had happened was, there was a lot of unrest in the country. Unrest leads to issues coming up, and that was one of the issues that came up.

DePue: Now, of course, the real emergence—and I'm sure this is all debatable—but Seneca Falls in the years prior to the Civil War—

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: …and, of course, the early feminist movement was so much tied to abolitionism, as an issue, as well.

[20] Published on February 19, 1963, *The Feminine Mystique,* a book written by Betty Friedan, is widely credited with sparking the beginning of second-wave feminism in the United States.

Webb: um-hmm. And then, in the '20s, in 1923—oh her name is Paul. What is her first name? I'll have to try and get that for you.

DePue: I know who you're talking about, because I've got this picture of her on a white horse.

Webb: She wrote an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution and started working for it. There was an office in Washington; it was still there when I was last in Washington. What happened was that women decided, no, they wanted to vote first. They kind of stopped working for the Equal Rights Amendment and went working—

DePue: Alice Paul, Alice Paul, I think.

Webb: Alice Paul, that's quite correct. She was unable to keep them from wanting…She pointed out that, if there was an Equal Rights Amendment, they would have the vote. But it wasn't getting across apparently. So women got the vote in…when my mother was thirty; so it was 1920. My grandmother was sixty. That still seems so strange to me. My mother was a highly opinionated woman. That she couldn't vote before she was thirty just floors me. (laughs) She and I never voted the same way, I should add.

DePue: Now, let's go back to the issue of the Women's Center and that one comment in 1971, late in '71.

Webb: December. Some of the women got together, about half a dozen of them, and decided to work on what we needed and decided we needed a women's center.

DePue: I want to go back and ask you, at that time—and obviously your views have evolved over time—but when she says, "We need to have a place for women to go when there's no other place to go."

Webb: That wasn't the first thing. We need to have a place to go where women can meet and discuss things and have consciousness raising groups and all that kind of thing. The idea of people staying was, Well maybe somebody would need it overnight, in an emergency or something like that. It was nothing like what we ended up with, as you can tell.

DePue: What did that mean to you at the time, for a need to have a place to stay overnight?

Webb: Well, I didn't think I would need a place to stay overnight, but I'm sure there were people out there who maybe had a problem with their husbands or something like that and needed a safe place to go overnight. We were pretty naïve. We had no idea that domestic violence was a major problem in this or any other country. It is, and still is. This was very much a learn as you go prospect.

But these half dozen or so women got together, did some planning and then, I think I have over there, a copy of a letter sent out over Genevieve Houghton's signature, explaining that we needed people to make pledges. I pledged $10 a month. Isn't that overwhelming? (laughs) Of course, we had three children and people coming in.

DePue: Well, in 1971 that was—

Webb: In 1971, that was a perfectly respectable pledge. A lot of people pledged. One woman who was interested said, "I'll pay for the phone for a year." That was good, because we weren't going to have enough to do that. So, what happened was that a house was rented. It was on Walnut Street in Carbondale.

It was a four bedroom house, which had belonged to a couple in the English Department, the department my husband was in at the university, and a house I was familiar with. It was old. They had built a new home and moved away. A lot of us spent a lot of time working on it.

DePue: I wanted to read a quote from an article that Rita Lovell Moss had written, I think just a few years after the founding of the Women's Center.

Webb: She was one of the original committee.

DePue: This is how she described the need for this, "A need for a warm and loving place where women could talk with other women, sisters, daughter, mothers and neighbors, about their common problems and ways of coping with them." Does that pretty much sum it up?

Webb: That's very good. Um-hmm, that's very good. That is what it was. I'm going to add here that, in those days, there were a lot of people involved as volunteers, getting going on the house. Some were young; some were students and grad students, and some were older.

From left to right at a planning conference are Rita Moss, unknown, Joyce Webb, unknown, Mary Rudasill, and others in the Center's second home, circa 1975.

The young ones called the old ones Mrs. so and so, if they were married. We had a meeting and decided we had to change that. (laughs) So, from then on, it was first names. I haven't been called Mrs. Webb very much in the last, I don't know, thirty years. (laughs)

DePue: Well, this is a complete aside, but when your husband would go there, how would they address him?

Webb: Howard.

DePue: He wasn't Doctor or Professor?

Webb: Oh no. This place is crawling with professors. (laughs) No, he was Joyce's husband, so that was okay.

DePue: I wanted to get the leadership of this establishment. You mentioned Genevieve Houghton. As we go on, I would like to have you flush out these personalities, their role in the organization as well.

Webb: Well, Genevieve…Recently there was some real publicity about her. Genevieve was one of the original Freedom Riders.[21] At the time, she was a beautiful young woman, twenty-eight years old. She was on that bus that was firebombed in Asheville was it? I believe it was Asheville [North Carolina].

Genevieve Houghton, on the left, and Joyce Webb meet outside the second Carbondale Women's Center for a planning session, circa early 1980s.

DePue: I'm going to get the year wrong. I think it was in the '61 or '62 timeframe that the bus, traveling around the southern part of the country—

Webb: That's about right, yeah. It was the first one, um-hmm. She was working for CORE at the time. Just knowing her has been a great experience.

DePue: I think CORE was Congress of Racial Equality?

Webb: Yeah, yeah.

[21] Freedom Riders were civil rights activists who rode interstate buses into the segregated southern United States, in 1961 and subsequent years, in order to challenge the non-enforcement of the United States Supreme Court decisions Morgan v. Virginia (1946) and Boynton v. Virginia (1960), which ruled that segregated public buses were unconstitutional.

DePue: Go ahead.

Webb: I believe she was working as James Farmer's[22] administrative assistant.

DePue: Was she **the** main founder or the main voice behind getting this organized?

Webb: No. She was just one of the first volunteers, (laughs) as far as I know. I'm sure she was involved to some extent. It was an amazingly dangerous thing to do. I don't know if people now can understand how dangerous it was, but they were risking their lives every minute they were on their bus.

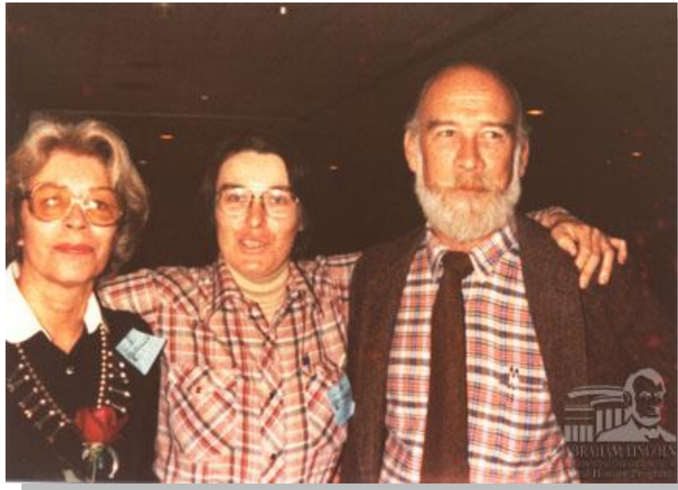
DePue: What was Genevieve doing in Carbondale at the time?

Webb: Genevieve ended up here. She was married at the time, and I think her husband might have been in graduate school. I first met her at that big meeting in December of '71 and then got acquainted with her. There were so many of us involved in volunteering there. That's when I got acquainted with her. She ended up being our first unpaid director. (laughs) But she certainly knew the territory of working in difficult situations.

I think it's very important to add here that this group was started as a feminist, pro-choice organization, and we never made any bones about it. For years, I went out and spoke for the center, later, when I was president of the board. I simply told people that's what it was. I was doing that in small towns and all kinds of places, where the term pro-choice didn't go down very well.

DePue: I want to get your understanding of what the term feminist means, what it meant then, to you.

Webb: To me. To me a feminist is someone who believes in equal legal rights for men and women, period. I was married to one. It would never have occurred to Howard that women shouldn't have equal legal rights. But he also hadn't thought about how we're going to get them. He was very supportive of my being involved in this.



Joyce Webb, Carol Keasler and Howard Webb enjoying themselves at the 10th Anniversary celebration in November 1982.

[22] James Leonard Farmer Jr. was a civil rights activist and leader in the Civil Rights Movement who pushed for nonviolent protest to dismantle segregation and served alongside Martin Luther King Jr. He was the initiator and organizer of the 1961 Freedom Rides.

There is one other thing I think I need to add in here. In London, in 1971, a woman named Erin Pizzey, I think that's P-i-z-z-e-y, had gazumped…I love that term. The British had that term. Gazumping means you take over an empty place. You know, you move in on it. She had gazumped a house in London to provide a safe place for battered women. We all knew about that. So that was part of what was going into this.

DePue: That was really the first of its kind anywhere?

Webb: Yes. And we are close to being the first of our kind in the United States. I'm not sure. I think the last time someone told me, they said we were second. I'm not sure if we were second.

DePue: Second in the United States?

Webb: But I know we were certainly in at least the first four, and we were the only one not in a big city and not founded by social workers. We had social workers among us, but this was just a group of women.

DePue: Who were some of the other women? I assume you're one of the founders of this, as well?

Webb: Well, I'm one of the founding Indians, not a chief, in that I was helping with the house. But there were lots of us who did that. I'm just an Indian on that. The ones who got it organized were that first six, and they constituted the board for about five months.

DePue: Who were the other members; do you recall? Genevieve was certainly one of them.

Webb: Genevieve, Rita Moss, Libby Moore—I know I'm going to blow this (laughs) —and three more. Oh my goodness, I'm not sure. One of the joys of being in your mid-eighties is not being able to think of things. (laughs)

DePue: What did all of you envision as the original clientele for this center?

Webb: I think we saw ourselves as the original clientele. We were having all kinds of interesting meetings, really, really interesting meetings. We didn't have a lot of female faculty members at that time, but we had them coming in and talking about what they had run into, getting into the academic world, all kinds of meetings going on, consciousness raising, something I never attended.

Trying to get over a child's death is enough consciousness raising for most people. (laughs) Within the first year also, Howard had a heart attack. It, thank God, was not a serious one. So I was kind of dealing with other things all along.

In April, I applied, as did others, and the board was enlarged. I became a board member, which I have been, was, for the next twenty years, until I thought one day, You ought to get off that board. Nobody has the right to stay on a board that long. (laughs) But that was a wonderful experience in my life.

We had a little flare-up, in that some women who were involved did not want us to take in victims of domestic violence. We'd had one show up within the first couple of days the house was open.

DePue: That was the first client, so to speak?

Webb: Um-hmm. And a person who did have resources and was able to go on and do something. The first one that I remember that I was involved with was a mother and a small baby, very young baby. I remember that I became aware, when I was there doing an afternoon or morning on the phone, that I thought this woman was mistreating this baby, that she had been mistreated too. I went home that night, and I could not sleep.

Our next door neighbor was the man who was the head of the social workers in the area. I woke him up at midnight and said, "I've got to tell you about something." (laughs) I said, "I think maybe this woman is abusing the baby." He said, "It sounds like it to me." He came down in the morning, and that was the case.

DePue: Well, that gets us into an issue, which I'm sure that was part of the discussion, part of the problem, was these are people like yourself, they're volunteers, they're amateurs. You're not talking about clinical psychologists or professional counselors—

Webb: I was a housewife. I think I still am.(laughs)

DePue: …or nurses. And now you're encountering some very challenging and difficult circumstances.

Webb: But, we were people who felt we should be able to handle things. So we would try. When an Illinois Coalition against Domestic Violence was formed in Springfield, we were told we should join. Genevieve and I went up to Springfield to the meeting. We were informed that we were amateurs. We said, "We've been doing this for several years; you haven't. You're still trying to get it going." (laughs) We don't think we are amateurs. We have experience.

DePue: But were there legal issues, because you didn't have certificates or licenses or things like that?

Webb: Nope. We had applied for and received the not-for-profit thing, and we did have social workers who were active members, like Clara McClure, whom I mentioned previously, and others. As we went along and we wanted to have

interns, graduate student interns, we had to have a social worker who could serve to keep an eye on that intern.

DePue: A social worker licensed by the state?

Webb: Uh-huh. There are lots of them around, and that's fine. Many of them were involved with us, so that did not turn out to be a real problem.

DePue: How about the issue, as you said right from the beginning, that this would be a pro-choice institution.

Webb: Yes, um-hmm.

DePue: What are the implications of that early on for you?

Webb: Well, it surprised people and a lot of people were uncomfortable with it. But we made a point of sticking with it. In fact, we made much more of a point than we do now. I think we assume now that everybody knows it.

DePue: But what are the implications for the house, saying that you're pro-choice?

Webb: Well, it was a little scary sometimes, I think. People would say things. My favorite is that I heard someone said that we did abortions on the kitchen table. (laughs) [To] the woman who said that to me, I said, "Oh no, we'd never use the kitchen table." (laughs) But what we felt was that pregnancy is a very private business, that it's a woman's body in which this child is forming, and that any decisions about that were not for a government agency to make.

DePue: This is late '71, '72 though, when you first got started. What were the laws in Illinois about abortion at the time?

Webb: Mark, I don't know. I don't know if it was legal or not, because as long as I can remember, I was aware that there was a abortion clinic in Granite City? Is that what I mean? I'll have to look at a map.

DePue: At the time you got started?

Webb: North of here. Whether that was available when we got started, I don't know, but I think maybe it was.

DePue: So women would come to your center, and if that was one of the issues, they would be referred to someplace like Granite City?

Webb: Well, not referred. We would give people information, but we wouldn't say you should, because the one thing we believed very firmly and made important was that our job was not to tell women what to do, but to help them learn how to take care of themselves. We could tell them that that possibility existed.

DePue: It was, I think, January of 1973 that the U.S. Supreme Court came out with it's *Roe v. Wade* decision.[23]

Webb: Oh, okay.

DePue: That's why I'm getting into these first couple of years.

Webb: I didn't remember exactly when *Roe v. Wade* came out.

DePue: So the equation would have changed a little bit after that decision came out.

Webb: Yes, and it may be that the Granite City thing opened after *Roe v. Wade.* I wouldn't be surprised, but I just don't know.

DePue: This leads to the next question, and it's not necessarily all about abortion as an issue, but I would think early on, there would be some logical individuals and institutions that were in opposition to what the stated purpose of the Women's Center was.

Webb: Yes, but they didn't give us much of a problem. They might say something about it, but…I had one experience when I was serving as president of the center, of going to a Christian radio station in another town. I was invited. I was talking. We got a terrible phone call from someone, directed at me. The host was angry at the caller, not at me.

I thought that was very interesting, that what I did as the speaker for the Women's Center, which I did for many years, was to say, “I'm a feminist. I am married. I have three children, and I have a wonderful husband. We live a good family life, and these are the things I believe.” They would kind of excuse me on those grounds. (laughs) I was doing something right.

I could go up and talk to a little church group and tell them that and answer their questions as honestly as I could, and they would give me a small financial contribution when I went back. So, that was interesting.

DePue: Was that one of the important roles that you played, as a spokesperson for the center?

Webb: During my presidencies, yeah.

DePue: When was that?

Webb: Well, about eight years. (laughs)

DePue: During the ‘70s?

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[23] Roe v**.** Wade, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), is a landmark decision by the United States Supreme Court on the issue of the constitutionality of laws that criminalized or restricted access to abortions.

Webb: When did I first become president? Very interesting. If we kept decent records we'd know, but I don't know. I think I was kind of a weird president. I know that I'm not a leader, but I'm a good mediator. That's really what I did. (laughs) We had a lot of opinionated women on our boards, and I was one of them. (laughs)

DePue: I'm shocked to hear that.

Webb: Yes, I know you're shocked to hear that. But they could be dealt with. Our board meetings tend to go until about midnight. We had to learn to get over that, because at first, it was decided that everything would be decided by consensus. That's fine, only it takes you months to come to consensus. (laughs) We had to give that up and vote on stuff.

DePue: Why was that the original thought, that consensus needed to be achieved?

Webb: That that was equal, that was showing that everyone was equal, and everyone had a chance to get their voice in.

DePue: So, in other words, the group would get together and talk and talk and talk, until they finally get—

Webb: Endlessly, endlessly.

DePue: …until they got to everybody agreeing on an issue?

Webb: Yes. And one night I came home, probably around midnight, and I said to Howard, "Well, guess what we did at this board meeting?" “What?” (laughs) "We bought a house." He said, "You what?" (laughs) “We bought a house; we bought the Renzaglia's house.” “Joyce, do you realize that you’re all financially liable for this?” And I said, “Yes, we realize that.” (laughs) But we did it.

DePue: That was the first house?

Webb: That was the second house. We rented the first house. The second house, we bought for $45,000 from Guy and Betty Renzaglia. Guy was the faculty member at SIU who started the wine industry in southern Illinois, Alto Pass wineries, his family’s winery. He and Betty made us a paper gift. In other words, actually we were going to pay $40,000 for it, instead of the $45,000, and they got a tax thing for the $5,000 they were giving us.

They had a lot of children, and so the house had…I think it might have had six bedrooms and a built-in basement then, a finished basement. And we added to that house. It was on a little dead-end street a block from campus. Dead-end streets are wonderful for a place like this, because if someone calls, “I'm going to come, and I'm going to get her.” You say, “Oh, please do come, we're on a little dead-end street, and the police will be here just about the time

you arrive." (laughs) So that was a good spot. It's just behind the building where you were this morning.

DePue: It's only a couple blocks away from the campus.

Webb: A block, half a block, virtually. We added on to that building a couple of times. Then finally, I was not on the board at the time, but they purchased the apartment, big apartment building, where we were this morning and moved the administrative offices and the rape action group offices over there, because the house was so crowded all the time.

This building became the second home for the Carbondale Women's Center.

We would get very crowded sometimes. If we had more people than bedrooms, we'd bring sleeping bags down, and they'd sleep on the living room floor.

DePue: I can go a lot of different directions here. I wanted to start with Harold's view about your involvement, because this was no small commitment of time on your part.

Webb: Well, the children were in school. Let's see, my son was in college at Washington University in St. Louis. Let's see, what year was that? '70. Amy was in the eighth grade, no—

DePue: You said '71 before.

Webb: Yeah, '71 was the meeting where this…In '71, that was Sarah's first year of high school, I think, or close to it. Amy was five years ahead of her, so it wasn't as though I was taking care of small children. I was forty-four when that meeting occurred. We had started our family early, earlier than we had planned. (laughs) That's different; you have time.

DePue: You mentioned yesterday—I don't want to take you back to this, but I guess I have to, to a certain extent—that after your son's death, you had decided to make a more substantial commitment in time?

Webb: Yes. Also because I thought I was losing it. I just thought I wasn't coming out enough of this, and so that was in—as I think I told you—December 26. (laughs)

DePue: Of '72?

Webb: Seventy-two, when I woke up the day after Christmas and thought, You better get your act together. So I volunteered at the hospital and the Women's Center. Most of the hospital volunteers…There were some faculty wives too, but many of them were townswomen, and it was a different milieu entirely, just completely. I worked in the shop there.

DePue: The store?

Webb: We had a little restaurant and little gift shop. It's larger now.

DePue: How were these women different from the women dealing with the Women's Center?

Webb: Oh, they were much more conservative for the most part. I was sort of an odd woman out there for a while. I was bothered by some things I saw. I didn't feel African American people coming in were treated properly by **some** of the people, not everybody.

DePue: By some of the paid staff?

Webb: Some of the volunteer staff. And the same was true if someone came in with a slip from the hospital social worker that gave them some free food. I felt that they were sometimes not treated properly. Eventually, I became chairman of that, and I made a speech and said, "We're not doing that anymore." (laughs) But it was a great experience. I met some wonderful people.

You need to be around people who are different from yourself, as much as possible, to understand all the different ways we become ourselves. As I said when we opened today, that this place has offered me the opportunity to know I don't

Joyce Webb, Lillian Adams, and Gillian Harrison in the early days of the Carbondale Women's Center.

know how many homeless people, up to presidents of universities, senators. I met Barack Obama over at Stone House, when he was running for president, and had a little chat with him. (laughs)

DePue: Did you share some opinions with him?

Webb: Of course I did. (laughs) And he knew Lillian Adams, who'd been one of his first supporters down here.

DePue: What was the name again?

Webb: Lillian Adams, the friend I told you, who died when she was ninety-six.

DePue: I think we have a picture of her someplace.

Webb: Yeah, we do someplace.

DePue: Well, another line of questions deals with funding. Obviously, when you purchased the home, Howard immediately knew, this is a challenge. (Webb laughs) It's a not for profit.

Webb: Um-hmm.

DePue: How did you fund the center, especially early on?

Webb: We asked people for money locally. Then we applied to United Way, and we got on United Way's list. We didn't get a lot, but we got some. I thought that was great. For a while, we were the only—I don't know if this is still the case—the only shelter in the state, after there were more shelters, who were receiving money from the city where we were located, not a lot, but some. Then, of course, grant writing, people got writing grants. In a university town, you can always find somebody who knows how to write a grant. (laughs)

DePue: Were these grants looking for state money primarily?

Webb: Um-hmm. Well, any place we could find it. I'm not good at that kind of thing and have had no experience doing it. I'm good at handing my own budget; that's about the extent of my fiduciary responsibilities. (laughs)

But everybody just worked on it, and we would manage. We would raise money. Oh, we picked daffodils. They used to raise flowers commercially, south of here. One of the women involved and her husband had built a home down on an old daffodil farm, down near Cobden.

DePue: A daffodil farm?

Webb: Yes, there were daffodil farms, and they were shipped out of Makanda. They would still bloom, not as many of course, but they would still…She asked us

if we'd like to cut some daffodils. We did that for a number of years. We'd go down and cut daffodils, down at Marian's place, and then go over on campus and sell them. We had to get permission to do that. But whenever we did things like that, people responded very well.

We opened a little gift shop, a craft shop, in the Methodist student building on campus and had that for a while. It did pretty well. All of this is volunteer stuff, you understand; nobody's getting paid.

DePue: At first you were renting, and then you purchased a home. So you're essentially homeowners, as well. Was there a lot of volunteer labor involved in fixing these places up?

Webb: Yes and the chief laborer was Lillian Adams' husband, Ed. Ed was our fix-it man. Then a local builder, in later years…I was so surprised. It was a person I didn't think would think we were any good, but he got interested. He had retired, and he would come and do things. I wonder now—I never asked him—[if] it might be that he knew someone in his family who had been abused. One hears about those things from time to time.

DePue: It was strictly labor? A lot of times, when you're fixing places up, there are lot of expenses involved with parts, with wood, with—

Webb: Well, I guess we didn't do the kind of fixing…Well, we did do some remodeling several times. We would always come up with it somehow. I'm not sure how we always came up with it, but we did. (laughs)

DePue: I'm assuming that some of the volunteers who were actually doing the work were volunteering some of the parts that were needed, as well.

Webb: Yeah, um-hmm. I remember going downstairs in the second house one time, to see Genevieve, whose office was down there, and there's a man sitting at the table working on something. I just said to

Margaret Katrannides, far left, Genevieve Houghton, third from left, and Joyce Webb (with cigarette) join other supports at a fund raiser in the late 70s.

him, "Who are you?" (laughs) His name was Harry Bahrenfend. I hadn't met him before. He was a retired person, and he had heard about the Women's Center, over at the seniors, the city's seniors place. He volunteered, and he helped a great deal, because he worked with the financial papers and things like that, a very nice man.

DePue: What kind of fundraising events did you have? You already mentioned the—

Webb: Okay, we had the shop. We had the daffodil things. Let's see, what other kinds of things did we have then? I don't know if I can remember.

We have some big ones now. The biggest one now is called the Little Black Dress. It's huge. I've never been to it, because it's late at night and…I mean, it goes late at night, and it's out of town. But hundreds and hundreds of women come to it, wearing little black dresses and imbibing in local wine and stuff, (laughs) and we get supported by businesses. That's been good.

People do runs for us. There's been a bike riding thing for us. People offer to do things. Maybe a fraternity or a sorority on campus will decide to do something for us. So it's a lot, but we're up to the point where the budget is over $1 million a year. The first year, on Walnut Street, it was $4,000.

DePue: With $1million budget, I would think that most of the funding has to come from city and state.

Webb: Yeah, yeah, and probably not so much from city, because the city doesn't have that much, state and federal, um-hmm. If we see Martha this afternoon—she's the assistant director of the center—she could probably answer that question. I'm no good on money questions like that. (laughs) I just know that we're still going. I'm so proud that we're still going.

DePue: As the center was opened, it sounds like its mission, its charter, kind of evolved. One of those early things that maybe surprised you and others was the importance of having a place for battered women to go and a rape center.

Webb: It really surprised us. We had no idea that it was going to take over, which it did. Not everybody wanted that. There was a long period of discussions about this. Some, a few women, felt that these women were, in essence, not worth bothering with. What were they doing, living with these people who beat them up? But, we had not before met women in their circumstances—those of us who were middle class women—three or four kids, no money, no job, no education.

We started, for example, if a woman comes in without a GED, we see that she gets it, if she hasn't finished high school. We've had women go on to college, and that's wonderful. Our motto, which we adopted right away, was to "Help women to help themselves."

One of the problems we had in the beginning was that we had all these women who'd been involved in starting the Women's Center, getting it moving anyway, and they tended to hand out advice. A lot of us were mothers; a lot of us were wives. So we asked Bobbie Piper, Roberta Piper, who was working on her doctorate in psychology, to come in to discuss this problem. She taught us about empathy. I don't believe that I had heard the word before that meeting. In other words, you're not there to tell her what to do. You're there to tell her there are opportunities that she can look at. But you're not her advisor.

DePue: So empathy versus sympathy, where sympathy possibly would enable the women to—

Webb: To do what they needed to do. Then, we worked hard to find out what was available. There wasn't a lot available in those days.

DePue: You mean in terms of support for people in those kinds of relationships?

Bobbie Piper, Rita Moss, Howard Webb (Joyce's husband) and Gillian Harrison enjoy the Women's Center's 10th Anniversary celebration at the Holiday Inn in November 1982.

Webb: Yes, yes. We were horrified if a woman went back into the situation. But after you've had some experience, you can see why some of the women go back. There's no place else for them to go, or he wants the children, or he said, "I'm going to take the children if you don't come back."

But the fact that they know there's an asylum they can go to, if they need to, a safe place. Asylum's become a bad word, hasn't it? It really just means a haven. (laughs)

DePue: I would think one of the big challenges was security concerns. How did you address that?

Webb: Well, that's interesting. We were on Walnut, a very busy street. That is, it was a two-way street then. We were across the street from the Catholic Church here in town, lots of traffic. We had a front porch. We talked about being worried about it.

We had women students who lived upstairs to answer the phone at night. The rest of the time volunteers were doing it. We talked to the police

about it. One rule we made that I think paid off very big for us at the very beginning, very early on in the board, was that we would go to the hospitals, go to the police, go to the sheriff's department in Murphysboro and everything, and tell them what we would do. We wouldn't tell them that we could do things that we couldn't do, but that we could provide temporary housing and things.

We found out they were very pleased to have us. The hospital was pleased to have us; the police department was pleased to have us, because they didn't know what to do with these women, when they picked them up in terrible circumstances. So that worked out very well.

DePue: Were there legal issues that came up early on, that you had to have an order of protection so that men couldn't come to this place?

Webb: Well, we weren't getting orders of protection then. That came later. We do a lot of that.

DePue: But how, legally, could you bar a man from coming to the center?

Webb: We just…You can't go in somebody's house if they say you can't come in. About the only thing I know that we had going for us…I know this because a lot of the women involved were law students; the law school was new, and she's my lawyer now. The question was about trespassing, and she said "Trespassing is if someone comes in your property **after** you have told them they can't. So if you tell a man he can't come in, and he comes in, he's trespassing.

We counted on the police, to stand by for us, and they did. They were very, very good. We thought we'd have a lot of problems, and we didn't. We had more threats than problems, a phone threat, you know. "I'm going to come over and I'm going to blah blah blah." I learned to say, "Come right over." I said, "Are you familiar with the Carbondale Police? (laughs) They can get to us within two minutes."

DePue: Did it surprise you and others that the police were as cooperative and supportive as they were?

Webb: I don't know if we were surprised; we were pleased. We hadn't realized what a problem it was for them to do it. They were really good, really good.

We had one incident, which was interesting. I wasn't there, but a young volunteer was on the telephone in the house, and a young woman staying with us was out on this nice front porch, with a small child. A Volkswagen pulled up in front of the house, and a man got out, ran to the porch, grabbed the child, ran back to the Volkswagen. The volunteer saw this and ran outside and yelled at him, "Oh stop; you have a flat tire." He didn't.

But she had time to open the door, grab the child, and he was on his way. (laughs) So that was our big problem.

No one was ever hurt; no one was ever physically attacked. It just didn't happen. It was always a possibility; it's still a possibility. You noticed when we went to the Women's Center this morning that the doors are locked. We got in, because I know how to get in. (laughs) If I'm on the phone…When I'm volunteering, I'm at the other end of the building, and I can see if there's a man coming in. I would probably go to the door. I won't unlock it for him until I find out his purpose there. He may be a social worker. It may be a man who says, "Well, my girlfriend is here. I want to see her." "I don't know who's here. We don't give out information about who's here," and we don't. But he's not coming in. That's just the way it is, and it works. We don't have a problem with that. People accept it.

DePue: Once these women are there, having gone through some extremely traumatic experiences themselves, what is the obligation or the role of the Women's Center to provide some kind of counseling and support in that respect? Because again, that's pushing the boundaries of the amateurs that you were called—

Webb: Well, now it's really good. We have on-site counselors, adult and children's counselors. We have counselors for women who have been attacked sexually and children. We have a case manager in the shelter department, who is going to help the woman make plans, but she's expected to make plans. We have some transitional housing.

When we got started, we thought women could stay one or two nights. More often it might be one or two months. (laughs) We have some transitional housing we can use that was provided by the Jackson County Housing Authority. So, as you can see, there's cooperation coming in here all over the place. We have people giving household things all the time. We don't buy linens and things like that; they've given to us.

DePue: How about food and medicine, things like that?

Webb: We buy food. The women come with their own medication. We have standard, over-the-counter stuff there too. We can get them medical help if needed. There's a lot more help available to people now than there was when we started. But we expect that they [the center guests] are going to take responsibility.

Some of them will be working with the woman who helps the women get…orders of protection. I couldn't think of the term. That's not unusual, but an order of protection says, "He can't come near her." It's not there to prevent him from coming near her. You're still vulnerable in an order of protection, particularly if it's a stalking situation. Those are dangerous situations. But at

least we can get the orders of protection over in Jackson County Court or in other counties. We don't work just in Jackson County.

DePue: If you had a woman or children who needed to go to the hospital or to the clinic, because they'd been battered or abused, would a volunteer accompany them?

Webb: We'd probably take them, and maybe a staff member would stay with them. We don't go to someone's home. We don't put ourselves in a position where we could get in trouble. Did that once, and I never did it again. (laughs) I went with a woman to get her clothing from a trailer near Murphysboro. After we were in, and she was getting her clothing, here came this drunken mess out of another room. (laughs) We went fast; we learned a lesson.

DePue: Is part of the ability to get grants tied to the fact that you have those kinds of professional services? Is that a part of it?

Webb: I feel sure, yes; I feel sure that it is. Staff could tell you more about that than I could. I've never been a paid member of the staff. In fact, the only paid job I've had in all these years that I've been here was a half-time job at the library, when my son was in college, as an archivist. (laughs) That was interesting for a couple of years.

DePue: How about as a center for women who had been raped and gone through that traumatic experience?

Webb: We have a whole staff to help people deal with that. Even the police will call and say, “Listen, we need somebody from rape services down at the hospital.” They all know that we have these services available and that there are two people on call all the time, a primary and a secondary, to go to be with the victim, not in her home, but at the hospital, where she needs to get an examination, for example, or wherever else it can be done that isn't in the home.

I was out one night on the railroad tracks, with a bunch of policemen and a fellow from the sheriff's department. We were all rejoicing because the girl had beaten up the attacker, and he didn't get to attack. (laughs) He broke her nose, but we were very proud of her. We were over, looking for evidence of who he was.

DePue: Did you go out on a lot of those cases yourself?

Webb: For ten years, um-hmm.

DePue: I would assume you have some stories or anecdotes to tell about some of those that are more memorable than others.

Webb: Well, I think I started to tell you about one of them. These, you understand, are all at night. (laughs) I was called and asked to come to Anna, which is twenty miles south of Carbondale. I said I would come. Howard said, "You're going where?" (laughs) I said, "I'll be in touch; I'll be in touch." This is pre-cell phones by the way. I went to the Anna Hospital, and there was what I would think was a very elderly woman now. She was probably about the age I am now, which is eighty-four. She was a widow, living alone and had been in bed. A man had broken into her house and had sexually attacked her. She knew he was very large, and he was an African American.

When I got there, she was in the examining room. It was a woman doctor who had called me, who worked in the hospital there. There weren't very many women doctors in small towns in southern Illinois then. I had met her before. The policeman kept standing there. Finally, I said to him, “This is going to be a very personal exam. You should leave the room.” He didn't want to, but he did do it. The woman was being very intelligent and calm. It had happened; it was a bad thing that happened; she had been frightened, but she was not going to let this ruin her life. While I was still there, the police told me they had a suspect, and they did. It was a man who had been released from prison a day or two earlier, where he'd been because he had raped somebody. So he just came back and raped somebody else. (laughs)

DePue: Did just finding that out make you angry?

Webb: Oh, by that time I was used to it. It's hard to believe that people can be so dumb, but I thought, Well, maybe he figured he was living better in prison than he was out of it. I don't know. I don't know. It's not easy for me to understand violence in people. I'm sort of nonviolent…No, I'm completely nonviolent. (laughs) I don't know, when you're involved in something like that, you're thinking about what happened to the woman more than what he did.

We've had some murders too. I remember vividly, the father of a murdered student. She was raped and murdered. They only got the person who did it a few years ago, many years after her death. The family had put up a reward, if they could find out who did this to her. I was on the Women's Center phone one day when her father called. He said they were not getting anyplace with it, and they were going to distribute the reward money.

They wanted to give $5,000 to the Women's Center. I thought that was amazing. I said to him, "I've lost a child too." We talked for about an hour. I had to get somebody else to answer the phone, but we talked. Of course, I didn't lose my child under such horrific circumstances. He was a good father (laughs) and I thought it was wonderful that he was willing to do that, because he knew that we were trying to help victims of sexual violence.

DePue: Did you encounter circumstances where the women would feel guilt about the experience?

Webb: Oh yes, oh yes. I remember another thing. I was on the desk at the Women's Center, not the present one, the previous one. The desk in that case was right in the living room, so we had a lot of contact with the women who were there. A woman came to the door and came in, a young woman. It was a warm day, and she had enough clothing on to get her through an arctic winter. I had had enough experience by then to say to myself, This young woman's been raped.

I didn't know how to get to her, but she was almost not able to speak. I finally got her in a separate place and asked her if we could help her. I did get her help. I called the Rape Action Committee, and whoever was on duty then came over. I don't think she ever got over it. I see her from time to time, and I think she never got her life back. I don't know what her life was like before this happened. But that kind of thing can happen, and that's terribly sad, terribly sad.

DePue: Do you have some incidents that you look back to and can say, "We changed that person's life in a very positive way?"

Webb: Oh yes. My favorite one was a woman who came…Let's see, she brought at least one of her children, maybe two with her, from way down in southern Illinois, south of us. [They] lived in a trailer. Her husband saw to it that all the windows were covered, and he locked the trailer from outside when he left to go to work every morning. They had quite a few kids. She had never been before outside the county where that trailer was located. Somebody told her about us. I don't recall the circumstances of that, but she came. We were pretty impressed that she did that. (laughs) He would come up and yell from the parking lot and everything, but he never did anything else.

At one point, she decided to go back. We were very disappointed. Well, that didn't last long. She was back in a few days. Then she decided—and this is wonderful—one of her children was in, I think it was Arizona. Now I'm talking about a woman whose visit to Jackson County was her first travel. (laughs) She decided—she had a car with her—she was going to take her daughter and move to Arizona. I'll never forget the morning she left the parking lot in front of the old Women's Center. We had her provided with so much food, (laughs) plenty of money to make the trip, to buy gas, to do everything and maps. We taught her how to read a map.

She left that place, and she got to Tucson, Arizona. For years, I sent her money at Christmas. She got a job; it was a cleaning person's job, and she volunteered at a women's center. That's one of my favorite stories. I was so proud of her; we all were. We were really proud of her. That's really great.

One of the women who came to us, with three children, early on, she was a Caucasian woman. The children were mixed, African American children, two girls and a boy. She ended up as president of the Women's Center. I think we were the first Women's Center ever to have a former guest, which is what we called them in the old days. I don't use the word clients with them; I use guests, but I'm not a social worker, (laughs) different language. She did well. I know that one of the girls became an engineer. SIU has done a good job of recruiting women into engineering. That's pretty good stuff.

DePue: Being next to a university, I'm sure, has pluses and minuses. Are a lot of volunteers from the university?

Webb: Oh yes. It has pluses, let me tell you; it really does. Yes, a lot of our volunteers are from the university, and that's fine. Certainly social work volunteers certainly end up there a lot. When we decided, some years ago, that the children who stayed with us—this was in the old house—needed to have experience with men who weren't violent, we got male volunteers to come and play with the children. That was a big leap forward. (laughs) We had our first male intern over at that house too. He couldn't go upstairs to the bedrooms, but he was great, and he could do all the rest of it. We got over the watch out for men thing. We just learned to judge whether the man at the door needed to come in.

Joyce Webb addresses a gathering at the Southern Illinois University Student Center in Carbondale.

DePue: When you say we got over that, are you talking about the people who were volunteering there, the original group of people, or to get the women beyond that?

Webb: Well, women can still be concerned. Women who are staying with us can still be concerned if they see that car outside or that man outside. But they know they're safe. As long as they're in the center, they're safe. They know we'll call the police. We have an alarm system that goes directly to the police.

We just succeeded in providing a safe alternative to these women. We can't make their lives perfect. We can't say, "Oh, I'm sure you won't have any more troubles in your life," because some of them will. Some of them have trouble all their lives. These aren't, by the way, all young women. They are primarily youngish women but not all of them. Some of them are

grandmothers. It's pretty tough to see a woman in a position like that, when she's not young enough to go into the job market; she has no visible means of support. It's hard; it's hard.

DePue: Was there a downside being next to the university, because it’s an environment where there would be rapes, where students would be raped?

Webb: Not really. I grew up in a university district, and I've lived in one. Most of my life [has been] spent around universities.

A recent situation—it was in the newspapers—[about] a woman who didn't get raped, was that she was walking across campus at 3:00 in the morning and that she heard someone behind her. My reply to that is, “What made you think it was safe to walk across a campus at 3:00 in the morning?” Not everybody has good sense. I'm very glad that she managed to run away, but they don't all. People will do very strange things. They're not aware enough of how they should take care of themselves.

One of the things I have found, as an elderly widow now, is that I think twice about going out and doing something in the evening. I think about where I'm going to park. I remember the first time I went to a friend’s library annual dinner. I had to park a little distance from the library. Another car pulled in right beside me. I asked where they were going, and they told me. I said, “May I walk with you? I don't want to walk over there alone.” At the end of the evening, they were right beside me to walk me back to my car. That's just being sensible.

I never leave an unlocked car. I never leave an unlocked house, because I'm alone, and I have to be sensible. But I wish that the parents would get this though. I wish parents wouldn't do things like getting their daughters license plates that say DEBBIES18, big mistake, (laughs) not a good thing to do. We have to always keep educating people.

DePue: You mentioned one time you had this woman come in who was way overdressed.

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: What's your thought about the argument that these women are dressing provocatively, so they are taunting men to rape them?

Webb: Now that's interesting, because that's been on my mind. I'm really tired of seeing the way women are dressing now. (laughs) I'm revealing my age here, good and proper.

DePue: It sounds like you're pulled in a couple of different directions.

Webb: Well, I am. I remember years ago, Mark, when miniskirts came into popularity on campuses. I remember Howard coming home—he taught for many years—and he said, “You're not going to believe this.”

“What?”

He said, “You know those miniskirts?”

“Yes.”

“Well, a girl in the front row today sat down.” And he said, “I just said to her, Go sit in the back row." (laughs)

At the same time, an elderly, distinguished professor was here in our department for a year or so. He and his wife were walking across campus when a young student in a miniskirt dropped her books and leaned over, nothing underneath. That's pretty dumb, if you ask me. Do I think it's asking for it? Yeah. I look at pictures of people…

Well, it seems as though sex has taken over on television and in all kinds of ways. I don't think that that should be the center of everything that's happening. Just people having multiple sex partners, they don't seem to understand there are health risks there, but there are; there are real health risks there.

DePue: Or emotional risks?

Webb: Physical and emotional, um-hmm, yeah. I think I'm kind of old fashioned. I think I'm sort of a prude, but that's okay. It got me an awfully nice marriage that lasted an awfully long time. (laughs)

DePue: Well, here's a question you might not have anticipated. Occasionally there are men who are abused.

Webb: Oh yes, and we have dealt with some.

Joyce talks to attendees at a T-Shirt Rally in the 1980s. Supporters designed and made the T-shirts to show their support for sexual assault victims.

DePue: So the center isn't exclusively dealing with just abused women?

Webb: They can't stay with us, but we can help them find a safe place to stay and things. Yeah, men do, but it's not frequent; it's not frequent.

DePue: But I'm sure it's hard for a man who's been abused, just from a societal standpoint.

Webb: Just to say something. Yeah, we know that. I'm sure all the women's shelters in the country know that, that it's hard for men to do it. There are some groups that have been established—I think there might be one in southern Illinois—of men who can get together and talk about this. But yes, it's a problem, but it's not like the problem with women. It's different.

I wanted to tell you, because I had forgotten to, that early on, when we were in the first house, we got a call from a young, local minister. He and another younger minister were trying to help women who were victims of sexual assault. In essence, what he said to the board was, We're men; we need women to do this. That's when we established what we then called the Rape Action Committee—it's called Rape Services now—so that women could call this one number, and help was going to be on the way. That was important. I was very proud of them. I knew both of those young men, who were ministers, and I thought they were really great guys to do that.

Another group of women, not the Women's Center, established something called…What was it called? Well, it started with a K; I don't know. But what they did was to collect money so that, if a young woman, for example after a rape, if she wanted to have an abortion and had no money, they'd pass the word around town that there was someplace to call and get money.

That group is no longer going, because it's no longer needed. A lot of people don't seem to realize that there are not so many abortions any more. (laughs) But that was not connected with the Women's Center. We couldn't do that and get funding.

DePue: I know what I wanted to ask you. You mentioned some of your successes that you were happy to talk about. Any tragedies that really stick with you?

Webb: When you say tragedy, I think immediately, death. I'm not aware of anyone that I know. But this is at least a semi-tragic situation. On the desk at the second center again, a young woman came in the door. I looked at her, and I thought, I know her. And she looked at me, and she said, "Joyce?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Do you remember when I came in here with my mother?" I said, "And now it's you." She said, "Yes." She said, "I guess I didn't learn my lesson well enough." (laughs) So it was generational.

Actually, I've had more good things. Like I go to the grocery store; people still come up to me and say, "Are you Joyce?" Because I've done that Tuesday morning[s], almost thirty-nine years now, on the phone. They remind me of their circumstances and when they were there. So I get more positive vibes out of things than negative.

There've been some negatives. I talked to a woman who was immensely distraught, recently on the phone. Then something very bad happened in her family. But you can't prevent everything.

DePue: I would think there are frustrations in this as well. Are there women who have a personality type, who seem to be drawn to the kind of men who abuse them?

Webb: Oh yes, oh yes, again and again. Part of that, I think, may start out when they're young, in that they have no one to support them. They get pregnant. So they'll go along with, you know, whatever they can. Yes, and I've known women outside of my Women's Center experience, who have been brilliantly bad choosers of men.

DePue: Brilliantly bad.

Webb: Brilliantly bad. I've known men who've been brilliantly bad choosers too. (laughs) I think a lot of what young people get now has very little to do with what I understood to be [an] important part about choosing a mate and things like that.

I believe I told you at one point that Howard and I had been so well acquainted, because we had written to each other, daily for a seventeen month period and had become acquainted at that level. A lot of that doesn't happen. Now, girls may have so many connections before they even get up to a marriage. It's a different world; it's a really different world. The society that I knew is gone; it's not there.

DePue: Does that mean that there's a greater need for a women's center than there used to be thirty, forty, fifty years ago?

Webb: Yes, um-hmm, I think it does. When we started, God knows the need had always existed.

By the way, farmers get away with a lot of business. There's nobody around. We've had farm wives who've stayed with us. It's scary. I know that one of my mother's sisters was an abused wife. I only know that because my mother, to my surprise, told me. My mother called my connection with the Women's Center this way, "Your work," (laughs) which I never thought sounded very sympathetic to what we do. Your work. "Are you still involved in your work?" (laughs) "Yes mother, I am."

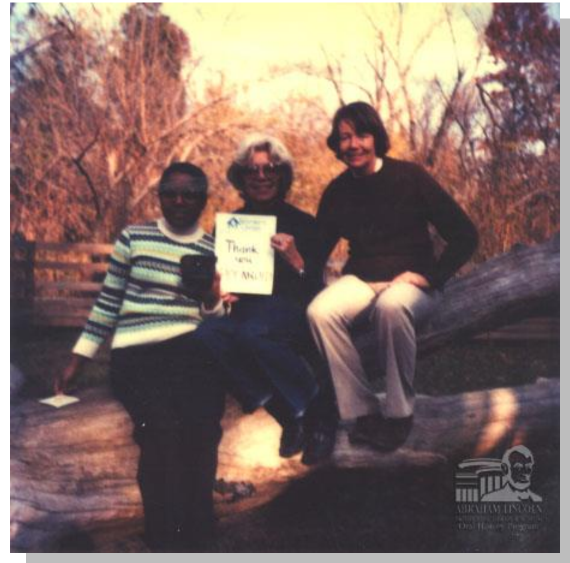
DePue: How large an area did the Women's Center serve?

Webb: Well, we took on the world at first, whoever showed up. Still, to an extent we do, but at that time, we had no place else to tell women to go. Now, we have a book full of things. We can give them numbers. We'll get a call—this is not unusual—a woman calling, "to see if you have room for me." I'll say, "Where are you calling from?" "Chicago." I'm going to give her a list of Chicago

things. We can't get enough money to serve as the out-of-town (laughs) place for everybody. If a woman…Let's say she comes through town, and he takes off and leaves, and she's not from here. We can take her.

We get a lot of calls from homeless women now, which we did not in the beginning. There is a homeless shelter here in town. We can only take a homeless woman temporarily, if we're not full. But domestic violence is the priority. A lot of the homeless women don't want to go to the homeless shelter; it's got rules. (laughs) We have rules too; we have a lot of rules. The women are given a lot of rules when they come in. And it's assumed that they're going to abide by them. Otherwise it won't work. And we get some for whom it's very difficult to abide by them.

DePue: Especially early on, how did you get the word out, so that people would know that the center even existed? The people who needed the center would probably be, in some cases, the least informed part of the society.


Joyce Webb and Genevieve Houghton share a moment with a friend at a meeting in upstate Illinois during the 1980s.

Webb: Well, we would tell the newspaper things, and we would tell the *Daily Egyptian*, which is the campus newspaper here, and then go out and talk to groups, church groups and people like that. There were a lot of people at that big meeting in '71, who did not end up working with us but who were there for…I still remember, as I walked out of that meeting, a young woman. We were having to wait by the door, and she whispered to me, "I've got four kids, and he doesn't know it, but we're not having any more." (laughs) I thought, Good for you, girl. (laughs) Four is enough.

I think what we hoped…We were very idealistic, you know. We're going to solve this problem. We're not going to solve this problem, because new people keep getting born, and societies are not the same from one generation to the next. No, we're not going to solve the problem. We can ameliorate the problem. We can insist that services need to be available for these people, and we can be sure our voice is heard.

DePue: Is a lot of the discovery about the center because of churches and police departments and hospitals and other agencies?

Webb: Um-hmm. The hospitals and the law enforcement agencies were delighted; they really were. Not all of them, not all of the counties. We serve, for the most part, about seven counties down here now, although we also serve other people. But some were very resistant, but they can come around, and they do.

DePue: Well, I wanted to kind of finish this portion with what I know you did with various radio and television stations around the area, and not just you. Amy, your daughter, helped me find this. This is some of the possible times that you would have appeared. It's not necessarily a specific station or anything like that, but some of the topics that might have been addressed. I want you to tell us about going to these radio stations and doing these kinds of things.

Webb: (laughs) Well, did I tell you about Genevieve and I going to a town, where we felt we had to get out of town fast after we were on the radio station? (laughs)

DePue: Didn't hear about that.

Webb: As we came out of the broadcast office, where they had been quite chilly to us, Genevieve said, "Well, we ought to get a cup of coffee." Then she looked at me, and she said, "We ought to get out of town as fast as we can get." (both laugh) So we got.

I had an experience myself on a Christian radio station, where a caller was very nasty to me over the phone. But the host took on the caller, and I thought that was very nice.

DePue: What were the specific topics that you were discussing?

Webb: That we provided temporary housing for women, and we tried to help them to improve their situation. I told them about the rape action going out for people. I told them about what we provide for children. But a lot of people couldn't get by the pro-choice part of the Women's Center, about which I was much more open then. Then I did a radio program for WSIU. Amy says she thinks they have it. It was syndicated for a while. I did that for a while. I know it was syndicated because my cousin Jim was driving through Oregon at 3:00 one morning, and he said, “I heard this voice on the radio.” And he said, “It was you.” (laughs)

DePue: All the way in Oregon.

Webb: In Oregon, at 3:00 in the morning.

DePue: WTWD, what did that stand for?

Webb: I don't know what that is.

DePue: Women Talking, Women Doing. Is that it?

Webb: I don't know what that is. These are records—

DePue: Of various shows that had been done.

Webb: The radio program I was proudest of—and it was a fifteen minute radio program—I got three young women, who were lesbian women. I promised them I would not use their names; we'd use other names, because this was way back when. I asked if they would come in and talk with me about dealing with their families, when they realized their orientation. They did, and it was very moving, lots of tears. (laughs) I thought, How brave of them. Certainly it was at that time, to do that, and how difficult. In one case, total estrangement from the family. That's very sad, you know. Of course, all of that stuff has changed a great deal, and that's fine with me. I figure I know who I am, and if they know who they are, that's fine; that's what we are. (laughs) I don't have any animus about it, at all.

Let's see…I liked doing that little program, except it was hard getting people to show up on time. I was really very free to make up…I think it was a fifteen minute; it might have been thirty. I'm not sure. I was very free to discuss anything having to do…It was presented that I was from the Women's Center, and people liked it. That was another way to get the word out.

DePue: I'd like to change gears on you now and turn the subject to the Equal Rights Amendment and the passage of that. This was a, let's call it a battle, that went on for ten years. It started—

Webb: It was the second battle. There was one in the '20s.

DePue: That resulted, as we talked before, about the—

Webb: Votes for women.

DePue: Yeah. The battle for the Equal Rights Amendment passage started in 1972, when it passed Congress. It passed Congress with an overwhelming majority in both the House and the Senate. Then, obviously, because of the requirements to the U.S. Constitution, has to go out to the states and be ratified by, I think it's three fourths of states; thirty-eight states have to ratify it. Within a year or two, there were at least thirty, and it was increasing. Eventually there were thirty-five states that ratified it, within the first two or three years of its being out there. One of the states that didn't pass it, early on, was Illinois. And one of the states that became a battleground, as you know better than I—

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: …was Illinois. One of the reasons for that was because there was an active movement to oppose it, and that was led by Phyllis Schlafly from Alton, Illinois, who started—

Webb: Eagle Forum.[24]

DePue: Eagle Forum and the STOP ERA movement. I'm sorry for taking some time to just kind of lay the groundwork on this.

Webb: No, that's all right.

DePue: One of the challenges that Illinois had was that, in 1970, the state had passed a new State Constitution. And one of the provisions of the State Constitution—you're nodding your head, because you know this oh too well—that it took three-fifths majority in the Illinois Legislature to adopt a new amendment to the Constitution. And that was applied, not just to the State Constitution, but to the U.S. Constitution as well. So, I'll let you pick it up from there.

Webb: But the new State Constitution had an equal rights provision in it. I have never been able to understand how anyone could be against equal rights. (laughs) I'm an American; I was born here; my parents were born here, not that that matters. Why wouldn't I have equal rights under the laws of my country? I'm expected to live by the laws of my country, equally, as men are. But why on earth could anyone try to prevent this?

Then I come to the reason why. If you tell a lot of people that the only people who want this are pro-choice people, who want millions of abortions, you can get them. And that happened. (laughs) You can get them. That was the major trip-up in this state. And the head of Eagle Forum [Phyllis Schlafly] is a resident of this state.

DePue: Let me read…You're aware that I've interviewed Mrs. Schlafly, as well.

Webb: Yes, I am.

DePue: I found a passage that kind of crystallizes her opposition to the ERA. I don't want to misspeak on her behalf, so I found a quote here.

Webb: Okay.

DePue: "There are no gender specific words in the Constitution. All the words in the Constitution are sex neutral, like citizen, resident, person, senator, president, we the people. They are all sex neutral words. What ERA would do would be

[24] Eagle Forum is a conservative interest group in the United States, founded by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972 and is the parent organization that also includes the Eagle Forum Education and Legal Defense Fund and the Eagle Forum PAC. The Eagle Forum has been primarily focused on social issues; it describes itself as pro-family and reports membership of 80,000.

to make all laws under the Constitution sex neutral. Well, the Constitution already was, so it really was a fraud."

Webb: Very interesting. (laughs)

DePue: Now, she obviously had a lot more to say about the ERA.

Webb: A lot more, uh-huh.

DePue: But that was at the beginning of her discussion about it and what she basically said was, it wasn't necessary.

Webb: Well, that sounds wonderful, but the problem is that it was necessary.

DePue: Why?

Webb: Well, let me give you an example. In the state of Georgia, until very recent years, a woman could not handle her own money, a woman like me. I am a widow. I have income from my husband's retirement and other sources. The state of Georgia had laws that required that a male had to be in charge of that money. Now let's see, she didn't have a son. Would she have a nephew, brother in-law, somebody, but not her? Well, that's not equal. But what that is talking about is states' rights, and that gets into this discussion. In other words, Georgia was saying, well, we have the right to do that. We make our own laws in Georgia. I'm not singling out Georgia just because they were the only ones who had unfair practices towards women, but because I always thought that was a noticeable one. (laughs)

DePue: Can you think of any for the State of Illinois at that time?

Webb: I wasn't aware…Lt's see.

DePue: I would think if you had a law like that and you also had this new provision in the 1970 constitution—

Webb: Yeah, I thought we were free and fine. On the other hand, I'll tell you something that was unequal. I've lived in this county for fifty-five years, and I can't get on a jury. [Do you] know why? Because when I have been called, twice, I've been dismissed by defense counsel immediately with this question, "Are you connected with the Women's Center?" "Yes, I'm a volunteer at the Women's Center." Off the list. (laughs)

DePue: What would be the rationale for taking you off the list?

Webb: Their client was involved with something, involved with a woman, and here's this dangerous Women's Center person sitting there, who's not going to be—"

DePue: So that you would have a bias against their client.

Webb: I would have a bias, um-hmm, um-hmm. So I never did get to serve on a jury. My husband did once, but I guess they didn't know he was married to this awful woman, who was connected to the Women's Center. (laughs)

DePue: Well, here is another one of the main issues that was always advanced by the STOP ERA forces.[25] That was the issue of being drafted into the military and serving in combat. Your reaction to that particular part of the argument?

Webb: Well, I thought that people could be drafted. I wasn't sure about the combat part, because women, on the whole, are physically not as strong as men. Women have periods once a month; (laughs) men don't--young women. I thought there were areas in which women could be used that would be immensely helpful, like the WAAC in World War II, like the women flyers in World War II, who received absolutely no credit for what they did at the time. But women are different from men, physically different.

DePue: Well, emotionally different?

Webb: Well, that's a good question. Every one of us is a little emotionally different from every other one, (laughs) whether there's some kind…There's of a male outlook here and a female outlook here. It's always been a bit fuzzy for me.

DePue: Well, I don't want to get myself in too much trouble, but let's just say that radical feminists at the time were arguing that the only differences between men and women, besides the physical ones, were those things that were imposed by the culture and society. Those would be these emotional things that we're addressing.

Webb: Okay. And I have never been there. I am not a radical feminist. To me, feminism has nothing to do with that or whether you shave your legs or not—that's personal—or whether you wear a bra or not. Nobody, by the way, ever burned any bras, but it's a great story. It was around for years. That's not feminism to me. Feminism to me is a point from which you take off.

DePue: Did you know women who were that strong in their views?

Webb: Oh heavens yes, quite a few.

DePue: And obviously, you know that Mrs. Schlafly used that to her advantage, that here's these radical feminists who insist that there's no difference between men and women, except what's imposed by society, and that means that we're going to have women in infantry units in the foxholes with our men.

Webb: Um-hmm, yeah.

[25] STOP ERA is the name of Phyllis Schlafly's campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Schlafly founded STOP ERA after the proposed amendment was passed by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in 1972.

DePue: And if we passed ERA, that would be the inevitable result.

Webb: Well she's very good at what she does. (laughs)

DePue: Don't you think that the way the language was written that would be the inevitable result, that there would be a lawsuit by a woman, who will be demanding to serve in combat units, because that's what the ERA—

Webb: Well, they are already serving in combat units; aren't they? And we don't have an Equal Rights Amendment.'70s.

Webb: Almost.

DePue: That it wasn't necessary.

Webb: But it wouldn't solve the problem of discriminatory state laws, would it? Because the states have not accepted, apparently, the fact that the Constitution is the Constitution…Interesting point.

DePue: Another issue that Mrs. Schlafly used to her advantage was the issue of homosexuality and lesbian rights, gay and lesbian rights. What are your views on that particular part of the debate?

Webb: Well, they're human beings, aren't they? (laughs) If they live in this country, they're probably citizens of this country. I believe that homosexuality is not a choice. I think it's pretty obvious that it's not a choice. By the way, one of Mrs. Schlafly's sons came out. But he told his mother he would not change his lifestyle. I've never understood that hatred, because I don't much understand hatred. I mean past Hitler, I don't much understand hatred. (laughs)

DePue: I know she wouldn't characterize it as hatred, that it wasn't necessary to have rights explicitly assigned to gays and lesbians, that, again, those protections are already there under the U.S. Constitution.

Webb: But they're not, because the states can abrogate those rights. If it says in Missouri that two males or two females cannot enter into a civil union—whatever you wish to call it—that's a state rule. So that's not making them equal, is it, to a man and a woman who want to enter into a union.

The sacredness of marriage, I think, is really interesting, considering the divorce rate in this country. I get the feeling sometimes that the people don't see it as quite as sacred as they pretend. (laughs)

DePue: It's interesting that these debates didn't go away when ERA did fail. They only continue.

Webb: No, no, they didn't go away at all. Now, I—

DePue: But can't you make the same argument for a man marrying several women?

Webb: Well, I can't, but I'm sure a man who wanted to could. (laughs) Yeah, that's very interesting, because of the recent convictions in that department. I think you can make a case for anything, but also that each of us makes decisions about whether this case works for me. It may work for that person over there, but I cannot go with it. That makes us individuals, and that makes us human, and that makes us argumentative. (laughs)

DePue: And the way it works out in this country is that the Supreme Court, the U.S. Supreme Court, decides what are things that are covered under the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and other amendments, the 13th and 14th Amendments, in particular, and what are things that should be left up to the state to decide.

Webb: Well I have, in the last couple of years, gotten into the habit of thinking of that group as the extreme court, not the Supreme Court. It's poorly constituted, in terms of reflecting the population of the United States. I was awfully glad when we finally got a woman on the Supreme Court. That took long enough. I'm sorry she's gone; she turned out to be a good Justice. Then she retired, of course. And we have three women on the Supreme Court now, but they're outnumbered. (laughs)

DePue: Do you think that's not fair?

Webb: Oh well, it's normal. What I think is that the backgrounds of the Supreme Court members, at present…I believe six of the members are members of the Catholic Church. That's a bit unusual, because 60 percent of Americans are not Catholic. And there are points of view in the church with which some might agree and some might not agree.

DePue: I think, perhaps, there's only one or none that are Protestant.

Webb: You may be right.

DePue: I'm wondering about Kennedy; I can't recall what Kennedy is.

Webb: So that's not my Supreme Court. (laughs)

DePue: Let's take this back to the 1970s.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: I know you had at least one opportunity to debate a STOP ERA advocate on TV?

Webb: Yes and I wish I could remember it better, because Amy remembers it, my daughter, but I don't.

DePue: Now Amy and I are going to try to find the actual footage.

Webb: I know that you are. (laughs)

DePue: So with your collection, maybe we can actually put that up as well. That would be fun.

Webb: That would be fun, yeah. I probably wasn't very good. I'm not a trained debater. All I can do, in talking about these things, is to be myself, to present myself. I had decided, when I was very young—this church leaving really changed my life—that if there was one thing I was not going to be in my life, I was not going to be narrow-minded. I don't admire narrow minds very much. (laughs) I like people who can…They don't have to agree with me about things, but it's nice if they can listen and if we can discuss things on an adult basis. I think that maybe the choices I made when I was very, very young helped me along into this life. That's what Robert Frost's wonderful poem, *The Road Not Taken*, is about. (laughs)

DePue: So, suffice to say, you don't recall many specifics about this debate that you had?

Webb: No, I don't and I don't know why. But there were times in my life, there when I was really going through stuff, and that may be why that I'm not remembering it. Also, I never had a great memory. And I must say that memory does not improve with age. (laughs)

I have learned, when I can't think of a word, to try to think around that word. Usually then I'll get it back, or a name, I'll get it back But I have to free associate to do it. (laughs.

DePue: I'm hoping you'll have a better memory when it comes with my next series of questions. Nineteen seventy-seven, the U.S. Congress decided to promote an event for the National Women's Conference. It was held in Houston, Texas. You ended up having the opportunity to go to that. I want you to tell me, first of all, how you ended up being able to go to that, because I think that's a story in itself.

Webb: It wasn't easy. (laughs) There was a major meeting in Springfield, and it involved—

DePue: Of what group?

Webb: All the feminist groups and all of Phyllis Schlafly's supporters too. There was a big argument about who was going to be allowed to go to this meeting. Much trouble ensued, and the groups ended up deciding that, on the feminist side, only part of the great big list of people could go. It was going to be cut in half. It was cut in half alphabetically. Now I was a Cooper when I was young, but I married a Webb, and I found out what the end of the alphabet means in

things like that. So some of the people from our Women's Center who were planning to go were fine. They were going to be able to be certified, and I wasn't. So, Howard agreed to help pay the expenses so that I could go, representing the Women's Center.

DePue: I've got a quick question then. You said that Schlafly's forces were in this group, as well, so does that mean that some of the delegates—

Webb: No, only our group was divided, because her group was smaller. They were setting a limit.

DePue: So were there people from Illinois going to this convention that were representing Schlafly's side of the argument?

Webb: Oh yes, a lot. I did get to go. The meeting was in a huge public building in Houston. I'd never been to Houston before that, although since then I've had a daughter living in that area for many years.

I remember the first day, walking into the building, there were policemen, Houston policemen, lining both sides. They were calling those of us who were on the wrong side, obviously—because the others were wearing tags and things—bitches. Hey, bitch, are you going in there? I'd never been around people who acted like that before. (laughs) It was something.

DePue: I assume you weren't laughing about it at the time. Did you get angry about it?

Webb: Oh, I don't get angry easily. I just looked at them. Really, what can you do, get yourself arrested? (laughs) I just went in. I didn't pay any attention, I didn't think much of them. Oh, the name of the major newsman…he's retired now, from the Dakotas? Tom Brokaw.

DePue: Tom Brokaw.

Webb: Tom Brokaw was reporting there, I remember. I'd never seen him before. I thought, My gosh, I'm taller than he is. (laughs) He was very good though.

What it ended up being was a match between the radical feminists, who were there and loud and the radical non-feminists, who were there and loud. So it was a losing proposition. But the most telling thing for me was going to dinner one night at—I think it was the Spaghetti Warehouse (laughs)—with three women I had met there. And there's one other story I shall tell after this. Two of them were Rosebud Sioux women from the Rosebud Reservation. Let's see, in '77, I was in my fifties. The reason I remember this is the conversation and the fact that that was my thirtieth wedding anniversary, the only one I ever spent away from my husband, bless his heart. (laughs) So I certainly remember that date.

But in talking to these women, they asked where I was from. Howard always said to me…I've lived here most of my life, and he always said, "You always say you're from Seattle." And I say, "Well I am from Seattle. I just don't live there." So I mentioned that, and they both said, "Oh, we were at Tulalip." I knew what they meant, right away. Do you know how to spell Tulalip?

DePue: No idea.

Webb: T-u-l-a-l-i-p.

DePue: Just like it sounds.

Webb: A reservation north of Seattle, where there was one of those Indian schools where the children were taken away from their parents, taken to other parts of the country, until they couldn't use their language. Both those women had been sent to that school. I said to them, "I'm embarrassed to tell you this, but we used to go up there to swim on the beach." They said, "We know it." (laughs) It was quite an experience.

Let's see, what was the other one I was going to tell you? Oh, the other experience, there were meetings all the time. One meeting, it said, was about how to start a women's center. I thought, Oh well, I know something about that. I went to this meeting. There were a lot of people there. Just after I sat down, a very tall woman, over six feet tall, African American woman, big woman, came and sat down next to me. We spoke to each other. We were talking, telling each other where we were from.

So these young women were up in front, telling everybody how to start a women's center. Well there's nothing to it. First, you have to be a social worker. It will cost you about $1 million to get started. This is in 1977. None of them knew a dang thing about starting a women's center, as far as…They said they wanted the audience to…I'm trying to get seen, and I can't. The woman next to me said, "Do you have something worth saying?" this great big woman. I said, "Yes."

She picked me up, held me up, and then boomed out, "This woman has something to tell you." (both laugh) It was a wonderful experience. And I did. I told them that we started a women's center. We were a bunch of amateurs. Our first year's budget was $4,000 that we had operated for some years without a single paid employee, all on volunteers. I said, "That's how you get started." So, wasn't that nice, to get a chance to say that?

DePue: Did you have people come up to you afterwards?

Webb: Oh yes, lots of them, lots of them. I found that most of the people at the big meetings I would go to, whether it was Springfield or here…Genevieve and I were once at a meeting near Springfield, where we were told we had to go and

listen to a twenty-four year old California woman tell us about getting along with African American people. I looked at Genevieve, and I said, "I don't think we need this." (laughs) We went for a walk, and we got bawled out. We said, “We don't need that. And what did she know anyway?” (laughs)

DePue: Did you know much about the counter-conference that was going on, because Schlafly decided, on their own dime, to bring STOP ERA forces to town, and had, I think, several thousand there as well in Houston, at the same time.

Webb: Oh yes, oh they were there. Oh it was a very vocal situation; believe me. Then the lesbian groups were there and very organized. Everybody was yelling at everybody. On the other hand, I saw one of Schlafly's lieutenants feeding the baby of one of our people. They were getting along fine, as individuals. The mother had to go to a meeting, and she was holding the baby and feeding it. (laughs)

DePue: One of the points that Schlafly especially likes to make is that this National Conference for Women was federally funded. Her group had not one dime from the Federal Government.

Webb: I didn't know the National Conference for Women was federally funded, but I guess it was, huh? It's okay with me; I pay taxes. (laughs) I even believe in paying taxes, although I think it's not fair that Warren Buffett's tax bill is lower than mine on a percentage basis. He thinks it's not fair too, bless his heart.

DePue: Well that's very much in the contemporary discussion right now.

Webb: Yes. (laughs)

DePue: Obviously, one of the decisions made is that the country needs to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. I would think one of the things that came out of there was supporting an extension to the seven year limit to pass the ERA, which would move it up to 1982, I believe.

Webb: It didn't help, did it? (laughs)

DePue: No. Well that's coming a little bit later here. You mentioned that it really ended up being a fight between the radical feminists and Schlafly's forces.

Webb: What I would call the radical non-feminists. I don't know how to use that term. (laughs) I'm not trying to invent a new term. Yeah, it ended up just as a fight.

DePue: Were you disappointed that it ended up being that way?

Webb: I wasn't surprised. Yes, I was disappointed.

DePue: What was the agenda of the radical feminists?

Webb: Rights for homosexuals was major and pro-choice and all that kind of stuff. Then, from the other side, you're getting *Roe v. Wade* and that homosexuality is a sin.[26] I thought, Oh, what else is new?

DePue: You say you weren't surprised. You didn't use the word disappointed. Did you think that hurt the cause of getting ERA passed?

Webb: I knew it did; I knew it did. The assumption that everybody is well informed about things is a false assumption. (laughs) I don't cling to it, so I'm not terribly surprised when things happen that I don't care for.

I was reading a column in the local paper not long ago, written by Ann Coulter, who hates, she says, people like me, terrible, communist liberal me?[27] (laughs) All these years, I've been hearing about how some people have the right to tell me about family values. I had a family; we had values. And when it's someone who's been married three times, I don't think they can tell me anything about family values. (laughs) I don't lose sleep over these things. I don't expect the world to be perfect, never did. I expect you will have to just go on working for what you believe in.

DePue: At the end of that meeting, walking away, did you feel more or less confident about ERA ever getting to be passed?

Webb: Less.

DePue: Less? There were three president's wives there at the conference. There was every prominent woman in the United States at that conference.

Webb: I know.

DePue: Why were you less optimistic?

Webb: Because I knew that these wild voices were going to prevail; these way out different opinions were going to prevail.

DePue: That that would dominate the debate from then on?

Webb: Yeah, and the American electorate is not very good with dealing with their elected people. I'll go back to one of the things I like least about American

[26] Roe v Wade was a landmark decision, issued in 1973 by the United States Supreme Court, on the issue of the constitutionality of laws that criminalized or restricted access to abortions. The Court ruled 7–2 that a right to privacy under the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion, but that this right must be balanced against the state's interests in regulating abortions: protecting women's health and protecting the potentiality of human life.

[27] Ann Hart Coulter is an American conservative social and political commentator, writer, syndicated columnist and lawyer who frequently appears on television, radio, and as a speaker at public and private events.

government. Whoever invented the two-year term for representatives was crazy. All they do is run for office for two years, because they've got to to get reelected. That doesn't make sense to me. But we've never been able to get rid of it, so we could have a representative who had time to do something for his constituents. With a fatal flaw like that— (laughs)

DePue: Well, not trying to justify one way or another what our Founding Fathers did, the reason they had some run for six years and some run for two years is, some of the Founding Fathers were suspicious of the dangers of a peer democracy.

Webb: Well they were quite right. (laughs) The Founding Fathers couldn't have imagined this. Franklin and Jefferson and Washington were all Deists and a Deist is described as someone who ascribes to **nature** deity. In other words—

DePue: Well, they believed in the Supreme Being, but they don't believe the Supreme Being was operating—

Webb: Or was a man.

DePue: …was operating in the world at that time.

Webb: Yeah. But that nature was what was important. (laughs) When you think how small the country was at that time, it's amazing they did what they did; it is just amazing. I'm always, always very proud of them, just like I'm always proud of Lincoln. (laughs)

DePue: Well, probably neither you nor I expected to be talking about the Founding Fathers when we started.

Webb: Probably not. But, remember Abigail Adams, who said to her husband, "Please remember the ladies." (both laugh) He didn't quite get through on it.

DePue: Let's get us back up in the late '70s.

Webb: All right. (laughs)

DePue: After that time, were you going to Springfield to participate in some of the protests and some of the events?

Webb: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember any of those?

Webb: I remember the one where I got called a nasty name. Did I tell you about that one?

DePue: No, I don't think so.

Webb: I was coming down, I think it's a spiral staircase, isn't it, in the Capitol?

DePue: Yes.

Webb: I was coming down there, and a nice looking little boy called me a hum-hmm old bitch. I thought, What is the matter with this child? (laughs) I thought, If you have good Christian parents, they're not teaching you how to talk to older ladies. (laughs)

DePue: What letter did that word start with?

Webb: F, um-hmm. That's not a word I use myself. (laughs) But language has changed in this country, very much.

DePue: What did you think about the tactics that of some of the pro-ERA forces were using at the time?

Webb: I thought some of them were unwise. I thought they should be trying to appeal to a wider audience. I didn't express that very much with people, because some people, I know, found me too conservative on things. I don't feel very conservative about much of anything. (laughs) I'm just not a flamethrower, and I don't think you get anyplace throwing flames.

DePue: That those kinds of tactics sometimes were counterproductive?

Webb: Yes.

DePue: Do you recall some of the tactics that were used by the opposite side, things like, I think in one year—

Webb: Well, being called a baby killer is a little unpleasant. I never killed any babies myself (laughs), but the fact that I think that people should have the right to make that decision themselves makes me to some people a baby killer.

DePue: Did you understand the rationale behind the argument that the pro-life forces had?

Webb: Yeah. It's a human being, and it's a creation of God, and it's murder.

DePue: How did you reconcile your views with those views?

Webb: I'm not telling anyone else what to do with their lives. That's a decision they have to make. I can well imagine a woman who's been raped and gotten pregnant—and that happens—might not want to have a nine month pregnancy and have that person's child.

DePue: Was your dealing with the Women's Center and because you were dealing with rape victims a big part of that rationale?

Webb: I think I felt that way before there was a Women's Center. It wasn't something I thought about a lot, because we weren't thinking a lot about those things then.

DePue: How about some of the things like…I know there was at least one time when the STOP ERA forces showed up with loaves of bread, or they would bake cakes, or they would dress up as nice looking housewives and things like that.

Webb: (laughs) Well, I'm a nice looking housewife, (DePue laughs) and I know how to bake bread. Never impressed me. (laughs)

DePue: The final year, 1982, it especially got lively in Springfield at the time.

Webb: Yeah.

DePue: I think there were not just people from Springfield and not just people from Illinois, but forces from across the country, especially the pro-ERA forces were showing up from across the country. Were you there in '82?

Webb: Yeah. I can't remember the exact circumstances, but we went back and forth quite a bit there for a while. (laughs)

DePue: Put a lot of miles on that year?

Webb: Oh yes, oh yes. I know that drive well.

DePue: One of the things was a hunger strike, that I think some nuns…Sonia Johnson is one name.[28]

Webb: Oh I remember that, vaguely, yes.

DePue: Thirty-seven day hunger strike.

Webb: Well, I couldn't do it, but also I wouldn't do it. I don't think it's healthy. (laughs)

DePue: Do you think that helped the cause?

Webb: Their cause?

DePue: Yeah their cause; it would have been your cause, to pass ERA.

Webb: No, I don't think it helps. I think it's just seen as an extremity. People don't like extremes too well.

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[28] Sonia Johnson of Sterling, VA was one of seven women, who, in 1982, went on a hunger strike to force passage of the Equal Right Amendment in Illinois.

DePue: Another one, the women went to George Ryan's birthday party that year and George Ryan, I think he was Speaker of the House at that time and a strong opponent to passage of ERA.

Webb: I wasn't there for that one, but I kind of wish I was. (both laugh)

DePue: In retrospect, now that you know that George Ryan is sitting in prison.[29]

Webb: Yeah, yeah. Oh yes, that's true, one of several Illinois Governors who's had unhappy fate.

DePue: He's not unique in that respect.

Webb: That floors me; that floors me. How did I end up in a state, which now has four governors?

DePue: Four governors. One's heading to prison.

Webb: One heading and two have been, and one's still in. I don't know; I don't know. Government is hard to understand. And this is a funny state, because government is centered in Chicago and not in Springfield.

DePue: And Illinois, unfortunately, has rightfully earned the reputation as being one of the most corrupt political states in the country.

Webb: Yes, isn't that great? I'm not a corrupt person; you're not a corrupt person, and we don't like that stuff. I think that we have some elected representatives who are first rate, and I'm sure we have some who are not. (laughs) It's hard to understand.

DePue: Well, in my job, it makes for some interesting interviews. (laughs)

Webb: Oh, I'll bet it does; I'll bet it does.

DePue: One of the more extreme things that the proponents of ERA did, is a group of them chained themselves to the railing, I believe, in the Capitol Building.

Webb: (laughs) Yeah. Well, that will get you a newspaper story.

DePue: I would imagine—I don't want to put words in your mouth here—in your position that you saw that as very counterproductive?

Webb: I didn't see it as productive, yeah. Okay, people have done that before. I couldn't figure out a way to get through all this violent opposition to it. I knew

[29] Former Illinois Governor George Ryan was convicted and sentenced to six and a half years in prison on eighteen felony corruption charges that involved the illegal sale of government licenses, contracts and leases by state employees during his prior service as secretary of state.

how I felt, but I didn't know that I could sell it to anybody else who didn't feel the same way.

DePue: What would you had preferred, in terms of the strategy for trying to convince…You're focusing on a few legislators, to get them to change their views.

Webb: I would have tried to explain to them how I felt as a citizen and that I was more interested—and I am, still. My gosh, those windows are dirty. (laughs) Excuse me—that the federal Constitution is more important to me than states rights kinds of things, that I think it has to come first. That's why I felt we needed an Equal Rights Amendment, because we've got now, fifty states.

I would hate to see a compendium of all the state laws that affect women, in one book. I doubt that you could get them in one book. But they're probably there, and there're probably some old ones that should have been thrown out or probably wouldn't make it through a court today. But the federal Constitution is kind of sacred to me. I know that Phyllis says that covers everything, but it didn't; it didn't. I think anyone can look and say, "Yeah but it didn't work that way."

DePue: The bill that year never even made it out of committee.

Webb: Right.

DePue: Which must have been a crushing blow to the proponents.

Webb: I think we were just worn out with it by then. We were going to go about our business and to keep being feminists and to keep our Women's Center going. But trying to win points with politicians isn't easy. (laughs)

DePue: Well, in the final act of the whole opera, the tragic opera, if you will, of ERA and the fight in Illinois at least, was women of pro-ERA went into the [Illinois] Capitol Building. They took their bottles of pig's blood and spray-painted on the marble floors outside of the senate chamber.

Webb: Disgusting, just disgusting. There had been a lot of things in the last few decades, big things we've had to think about. For example, I am glad that the laws and things changed enough so that my husband and I were able to make out our final wishes statements, because I used my husband's final wishes as he was dying. (laughs) Years before that, nobody would have listened to me if I said, "No, this is enough. Don't do anything more. This isn't what he wants. The papers are in your office."

DePue: End of life care.

Webb: End of life care. That was between Howard and me. Now it's between me and my daughter, who's my health care whatever you call them. (laughs) That

kind of thing couldn't have happened earlier on. So there've been changes; there have been good changes. But there are never enough good changes; we can always get better. (laughs) Heck, we could stop going to war so many places; that would be a good change.

DePue: That ended one chapter of your life, but you still are very much involved with the Women's Center here.

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: We've already discussed the Women's Center at length, and I'm sure your discussions of it straddled both pre-'82 and post-'82. How many years, again, did you say you were president?

Webb: Well, eight years I was president, and I did two partial terms when people left too or eight terms—I think it was a couple years in a term—a long time. It was interesting.

DePue: I would think that this kept you very busy, this and having a family and volunteering in the hospital, as well.

Webb: Well there's time for stuff like that. I also had a nice home situation to be in. I had support from my husband for things I wanted to do. I didn't let what I wanted to do mess up what he wanted to do. (laughs)

DePue: Well, let's turn to Howard's side of business.

Webb: All right.

Joyce Webb with a staff member in the Women's Center office.

DePue: What was going on in Howard's life, especially the last twenty or thirty years of his life?

Webb: Well, Howard was extremely happy in his career. He had gotten a PhD from the University of Iowa in 1953, in American Studies. His main field was American literature, and his main interests were [Herman] Melville and Mark Twain. He worked hard in the English Department when we came here. That was his second job, three years after he got his PhD. And he became director of graduate studies. Then, when the then chairman at the time, Bob Faner, died, Howard became chairman of the department. He was good at what he did. He was a well prepared academic.

There was a wonderful letter sent to the alumni magazine after he died. I didn't know who wrote it, at the time. It was a short letter saying that the story should have been headlined, "Extraordinary Teacher Dies." It was Howard she was talking about. She was not an English major, and she had taken every course he ever taught. This note came from a little town in New Hampshire. I wrote a note to the person and the little town in New Hampshire, with a note to the postmaster on the front, saying, “Please deliver. I can't find an address.” And he did. She turned out to be the daughter of a faculty member here. I had known him.

When Howard went into a class, he was totally prepared, and by the way, he didn't let me come and see him teach for a long time. Then he was teaching a St. Louis woman, author—I knew I'd forget her name if I tried to bring it up—At any rate, he knew I really liked her books, and he said, "Would you like to come to class today?" I was floored.

I went and found that the class was judging this 19th century woman as a post mid-20th century woman. I finally couldn't stand it anymore, (both laugh) and I said, "Excuse me?" And Howard said, "Did you want to say something?" And I said, “Yes.” I said, “How can you judge her by contemporary standards? She didn't live in this world.” This is a book about a woman whose life was ruined by the way women were treated. It was an interesting discussion, and Howard was pleased that I had spoken up. (laughs)

DePue: Had you confirmed everything you’d already known about the qualities of his teaching?

Webb: People told me all the time about it. Then he became the vice president for academic affairs of the system. He enjoyed that job. It had to do with dealing with the Illinois Board of Higher Education about programs.

DePue: Now he's gotten into the political side of academics.

Webb: Well, but that's the nonpolitical vice presidency. Yeah, some board members were interested in him becoming the president. He was not interested, because that's…What are you doing? You're going to dinners; you're dealing with politicians and stuff. It was the **work** that he liked. That was a good experience for him.

Then, in 1990, he came home from the campus. We had moved over here, so he could walk to his office very nicely, and since Howard was not an exerciser, that was a good thing. (laughs) He said to me, "I've accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish. I believe I'll retire." So he did.

DePue: That came as a surprise to you?

Webb: Well, I hadn't been thinking of it as being right ahead of me. I knew he was going to; he was sixty-five.

DePue: Well, he kind of popped the question of marriage to you in a surprising way too, didn't he?

Webb: He was a surprising man in lots of ways. Who'd want to be married to a dullard? (both laugh) One of the things I always liked about him best was, when Howard met a woman that he really liked, he would come home and tell me, "I've met a woman I want you to meet." He would like her for the qualities that I would like in a woman too. He was always right; I always liked the women he introduced me to. So that was nice.

Then we had thirteen years of retirement, almost. It was wonderful. People ask me why I don't do more foreign travel. The truth is, I enjoyed it with Howard, and I don't think I would enjoy it without him. (laughs)

DePue: Does that mean, after he retired, you did do some foreign travel?

Webb: Oh yes, yes we did. Howard would do things. He said to me one day, "Oh by the way, we're taking a cruise." "Oh really, when?" "Next month." (laughs)

DePue: Another surprise.

Webb: "Where are we going?" "The Baltic," he said. I said, "The Baltic?" He said, "We're going to all those countries around. We're going to St. Petersburg." It was a great trip. We had a good time, except Howard was not a crowds man, so dealing with the ship was the hard part for him. (laughs) But it was a great trip; it was wonderful.

We had first gone to England, in the spring of 1971. That too, he just announced, "We've got to do something different." This was shortly after Howie died. We went to England, and the girls were home alone, as Amy's always said, "With thirty-six mothers," (both laugh) all the neighbors, all their friends. I think Amy was eighteen, nineteen.

DePue: She probably figured she didn't need any mothers.

Webb: They did not want someone to come in with them. So that's the way it was. We went and stayed with an English writer friend, visiting him. We were up at his house in a tiny village, and he said, "You're going into London." We said, "We are?" He said, "You're going in…There's a cocktail party at a bookstore I want you to go to." He had the tickets, the train tickets for us. He had the things to get into the bookstore.

We went, and when we got there we found out why we went and why we were there. He had come over here and taught, repeatedly, Kenneth Hopkins had. At one point, Lord and Lady Snow were here, and we met them. We used to have all kinds of major names here, in the good old days. We went into the bookstore, and there was a receiving line there. Whoever was introducing people said, "Dr. and Mrs. Webb," and "It's Lord and Lady

Snow." Lord Snow says, "I know, we met in Carbondale." Imagine that happening? (laughs) What a moment. So I live in a little backwater town, right? So, yeah, we had some good travel.

The Illinois State Museum had a woman named Estie [?]—I've forgotten her last name. Amy would know it, because she worked there too—who did the most wonderful trips. The last trip we had together was when we were in Montreal. We were doing Ottawa and Montreal. Montreal has the most wonderful museums. It being Estie's trip, we were staying at the Ritz Carlton. You might as well travel nicely.

Our granddaughter, Amy's daughter, was in Vermont. She was pregnant with her second child, in law school. We got a phone call at the hotel. It was Cameron, my oldest great granddaughter, who was then a little over two and a half. I still remember what she said, "Nana, I got a budder." (both laugh) So, instead of going back to Illinois with the rest of the group, we rented a car and drove to Vermont and got to meet Ian. That was nice.

DePue: Well it sounds like you and Howard both very much enjoyed being grandparents?

Webb: Oh yes. If he'd known about the twins that I acquired two years ago, he would have been beside himself. I don't believe I've mentioned this, but two years ago, my then fifty-one year-old daughter, then married twenty-nine years, almost, became pregnant for the first time. She'd been told forever she couldn't.

DePue: Which daughter is this?

Webb: Sarah, Amy's younger sister. I called her on her birthday, and she said, "Mom, are you sitting down?" I said, "Well I will." "Well, I've got good news and bad news." I said, "Bad news first." Bad news was their older kitty had died, I can handle that. "What's the good news?" "I'm pregnant." I said, "But you can't be." "Well," she said, "I am." I said, "What did you do?" "Nothing different." (laughs) In a week, she called back and said, "Sit down again; it's twins."

She had boy and girl twins, and she managed to get within eight weeks of the delivery time…well, four weeks, I mean, of the delivery time, which is unusual in an older woman. She was really determined. She had to go to bed for a long time and everything. A fifty-one year-old woman is a real risk to a gynecologist. She had a wonderful doctor. She had the boy and the girl. I went down a month later, because the little girl had to stay in the neonatal for a while. She weighed two pounds, twelve ounces when she was born. I said, I'll come when she gets out, so I can be of help."

When I got there, I held her the first time in my left hand, in the palm of my hand. She was so small, I couldn't believe she was real. But she's active

and busy. Oh my goodness, are they active and busy. They came up the next year and celebrated the twins first birthday and their thirtieth wedding anniversary. (both laugh) And they'll be retiring in a few years.

DePue: Well, only in one respect.

Webb: Yes, only in one respect. If I make it to when the children are eighteen, I'll be 100. I'm the only living grandparent, so I'm trying to workout for four. (laughs)

DePue: Well you seem to be doing very well now.

Webb: I'm working on it.

DePue: You've got a great chance to make 100, I think.

Webb: Mother made it to over 100, but she didn't know it. So far, my head's still working. We'll hope that that remains. I'd like to stay in this house, because every time I look out those windows it delights me. (laughs)

DePue: You just noticed they were dirty though.

Webb: They're filthy. (laughs) It's been a hard year.

DePue: Well, that's okay.

Webb: They are cleanable.

DePue: It looks like in the last…Well, not just the last few years, but you have been recognized for all of your volunteer work, as well. I'm holding a plaque, or what would you call this?

Webb: Well, I guess it's a plaque. That was nice, because Howard came with me for that.

DePue: Outstanding Victim Service Volunteer, Joyce Webb, April 21, 1998. This is presented by Attorney General Jim Ryan.

Webb: And there's the picture, yeah.

DePue: Was that a surprise?

Webb: Well, the woman who was acting as director of the center at the time, Mary Kay Bachman, had nominated me, but I didn't know about it. (laughs) So yes, it was a lovely surprise, and I was very pleased. There were people from all over the state there for different things. A lot of them came up and spoke to me afterwards; that was nice. And that one's [indicating another award] from the Women's Center. What's that curvy one? I forget what that one is.

DePue: "Illinois Coalition against Domestic Violence, Human Dignity Award, presented to Joyce Webb, January 20, 1999."

Webb: Yeah. That was after that one; that was nice.

DePue: I saw a DVD that you had given us that had a series of women who had been very influential in establishing the Women's Center. You were at the end of that. Was that some kind of a recognition for you, as well? Is that, perhaps, this? I think that was 1999.

Webb: I don't know; it might have been, January 20, 1999.

DePue: You got on TV the next year, in 2000, as an Unsung Hero.

Webb: Yeah, that's a local thing. (laughs) That was very nice of them.

DePue: But still, it's got to feel great to be recognized, to be affirmed for your life's work, in that respect.

Webb: It's nice. I think people don't understand that I've gotten a lot more from it than it's gotten from me, that to have a life you can enjoy is very important. Howard had it, and I had it, and we had it together. So that was really neat, really neat.

DePue: Another one here, 2002, "Joyce Webb, the Joyce Webb Volunteer Award."

Webb: They give it annually to a volunteer.

DePue: And it's named after you?

Webb: Yeah, isn't that nice? (laughs)

DePue: That's kind of cool.

Webb: It's kind of cool.

DePue: Not many of us can say that.

Webb: Kind of cool. Yeah, that really thrilled me. We have long volunteer trainings, which are required by the state group. I'm one of the first speakers, and I speak about the history of the center. I point out to them that I'm living history. (laughs) It's kind of fun.

Also, I find, it's really interesting when people find out how old I am, the women down there, they kind of don't believe it, because I can talk and walk around. (laughs) One of the questions I get asked is, "How did you get that old?" I said, "Well, I'm not dead yet. That's how I got that old." And I don't plan to be for a while. (laughs)

DePue: That is kind of a peculiar question.

Webb: It is a very peculiar question. Well, there are all kinds of peculiar questions in this world.

DePue: Hopefully, I'm going to end with not so peculiar questions.

Webb: All right. (laughs)

DePue: The first one might surprise you.

Webb: What?

DePue: Because we're going back to…This was important work, especially being one of the very first women's centers in the entire country.

Webb: Oh yes.

DePue: You guys were pioneers at that time.

Webb: We know it. (laughs)

DePue: Also the involvement with the ERA movement and all. The last couple elections, especially this last election in 2010, women have been involved in politics. And their involvement has been growing over the last couple decades. But it's just recently that there are a lot of powerful women candidates who are also definitely conservatives, as well.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: What are your views, in terms of that particular trend that's going on now?

Webb: It was bound to happen; it was bound to happen. There are strong women on both sides, politically. I've read a little bit about some of the women whose point of view is very different from mine. Some of them are a little wonky on how they know the Constitution or where Paul Revere was going when he rode his horse. (laughs) I was born on the anniversary of that ride, as you may recall, although I didn't know him. (laughs)

DePue: You're not quite that old.

Webb: Not quite that old. It was bound to happen, and I think it's amazing that we have an apparently very capable German head of state, who is a woman.[30] We've had some in Asia. That's fine; that's fine.

DePue: Well, Margaret Thatcher.

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[30] Angela Merkel became the Chancellor of Germany in 2005, the first woman to hold the post.

Webb: Margaret Thatcher.

DePue: Golda Meir.

Webb: Absolutely. And she was an American by the way, by birth. More power to them. I know, as we all do, I know how I will vote, and I presume I know how they will vote. But it's incumbent upon me to do that. I would never miss an election. And by the way, some of these elections have pitiful turnouts. I would never miss an election. I don't care if it's for a dog catcher—although we don't actually elect a dog catcher—I'm going to be there, and I'm going to vote, because I feel very strongly that being given the right to vote is being given the responsibility to vote. I cannot separate those two out. Howard was the same way, so that was good.

DePue: Looking back, I think you would say you've had a long life.

Webb: Yes…so far.

DePue: What would be the accomplishments for which you're most proud? And let's take away the obvious one; everybody always says the kids. So, other than the children and the great marriage that you had.

Webb: Oh, other than the children and the great marriage, okay. Oh gosh. Well, I think, probably, the best thing is that I have been able to continue to work for the Women's Center, so that people know I'm connected with it; that's nice. I've spent a lot of years, and I think that helps. I still get phone calls. I got one this last week. "I have this futon bed, with a frame and everything. Do you think the Women's Center could take it?" "Absolutely. We have people who need things all the time." Then we get it. I tell them how to set it up, to have somebody pick it up. It's important.

I had an extremely conservative neighbor, right behind here—she's no longer living—who told me one day that she bought new towels every year. I said, "That's wonderful, Mary. Would you pass the ones you're going to pass out to the Women's Center?" I would take them to the Women's Center every year for her, because she wasn't going to go near that place. (laughs) To be able to be a continuing help to something you really believe in, now that's nice; that's nice.

DePue: Well, there's a flipside to that. Are there any significant, serious disappointments you've had in your life?

Webb: Hmm. I think the most disappointing thing in my life was that we were not a close family that I grew up in.

DePue: You're talking about your relationship with your mother?

Webb: My family, my mother and my brother primarily. When people talk about these close relationships, I didn't have that. But I know now that maybe there was a good side to that. It sent me looking for it, and I found it.

DePue: Did that make you much more determined to have that healthy relationship for your family?

Webb: Oh absolutely. Oh yes, oh yes, it really did. Then, the five years we were in Iowa City, near my grandmother, my maternal grandmother, was wonderful, because she was the mother I always wanted. (laughs) She was wonderful.

The last night we stayed there, we were leaving to go to Howard's first teaching job in Missouri, and we had to get out of our barracks. So I called Grandma and said, "Can we come and stay with you tonight?" Amy was eight weeks old. We got there, and we had a bassinet we put in the front parlor, where Grandma never sat. Howard pulled a chair up by the bassinet for her, and Grandma sat there. When we got up in the morning, Grandma had spent the whole night sitting next to that bassinet. We were the only grandchildren who brought great grandchildren for her to meet. I'm really annoyed with the rest of them. They should have done that. She died in her ninety-third year, when Amy was nine months old. Oh, she was a wonderful woman. Have I told you her two most famous stories?

DePue: I don't think so.

Webb: You better hear them. When she was a little, tiny girl, they were living on a farm in Indiana, these are German immigrant parents.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Webb: Jacobs. And they were going to move to Iowa. They moved by Conestoga wagon.[31] As they approached Iowa City, here was this building with this beautiful golden dome, and the children thought they had gotten to heaven. They were very disappointed when their father said, “Oh no, that's the state capitol.” (both laugh)

But there's another great story from the farm. Grandma told me the only time her parents ever went away overnight—because farming families didn't do that then, she never forgot—they left in their small carriage. They were going to see the Lincoln funeral train pass. How’s that for a memory?

DePue: That's one they shared with, I think, a million or more. It was incredible how many showed up for that.

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[31] The large covered wagon that was used for long-distance travel in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, typically for carrying pioneers in the westward migration.

Webb: I know; I know. Imagine, farmers leaving a farm. They were left with the hired help. But she never forgot that, never. I thought that was wonderful, just wonderful. But I also liked the fact that the old capitol was heaven. (laughs) I thought it was pretty nice too.

DePue: Well it's interesting; that's how you remember your grandmother.

Webb: Yes.

DePue: How would you like to be remembered?

Webb: As a friend, I hope and as not too stuffy (laughs) and as loving. I love them all. They're all very different. We took care of Cameron during the day, when her mother, Amy, was in school here, for over three years. When they left, it was terrible. I cried my eyes out. (laughs) That was Megan. Then Cameron, my great granddaughter, we took care of for eighteen months while her mother was in school here. So I got to have two more chances at child raising, and they were wonderful.

We were really lucky to have that, because we're like most couples here. One's children don't stay here; they leave. I was talking to a friend, out in front yesterday. Her children want them to move to the east coast, because they're all there. She said, "But I don't want to live on the east coast." (both laugh)

DePue: Well especially today, since there's a hurricane bearing down on them.

Webb: Oh yes, today is a good time not to live on the east coast. When my sister-in-law says to me, "Why don't you move back to Seattle?" I think, "Oh, this is home." And this place has given me a lot; it really has. I value every bit of it. It's just been a wonderful experience.

DePue: Well, we kind of started today with a discussion about how important being in Carbondale, living in Carbondale was, and we kind of finished off that way. Any final comments for you?

Webb: Well, I don't think so. I'm grateful I've been able to make a post-Howard life, except that he's still here with me. (laughs) But I'm glad that I didn't just give up on it. That's a good thing; that's a very good thing.

DePue: Well, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to hear your story. I got into this because I knew you'd gone to the national conference in 1977, and I wanted to hear that ERA story. But I think, maybe even more important was to hear the story about how one of the first women's centers in the country got its start.

Webb: Yeah, isn't that something?

DePue: Yeah.

Webb: We're going to have our fortieth anniversary, oh my gosh, next year, next November 2nd. It will be November 2nd, fortieth anniversary. Holy cats, that's a long time. (laughs)

DePue: A reason to celebrate.

Webb: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Thank you very much Joyce.

Webb: Oh yes. Now, I want to take you to the Women's Center. What time is it?

DePue: Okay, we'll stop this.

(end of transcript #2)