

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Brenda Edgar

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Illinois Statecraft – Jim Edgar* Oral History project

Interview # ISG-A-L-2010-039

Brenda Edgar, wife of Governor Jim Edgar, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft – Jim Edgar* Oral History project.

Interview dates & locations:

Date: August 17, 2010 Location: Erwin, Martinkus & Cole law office,  
Champaign, IL

Date: September 14, 2010 Location: Gov. Edgar's Office, IGPA

Date: November 23 & December 21, 2010 Location: Gov. Edgar's Office, IGPA

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center

Edited by: Mike Czaplicki

Total Pages: 179 Total Time: 2:11 + 2:48 + 1:11 / 2.18 + 2.8 + (0.22+0.97) = 6.17  
hrs [Session 3 recorded on Nov. 23rd & Dec. 21 due to technical problem]

Session 1: Early years through Jim Edgar's appointment as Secretary of State

Session 2: Years as wife of Secretary of State 1980-90 and Governor 1991-98

Session 3: Years following Gov. Edgar's service as governor, 1999-2010

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on Feb 16, 2011.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in  
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# Abstract

## Brenda Edgar, *Illinois Statecraft*, ISG-A-L-2010-039

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Brenda Smith was born on August 31, 1948 in Tuscola, Illinois, and grew up on a farm in rural Massac County near Belknap, Illinois. She attended school in nearby Anna, Illinois. She started college at Eastern Illinois University in 1966, where she soon met Jim Edgar, who also attended Eastern. They began dating, and by April 1967, they were married. Brenda also found herself helping with Jim's campaign for student body president. She dropped out of school after their son Brad was born, and by the fall of 1968 they were living in Springfield, where Jim was an intern with the Illinois state legislature.

In 1974, Jim ran for the Illinois state legislature and lost, but he was more successful in 1976. After two years in the legislature, Governor Jim Thompson asked Edgar to serve as his legislative liaison. In early 1981, Thompson again turned to Edgar, this time selecting him as the Secretary of State, a position in which he served for ten years. During this time, Brenda raised their two children, Brad and Elizabeth, in a modest Springfield neighborhood, even as she learned by experience the many roles and responsibilities of a politician's wife. In 1990, when Jim ran for governor, she became one of his most important assets, often hitting the campaign trail on her own. After a grueling race, Edgar won by the narrowest of margins. Brenda next mastered the role of First Lady of Illinois, taking on adoption and children and women's issues as her special passion. She was most proud of her P.J. Huggabee teddy bear program, where children passing through Illinois's foster care program were given teddy bears to help comfort them. When Governor Edgar stepped down in 1999, Brenda gratefully returned to the private life she had always preferred.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Anna, Illinois; Eastern Illinois University; Secretary of State Jim Edgar; Governor Jim Edgar; campaigning for Jim Edgar; 1990 gubernatorial election; P.J. Huggabee teddy bears; 'Help Me Grow' program; Project Heart; KidCare; Brad Edgar; Elizabeth Edgar; Mike Lawrence; Gov. Jim Thompson; George Ryan; Rod Blagojevich; Barack Obama;

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