

Interview

with

JAN ALLEN

July 5, 2006

By Robin Payne

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The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Transcript on deposit at
The Southern Historical Collection
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Citation of this interview should be as follows:
"Southern Oral History Program,
in the Southern Historical Collection Manuscripts Department,
Wilson Library,
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill"

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BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ROBIN PAYNE: This is an interview with Jan Allen in her home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on Wednesday, July 5th, 2006. Okay, so if you could maybe just begin by telling me where you were born and where you grew up?

JAN ALLEN: Okay. I was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1935. I grew up mostly in the Philadelphia area. My folks apparently moved there when I was about six months, and my father was working, I believe, for General Motors, and he traveled around the eastern part of Pennsylvania in the coal mining regions. So I went to grade school there. We moved back to Michigan when I was in sixth and seventh grade, and then we moved back to New Jersey and the Philadelphia area. He had a car dealership, so I went to high school there, and went to Bucknell University which is in Pennsylvania, and then I went off to live in Boston to work for RCA, and I ended up in computer programming. I was a math major in college.

One of the more interesting, well, there were two things there. My father didn't believe girls should go to college, and if they did he thought they should be home ec majors, so my sister and I both went to Bucknell which doesn't have a home ec major. I was not the least bit interested in home ec. I was interested in math, and probably given any kind of encouragement I would have gone into engineering. My father was an engineer, but girls at that point were not really encouraged to do that, and I didn't really have any real goals, but I loved math. I didn't want to be a teacher, and I didn't want to be a nurse, and I didn't want to be a secretary, and that's what was open for girls at that time. So I became a math major, and I went to work for RCA up in the Boston area and

got into computer programming a year later because that was pretty much when programming started becoming a real profession so the timing was just incredible for somebody like me. And then Betty Friedan's book came along, *The Feminine Mystique*, which I'm sure you've read about in your history books.

RP: Right.

JA: It basically changed my life because what it did was it just talked about women doing other things besides being mothers and staying at home which is something I really had not been looking forward to. By that time I was married, and we had this little group of couples, there were three or four couples that used to get together every couple of weeks, and one of them said to me at some point, "Well, you really carved out a career for yourself." Well, I'd never really thought about that, but I had because I had started into the computer programming business.

My husband finished his graduate degree, and we moved to Iowa for four years which was an interesting experience. Jim was in divinity school at that point, and he became a college chaplain. Thank heavens he didn't want to take a church. So he became a college chaplain in Iowa, and we were there for four years. It was fine. It was a very small, very small town, Methodist college. I went to work for a company in Des Moines. We lived about twenty miles south of Des Moines, so I went to work part time.

RP: And was your work there also in computer programming?

JA: Yeah. It was really fun. Computer programming is one of those things, it's a very logical type thing. I used to say it's a great profession because you write a program, you create bugs, and then you fix them. It's an instant gratification type thing because you can solve problems, and you can see the problems you're solving. I loved it. It was

a great career. Then four years from then Jim decided he wanted to go into population. I was one of what is now called a trailing spouse. I love the term. We were planning on moving to New York City because he wanted to go to population, and at the time he was going to take a position with the National Council of Churches, and he went off to a population conference and came back and said, "How would you like to move to North Carolina?" I said, "Why would I want to do that?" I had never lived in the south. Jim had actually grown up in North Carolina.

RP: Oh, okay.

JA: He moved when he was twelve, but he was born in Beaufort. His father, I believe, was county school superintendent in Beaufort or Morehead City, around there somewhere. So he had a lot of relatives here, and I said, "Well, I don't know." So I looked around. Then I found out that IBM had built their plant out in Research Triangle Park here in 65. They apparently were the first big company in the Research Triangle area, so I interviewed with them, and got a job with IBM so when we moved here they actually moved us, and I started working for IBM, and that was in 68.

RP: Okay. So before you moved to the south you said you had never been here?

JA: No.

RP: Having grown up in the north did you have certain kinds of expectations of what the south was going to be like?

JA: Yes, and a lot of the assumptions were of the kind where you're not terrible conscious of them, you know?

RP: Um-hum.

JA: But Jim had assured me that North Carolina was the most progressive of the southern states, and I was a little nervous about moving south, but I figured as a trailing spouse, you know, and I was kind of excited coming to work for IBM. When Jimmy Carter ran for president some of these assumptions came out. We had the funniest conversations. I kept saying, "A southerner can never win." Yankees, as in people who grew up like I, assume that southerners are dumb, you know, and Jim, I think he thought I was personally making this up, but then I started comparing notes with one of the women I worked with, and she and I had the funniest conversations. She'd say, "Well, everybody knows that northern girls are fast," and a lot of the southern guys I worked with were playing on those stereotypes because one guy said he would stand up to make a presentation, this is at IBM, and he'd just put on this southern accent. He had a southern accent, but he'd put on a really stronger one. And there are assumptions you grow up with as Sally and I were comparing notes. There are these stereotypes. I don't think it's so much any more, but stereotypes of "dumb" and "slow" on the part of Yankees looking at southerners and so on.

IBM was not a real southern environment, so it was a little hard, too. And living in Chapel Hill, between the two of them you wouldn't know necessarily that you lived in the south, so I think that it's hard to get a feeling of really living in the south when you live in Chapel Hill.

Our son, we adopted our son in 1967, and moved here, and Gregory, when he was two, the university had this daycare, and they would take children as young as two. At that point there were no day care facilities for babies, and so Gregory started going when

he was two, and I had a terrible time. He was learning to talk, and his teacher had this really strong southern accent. He'd come home, and we'd get into these conversations.

I'll never forget this one conversation. He's coming home with drawings of rainbows, and he came home with this drawing and I said, "Is that a rainbow?" He said, "No, it's a heel." I said, "A heel?" I'm looking at it trying to figure out the heel of a shoe, and Jim's sitting there smiling. I said, "Okay, what did he say?" Jim said, "He said it's a hill." [laughing] This was so typical of southern accents, and Gregory, I think, didn't learn to talk with a southern accent because neither one of us does. Jim can put one on, but Jim doesn't talk with one, and I didn't realize until about three or four years later when Gregory was about five. We were visiting some of Jim's relatives, and there was a cousin about the same age, and I kept thinking, "He talks funny," and I finally realized he had a southern accent. Well, of course, he had a southern accent. He's over in High Point.

RP: Right.

JA: So that was when I was slowly figuring out, well, I already knew that Chapel Hill is not typical south anyway. And, of course, I fulfilled all the stereotypes of being a liberal Chapel Hill person.

RP: Right. You mentioned earlier when we were talking that you had a very conservative upbringing.

JA: Yes.

RP: So would you say by the time you moved down here, your husband assured you that this was the most progressive southern state, so by that time had your political leanings started to shift?

JA: Oh, my political leanings had started shifting left. The first time I voted, as I said, I voted republican. I was for Eisenhower, but then the next time I voted—does that make sense, yeah—I voted for Kennedy.

RP: Okay.

JA: I remember my parents writing a note and saying, "I'm not even going to ask who you voted for." They were beginning to suspect. They always blamed this on Jim that I was starting moving to the left. Jim was in seminary at Boston University. At the time anyway it was a very liberal seminary, pacifist. I'd never heard of pacifist. Jim was a pacifist, and there were a bunch of people there who were, and that's where I probably started formulating some of my thinking, or I think developing my own self is probably more what it was. We were twenty-four when we got married.

RP: Okay.

JA: We got divorced two years ago.

RP: Were there issues in particular that during this time, so I guess the late '50s, early '60s, that were starting to make you change your point of view?

JA: I didn't actually have a point of view except that apparently when I was really young, when I was younger than ten, maybe, around then, I was apparently going around saying I was going to commit suicide when I was thirty because things looked so dull after the age of thirty. I couldn't imagine just being a housewife, and I know my mother may have been insulted by that. I think I was very careful about it actually, saying it that way, but the only options available to women at that point were extremely limited. My mother was a teacher, and she had to quit teaching when she got married. I

had an older sister who was a flight attendant, she had to quit being a flight attendant when she got married, and that was even later, so you can see the trend.

When I was looking for a job in Iowa I already had programming experience. I had worked at RCA, and then I worked a year at MIT before we left the Boston area, and this guy who was head of the IT department at the State of Iowa said he didn't hire women, and I said, "Why not?" and he said, "Well, we work kind of late hours, and the other wives would object." Well, that was fairly typical, and it was perfectly legal back then too. It wasn't until the Civil Rights Act, I believe of '64, took effect, and I don't know when it took effect.

Well we moved here, and I was in the process of figuring out that I really did want a career. That was Betty Friedan's book had a lot to do with that. She explored all of the why women, a lot of women who really didn't have any choices other than staying home were feeling like they were empty. So, I was, yeah, I was busy becoming a feminist in my thinking during the '60s and the '70s.

RP: Okay.

JA: And I was working very hard too, and I really wasn't doing much of anything besides working for IBM. Gregory was less than ten at that point. So it was only in the late 70s—Jim said, "You need to get out and make some friends," because all I was doing was working. I was in management off and on, and he said, "You need to get out and make some friends." Well, toward the end of the '70s there was this—I joined NOW, the National Organization for Women, and it was just forming too. It started I think in '65. I'm not sure. I went to a meeting or two, and decided it was far too radical. I tried looking around for other organizations. I joined BPW but the only program they had, I

looked at the entire year's programs, and the only program I was really interested in was the political one.

RP: Right.

JA: The group here was great. The group that I attended, I still know some of those women. It was one of the best integrated groups I've ever met for one thing, racially integrated. I found out later that these women, a lot of the women were from Hillsboro, so it was Orange County Business and Professional Women. I found out later apparently there was a BPW in Hillsboro, but it was white women.

RP: Okay.

JA: And meanwhile – so then I went back to NOW. At about that time the ERA had been passed [by Congress], but there was I believe a time limit of like seven years, and so there was this huge effort to extend it to ten years. I think it would have expired in 1979, so about the same time Jim was saying, "You need to get out and make some friends," national NOW sponsored this national march, and some of us went. I came home, and I said, "A hundred thousand of my closest friends and I marched." That was basically my introduction to NOW and the ERA. I didn't think at the time women needed the Equal Rights Amendment when I joined NOW. I didn't understand the law. Now that I know the law through working for the ERA I understand the law, and the complications, and the ease where you can—yeah, you passed the civil rights act, but you can also rescind it. Women's rights hang by a very slender thread, and congress can take away a lot of those rights, and we're watching that happen with the reproductive rights issues. That was the reason I got involved in the ERA in the first place, was I was very, very concerned about reproductive rights.

RP: Okay.

JA: Even then, right after *Roe v. Wade* you could see the right wing starting to dismantle that or wanting to, and then Reagan became president in 1980.

RP: Right.

JA: That was interesting. When I was going through some of my ERA stuff, the republican party used to support the ERA. I found this little card. On one side it had all the reasons why you support the ERA, and on the other side it said something about, it may have been the national Republican party. I was stunned, because in the middle of all of that they shifted sides. They started attacking the ERA, and that was when Reagan was president.

RP: Okay.

JA: So you could see the extreme right wing movement coming, and particularly the ERA gave them a wonderful focus. So during that last year we did get the extension, and 1982 was the last year. I had two weeks vacation from IBM so I took it and was working just helping in Raleigh. NOW had some, a couple of state, they were paid by national NOW, but they actually were local people. It was actually North Carolina NOW people, and we had an office, and we were going down to the legislature every day, and it was halfway through that two week period when the senate tabled it which effectively killed it because the deadline was coming up.

We had a rally. Actually the rally occurred after it was killed in the senate. I sat in the senate gallery. It was packed. We were having people come down, and we were doing training, and having them go up in the gallery. People supporting ERA were wearing ERA stickers and wearing green and white, and the other side was wearing red

with stop signs. We had a lot of rallies. We had Monday night vigils for the ERA. The People of Faith for the ERA were sponsoring vigils on Monday nights. It was actually, it was very fun. I thought initially, and I was right, the whole thing was kind of doomed because we only had three years to get the rest of the states, and it was clear that the whole thing had stalled. I didn't really think it would work, but watching the whole thing come down like that was actually extremely motivating, and that's why I'm still in politics.

RP: So you said you had a sense that it was doomed to failure.

JA: We needed three more states three years before the deadline. The three targeted – well, there were four, I think. But, the three – there were four. It started out the four that we were targeting were Virginia, and it fell very fast there, North Carolina, Florida, and Illinois, so they were the three targeted states. From a women's movement, feminist perspective it was an awfully interesting place to be.

RP: Right.

FG: We had deep suspicions about some of the legislators who said they supported the ERA, but we had a feeling that they really weren't. If they hadn't found the number of senators who actually tabled it they would have found some other ones who said they were supporting it. I mean there just wasn't any kind of momentum. We blamed Governor Hunt because we felt that he didn't do enough for us. [I'm now a strong supporter of Governor Hunt – he appointed a significant number of strong women to important positions while he was governor. Looking back, I don't think he could have changed the outcome." I mean there were twenty-seven senators. We were sitting in the senate gallery, and these twenty-seven white male senators all voted to table it, and that

effectively killed it. Somebody started yelling, "Vote them out," so the whole gallery started yelling, and the lieutenant governor kicked us all out, and they sent this poor woman senator out to talk to us. We had to leave.

RP: Wow.

JA: Yeah, it was a very emotional time.

RP: I can imagine.

JA: Yeah.

RP: So you weren't necessarily surprised that it was defeated?

JA: No, no I wasn't.

RP: Why do you think that it was that the south was so reluctant to accept the ERA?

JA: Oh, I think the whole women's movement is exactly like the civil rights movement for minorities. There's this fear of change. I think not very deep down, I was going to say deep down, but it's not really very deep down, there's this control issue, and you hear the same kinds of arguments now about women. I can't believe we're still hearing this, but women should be staying home taking care of the children, and women should be doing this, and women should be doing that. It's a control thing, and why men feel they have the right to say what all women should do is clearly a power problem. If you look at the numbers of people who are in positions of power overwhelmingly it's men. I don't think I can probably analyze it any further than that. I am not a psychiatrist. I'm not in the psychology of things, and I believe the whole reproductive rights issues are control issues also.

RP: Right. So you kind of have a unique perspective having lived in both the north and the south while all of this was unfolding.

JA: Um-hum.

RP: Did you see these issues of control as kind of general to the entire nation?

JA: Um-hum.

RP: Or did you see the problems women face in the south as different?

JA: Oh, I don't think women face more problems in the south than anywhere else. I mean working at IBM was not really a southern experience. I will say though, I discovered later when I went into management at IBM, I discovered they'd only started hiring women around 1967 at the most, so when I came in 68 it wasn't really obvious, but there were quite a few new women working there as computer programmers. I mean there were bunches of secretaries who were almost all women, but it wasn't really obvious that there weren't that many technical women until we had this very large meeting in Raleigh, and then I discovered how few women there actually were in the programming center.

I think the south tends to be more entrenched in terms of the way people live and ideas about women staying in the home, but there are a lot of other ethnic background people who are the same way. I mean civil rights, women's rights, but civil rights. I don't have much of a perspective for growing up in the north because I didn't become an adult really until late 20s. It takes a long time to grow up.

RP: Right. It does. What was it like to work for IBM? I mean you spent most of your career there, right?

JA: I did. Yeah, I was with IBM for twenty-seven years.

RP: Okay. Did you ever feel like you faced gender discrimination working there?

JA: Uh, no. I think the kind of things that women are facing right now is not—well, there is outright discrimination and sexual harassment in a lot of areas. I personally never experienced any of that, but I understand there were women at IBM who did depending on what area they were in. But IBM had established an affirmative action program, and I'm not quite sure when they did. It must have been in the late '60s, pretty much probably when I started. Probably that's how they got women there in the first place because they wouldn't have been hiring women if it hadn't have been for affirmative action and ditto for blacks.

And, I benefited from the affirmative action program. I started thinking about getting into management after I'd been there four years, and I realized that my mental image of a manager was a white male in a pin striped suit, and I thought, well, I can't be the only one with that mental image, and it was pretty clear that there weren't too many others anyway. So when I was appointed into management in 72 there were two other women both at the same time. IBM had this practice of putting up on the bulletin boards that were all over the place anybody who was promoted. They'd list who was promoted, and when you got to a certain level you got to have your picture up there. Well, they also posted people who were appointed into management, and all three of us, unfortunately, were posted at the same time. Somebody told me that they were standing at the bulletin board, and some guy comes up and is reading them. He said something about, he looked at all the women's names and said, "Wow, what a bunch of ball breakers." I said to

somebody else, "I don't feel like a ball breaker." I had never even heard the term. [laughing] But that's the way it was perceived.

I used to have discussions with this one guy off and on, and he said, "You can't let people's thoughts like that, or opinions, or anything else guide you in terms of what you're going to do yourself." And it's true. I mean, I think I probably did get into management because of affirmative action, but I also succeeded. But there were many, many, many meetings over the years where I'd get into a meeting and I'd be the only female, and that was still going on when I left although it was not quite so bad.

RP: Despite that being the only female in these board meetings did you feel like the men there treated you as an equal?

JA: Some of them did. I will never forget this one management training, and this was really subtle, and I only figured it out—I don't necessarily figure things out on the spot. I have to think about them later. I was in this management training, and it was a situational type thing where they would set up these situations, and so we had this training exercise, and this guy I was friends with, there were three of us who were supposedly managers of some corporation, and we were interviewing people for prospective jobs. So they sent the interviewee out of the room, and the three of us decided I would be the manager of something. Terry was the CEO, and I was the vice president for something, and there was this other guy who was the vice president.

So this guy comes in, and we're interviewing him, and this was with this facilitator running these meetings, and I don't remember anything much except that after the whole thing was over with we went back through the whole group, this was in front of everybody else. The whole group went back through the whole exercise and were

commenting on different things. Well, the guy who was being interviewed, his reaction was "I wasn't about to be not hired by a woman." I was the only woman in the entire group. There must have been twenty of us, and I was rather taken aback because I wasn't supposed to be part of. This was not a workshop in gender, at least it wasn't supposed to be. I was so taken aback by the whole thing, and the facilitator never even commented on it. It would have been a great opening for a gender discrimination or gender something discussion, and nobody ever mentioned it. It was the weirdest thing. It was only afterwards when I started thinking, I thought, "We should have talked about that." At least I felt we should have talked about it. But it was just a very odd experience. It was weird things like that.

The only other thing that used to really annoy me was I'd get in these meetings, and some guy would be up there talking, and he say something like "damn" or "hell" or something, and he'd look at me and, "Oh, excuse me." It used to drive me crazy. So I had this one manager I went to work for him, and I had just come back from one of those meetings and I told him. I said, "I just get so damned mad." So Stu goes off to these meetings. He came back from this one meeting and he said, "You're going to love this. I was in this meeting. There was one woman in the room, twenty men," and somebody did the same thing, and looked at the woman and apologized, and Stu said, "So I piped up and said, 'I don't know why you're apologizing to her. I'm the one who's offended.'" [laughing] He got it. He got it.

I said the problem is when people do that is what they're doing is defining the out group, and there were bunches of things like that. It was not, at least I don't think it was, but I tend to be a little naïve on these things, but I don't think it was necessarily

conscious on their part. But I always had this feeling of being the out group. It got a whole lot better, I mean IBM's affirmative action. And, they had this fast track program and women, and blacks, and whites were in it. I wasn't as it turned out because they only started it with people when they were new hires from college. I didn't know it existed until I became a manager, and one of the guys in my group was in it.

Yeah, it was always a feeling like the out group. I was the out group actually. I mean it wasn't just a wrong perception on my part. I think that a lot of that has changed, a lot of it. I mean one of the reasons that women used to be the out group is that men who were the ones in management and stuff felt very uncomfortable sitting in an office alone with a woman even though she was his employee, talking the way they talk to other guys. There's a lot of that, and so women miss out on a lot of the informal discussion, and I think that's still going on today. I think it goes on with other races too. There's always a problem like that, of people getting together with people they feel comfortable with, and it doesn't necessarily, with men, it doesn't necessarily include women.

RP: Right. Are those the kind of problems that you thought something like the ERA could help solve?

JA: I think the ERA would have prohibited job discrimination. And no, I think that that's the kind of thing that has to take place over time, but you need the legal structure behind you, and you need all kinds of legal structures that would be there automatically if there had been an Equal Rights Amendment. Now we have to fight it pretty much law by law.

RP: Right.

JA: You know, area by area. Sexual harassment probably would have come along as an issue as part of the ERA. I mean it did come along anyway, but there are lots of other things. There's still unevenness in salary in the same kinds of jobs with the same kinds of wages and so on, and we're still fighting this, and I think we will be for a long time.

RP: Right. If we could talk a little bit more about how you came to see yourself as a feminist. You mentioned by the '60s you were seeing yourself as a feminist?

JA: Yeah. I was sort of evolving. When we lived in Iowa, I have no idea why, but there was this discussion somebody had organized. I was a faculty wife, of course. I think it was the whole women's movement was starting, and even in Iowa we heard about it. I felt kind of isolated in Iowa. Even in Iowa we were aware of it, and women getting jobs, and things like that. So I was pretty much slowly evolving into being a feminist. I was just becoming more independent.

RP: Okay.

JA: At that point I did have a career.

RP: Right.

JA: So there was always this problem of being a mother, and worrying about shouldn't I have stayed home? And I know I would have been a basket case if I had. We all would have been basket cases. But there was always this—having grown up with these assumptions that I would do the same as my mother did, you're always questioning things, and I don't know whether young women still have that or not. I have this terrible feeling they do particularly since there seems to be more of an overt movement at this

point to make women feel guilty if they're working. Back then it was just sort of an automatic assumption. All of us felt guilty.

RP: Okay. So you mentioned *The Feminine Mystique* being one thing that really kind of started to change your thinking.

JA: Yes. Yes.

RP: Were there other kind of pivotal moments or things that you remember kind of having a really big impact on the way you thought about women and feminism?

JA: No, because at that point I was—there are not single things that really stand out except that one workshop which I still wonder about. No, I think it was more of an evolution. I've been active in NOW since then. I still am as a matter of fact. NOW, as far as I'm concerned, the National Organization for Women, is the only organization that fights on all fronts. We're pro choice. We'd like to see the Equal Rights Amendment passed, but I think at this point most of us realize it's a dead issue. I'm not going to spend any time on it.

But yeah, lesbian and gay rights. The percentages, for instance, of military people, you know, the don't ask, don't tell, apparently there's a much higher percentage of women who have been identified as lesbians, a much higher percentage of them being kicked out of the military than men. I don't know what the percentage is. I never remember numbers, but NOW works on all of these issues and because all of them related to being a female and being at a disadvantage therefore.

But the ERA, I think, back to that question, is an economic thing. I mean women deserve to be paid the same as men, and they deserve the same job opportunities, and that's still not happening. Women still earn, what is it? I think we're up to like seventy-

five cents to the dollar, every dollar a man earns, and that takes into account part-time people. It does not mean it's just because women tend to work part time. They don't. But there are fewer benefits available to women and lower salaries. And that's still happening. That would be the main reason we'd want an ERA. As I said, it's kind of a dead issue at this point. I think we're all extremely concerned about reproductive rights issues.

RP: Becoming a feminist, or this evolution you were experiencing, did it change the ways you thought about marriage and family? You mentioned it was common for women who worked to feel guilty.

JA: Yeah. At the time, yeah, Jim was always extremely supportive. He was the one who said, "You need to get out and make some friends." And he was extremely supportive in terms of doing stuff around the house and stuff. He was on the faculty of the School of Public Health, and his hours were a lot more flexible than mine were. He was the one who was taking Gregory to the day care center on campus and picking him up, and doing all kinds of stuff like that.

In fact when I retired he had been doing the cooking. Actually we both did cooking, we froze stuff, and so it was more a case of thawing things from the freezer, but when I first got downsized, I was around a lot more. It's kind of like having a teenager on the phone and everything. At that point, he had his business that he operated out of our house, long-term care education, and after about two weeks he said, "Why don't you go to law school?" I think he was just trying to get me out of the house. [laughing] It was true. I was taking up a whole lot more of phone time. He had to install another phone line for his business. So, yeah, but he was very supportive. It's just that I suspect the

feminism and the becoming very independent part, I tend to be a very independent person, took it's toll on our marriage. It wasn't just that. It was a whole bunch of other things that I really am not going to get into, but that was part of it. But I had developed my own life, and it's actually served me very well. We were divorced a year ago January. We were married for a long time.

RP: Yeah. You were.

JA: It's been an interesting, fascinating, stressful lifestyle change.

RP: You mentioned when you first moved here he was encouraging you to go out and meet friends.

JA: Yes. I told him it was all his fault. It was an amicable divorce, yeah.

RP: You mentioned considering NOW, but thinking that it was too radical at the time, what was it about NOW that made you see it as too radical at first?

JA: Well, I wasn't very comfortable with gay rights issue, lesbian rights.

RP: Okay.

JA: That didn't come up in the first meeting. It was just I wasn't sure—the first meeting, I don't know whether it was the first one I went to they were in the process of exploring the need for the rape crisis center. The woman who was, probably stayed president, but I know she was the chapter president, Miriam Slifkin, had a meeting at her house, and I think that's where they were meeting. They were talking about the problems of rape, and there was this older woman there who was in her at least 70s, and this was in the late '60s so that was a long time ago. It turned out that, and we were just talking about the need for a rape crisis—back then I don't think there were any rape crisis centers. It was something that was just beginning. And this woman finally spoke up and

said her sister, who was older than she was, had been raped in her house. She had recently moved here from New York, had been raped in her house, and finally just moved back to New York where she felt safe. We all thought that was a little ironic. Here were are in Chapel Hill, this small town, supposedly safe. So I came away from that meeting. I did get back to the next one, and we all compared notes on how we felt walking out of the house and going into our cars. We were all petrified.

But, I think what it was was raising concerns and feelings about issues that I wasn't sure I really wanted raised at that point. And, that's why I went off and tried other groups because I was a little nervous about raising some of these feelings, and I was probably right about them. The problem is that once you start having concerns and awareness of problems then there's no going back, and that's pretty much what was going on. Once you learn—I don't want to call it oppression because I can't stand that whole mind set, but once you learn, become sensitive to, or whatever else you want to call it, the whole set of issues it's hard not to let them take over. I'm not sure I've actually succeeded along those lines. I've always been since then very sensitive about women being treated differently, just like a lot of blacks feel the same way about being treated as blacks, and I can understand that. Because we are treated differently, and there's always this, "Did they really mean to do it, or is it sort of a subconscious or just totally not even there?" And you're always, after you start becoming aware of this, you start having to then figure out do they really mean that comment? And I'm not terribly good at subtleties, so you know, reading between the lines type thing. It takes me a long time to figure things out.

RP: Right. So (*unintelligible*) participating in these kinds of organizations like NOW, and the BPW that made you—.

JA: That was a short lived time. That was only about five meetings, and then I thought I just can't do this. The meetings were not all that interesting. I'm not interested in self-improvement type things.

RP: That was the BPW?

JA: I don't remember. All I can remember is that we set out these twelve programs for the whole year, and there was only one out of the entire twelve that I was the least bit interested in and that was the one on politics, and that's when I said, "Maybe I'd better go back to NOW," and that's basically what I did. It was a great group of women, just great. I tried, I don't even remember the other groups I tried, but there was one that was very literary, and I thought this is not me. I didn't have time for that. I joined the League of Women Voters. Did that for a while too.

RP: Okay. So eventually then your interest in politics drew you back to NOW?

JA: I think what it was was I was figuring out I'm an activist, and I like to see, well, I'd like to say I like to see results, but anybody who's worked on the ERA knows better than that. I want to take action, and that's what NOW does. It's a feminist activist group, and that's what I am is a feminist activist. There were plenty of issues to be active on, and there still are actually.

RP: So did you begin to see yourself as more radical then as an activist?

JA: Yeah. Yeah. It was, um, a lot of these things relate to my experiences at IBM because I was always going off to these marches or going to a NOW convention and everything. Some of the guys were a little uncomfortable with some of the stuff I did.

I remember this one time, I probably shouldn't have done this, but I was pretty comfortable with being an activist, and we participated in all the gay pride marches around here. We were in the one in Durham one year, and I think I was still a manager at that point. It was a different group, but it was almost all guys. We're all having lunch together, and I said something about the Durham Gay Pride March, and I said I was there. And they all kind of looked at me, and I said, "Actually, I was in the march." [laughing] "You were in the Gay Pride March?" I said, "Yeah. It was really fun." I said, "There were these drag queens in the convertibles waiving at people and everything," and they're all totally stunned.

I talked to one of the guys later, and I said, "Maybe I shouldn't have said that." He said, "No. I figured it out. I know you're a very civil liberties person." Actually where I came from in the very beginning I was very big on civil liberties, and nobody's going to take away my rights type thing, and that's how I got into this whole thing. "I'm sure," he said, "but you never answered the question they all had." And I said, "What?" I'd gotten into the whole set of issues at that point so I'd forgotten that people might wonder if I was lesbian.

RP: Right.

JA: And I said, "Oh." I said, "I never thought of that." I kept wondering why they were all just sitting there. They were still trying to absorb the fact that I'd been in the march. Anyway, so things like that did come up because I was talking. I tried not to talk about my views, but everybody knew what they were, so obviously I did. Well, I occasionally appeared on TV in the early days too. Some of the guys, particularly on reproductive rights, well I know one guy who's very anti-choice. He approached me

after I'd been on TV the night before. He said, "You really looked good. I wish you were on our side."

RP: And this was someone from work?

JA: Um-hum. Somebody I worked with. Yeah. I had seen him. A couple of us went down and watched the anti's march, and I saw him in that march, and I realized. They were across the street. It's best to know who's not on your side type of thing.

RP: So kind of talking about how people at work thought about you being involved in this activism, and you've mentioned that your family at this point was pretty supportive of all of your work with this, what about some of your other friends? Did you have friends who weren't involved in NOW who thought—.

JA: No. I didn't have any other friends, well, except occasionally there were department parties at Jim's department. We didn't have a social life outside of my NOW friends and his occasional department party. His department was not terribly, I don't know how to put it. They were not a really group type. We didn't work with them very much, so I didn't really have any other friends.

RP: Okay. How would you characterize the kind of women you were working with in NOW? Were they of diverse backgrounds?

JA: We had a CR group, consciousness-raising. That was the thing. We were all pretty much, we were all white. There were no blacks in that group. From a different background perspective we were pretty diverse. One woman actually grew up in North Carolina in the western part. Another one grew up in South Carolina and had been married for a long time, and had just recently concluded she was lesbian. She had something like eight children, and God only knows how many grandchildren. Another

one from Boston. In terms of geography we were fairly diverse. Yeah, I'd say we were diverse but not racially.

RP: Okay. And so initially you were working on the ERA, and you mentioned reproductive rights being one thing that really prompted you to—

JA: That's what got me into it because I was very concerned about the whole woman's right to choose, because you could see, immediately after *Roe v. Wade*, you could see the people working against it, and we could hear people staying home and having babies and things like that.

RP: Is that something, reproductive rights, that you had always felt really strongly about, or was it after 1973 with *Roe v. Wade*?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGINNING TO TAPE 1, SIDE B

RP: This side B of cassette one with Jan Allen. Okay, Jan, we were talking about your concern about reproductive rights.

JA: Yeah, all through the 70s I was totally unaware of what was going on much on the outside. I really don't remember when *Roe v. Wade* passed. I don't know whether, because I hadn't been involved in any kind of group or anything at that point. The ERA actually went down in defeat a couple of times too, and I vaguely remember that. I know one time when it was defeated in the house I guess, one of the guys came in and his wife was very unhappy about the ERA thing, and he said something about being sympathetic. I said, "Yeah, I don't think it's ever—" I don't know what I said. It was interesting because I was not involved at all in anything except IBM which is why Jim suggested I go out and make a few friends. So I wasn't really aware of anything until I actually

started getting involved in NOW because NOW is involved in everything. It was sort of one extreme to the other which is probably why I was dubious about getting involved.

RP: Right. So then you founded Lillian's List in 1997 so I guess this is some time after the ERA was defeated?

JA: Oh, well, yeah. What happened was I was downsized by IBM in 1995, and I spent a year exploring what I wanted to do when I grow up. It's sort of the other end of where you're going to be. I thought, well, I'll go work for a non-profit. Jim and I decided that I didn't have to actually. I took early retirement and we concluded, he concluded that we didn't need an extra salary, so I started exploring non-profits because there are a not of non-profits that work with women.

I did the non-profit management. Duke Institute, Duke University has a program called non-profit management certificate. I went through a lot of the classes thinking that that's what I would do. There are all kinds of non-profits. The problem is that you can't be political because most of them are more charitable, from the IRS perspective. They're 501-C-3s, and they can't be involved in politics. They're the kind where you contribute to them and it's tax deductible.

And, so the more I thought about it—and meanwhile I had gone to a political gathering probably about two weeks after I was staying home, and said, “I don't know what I'm going to do.” Somebody said, “Why don't you run for county chair?” I had been a precinct chair in this neighborhood for quite a long time. It was right after 1994 when David Price had lost as a congressman, and Howard Lee who had been our state senator also lost. And I said, “Well, gee, this would be a good time to do something like

that,” because people would be coming out of the woodwork. I mean people were just astounded that David Price would lose.

And, so I decided I would run for county chair, and I talked with a woman who was currently the county chair, and she decided not to run. [. . . .] But it worked out really well because I got acquainted with a lot of people locally.

Meanwhile I’m sorting out what it is I really want to do. I had gone to an Emily’s List majority council. Emily’s List is the national organization that elects pro-choice Democratic women to the senate and the congress. I asked Ellen Malcolm, I said, “Is there any such thing as a state organization that does the same kind of thing?” She said, “We don’t have chapters,” she said, “but yeah.” She introduced me to a woman who runs an organization in Maryland called Harriet’s List. So I started thinking about it more, and then I thought well, maybe only people in Chapel Hill think this is a good idea. So I started talking with people around the state at various Democratic party functions. I was talking with people about choice, how do you feel about a woman’s right to choose, talking to women particularly from rural areas, and all of them said, “I believe that’s a woman’s own private decision. I don’t think the government should be involved.” I thought, “well, maybe people would support this.”

But then everybody I talked to said, “Well, let me know when you get it organized.” I thought, “I can’t do this by myself.” I’d never started an organization before. I know how to organize, but—so finally I remembered this young woman who had organized and had a reception for Emily’s List, and I called her, and we got together. Her name is Laura Edwards, and she’s a lot younger than I am. She said, “Oh, I’d love to help,” so she and I are the co-founders. We put a group together, and met about every

three weeks, and started talking about putting it together, a bunch of women from Raleigh. Well, we had about twelve or thirteen, Ann Barnes helped. She used to be our legislator. Laura and I, Laura was in Chapel Hill, and we used to get together at the food court at the Morrisville outlet mall because it was sort of a midway point, and it was equally inconvenient for all of us. We started talking, and I got all the information from Harriet's List, bylaws and things like that that you need.

We had our first event in 1997, and that was right after, in 1996 Elaine Marshall won secretary of state. She was the first woman to be elected state wide in a non-judicial race. So we asked her to come as a special guest, and it was magical. She just gave some brief remarks, and she said, "We're making history tonight." It was incredible. We had all these women who had been involved in the ERA, a bunch of older women. It was like a reunion. And, then there were a bunch of younger women too. We must have had two hundred people there. It was just incredible. There was this air of just total positive motivation and everything else. It was really, really exciting.

We had our first candidates in 1998. We had six or seven. One of them lost in the primary. And right before the election, Berni Gaither who's from Winston-Salem who's the candidate chair and I were talking, and I said, "What if nobody wins?" We didn't know. We had no idea. We raised money. We gave them money. We asked our members to give money, everything exactly the same way Emily's List does, and three of them won.

RP: Wow.

JA: Yeah. Two of them are now co-chairs, Linda Garrou and Kay Hagen are both senators, and they're co-chairs of the senate appropriations committee, which is

exactly what we want. We want these women to become leaders. Marian McLawhorn beat this guy in Greenville. She's from Greenville. The guy she beat, Henry Aldridge, is the one where in I think the previous year his committee was talking about the state abortion fund, and he's infamous. He made this statement about, "Well, women can't get pregnant if they're raped because the juices don't flow." This made national news.

RP: This was just recently?

JA: It had been like the year before. Oh, man. What he said was that women can't get pregnant if they're raped, truly raped. It just kept getting better. The newsperson who was interviewing him: "well, Representative Aldridge, what do you mean by truly raped?" And he, "Well, women lie a lot." It was wonderful. [laughing] The Greenville people didn't actually think that badly of him. Marian won by a very few votes. We gave her money at a time when none of the other PAC's could because we don't have a lobbyist. There's a lobbying law, part of the election stuff. We gave her money just in the nick of time, and she's not the only one. We have had candidates since then who have said that Lillian's List has been a really important factor in their becoming legislators.

RP: Great.

JA: So, yeah, we're very proud of Lillian's List. It's amazing to me. The timing must have been incredibly helpful. It was before redistricting so there were some open seats around 2000 and 2002. We've had amazing numbers that we've helped elect. The number of Democratic women [in the legislature] since Lillian's List started has more than doubled. Women in the legislature have now reached a new high at the national average. So, we're just totally thrilled.

RP: Yeah, that's fabulous.

JA: Yeah.

RP: So reproductive rights clearly has been something that's been important to you all along.

JA: Yes.

RP: Would you say that this is now the biggest challenge facing women today?

JA: I think it is. I don't think, because most of you have grown up, well all of you have grown up, when abortions have been available, and birth control. I mean it isn't just abortions that the other side is out for. They're out to eliminate birth control too. If you start reading between the lines of what it is they're doing you don't have to read between too many lines.

I don't think young women appreciate just how profoundly important it is that they be able to control their own reproductive lives. The restrictions, the anti's have been incredibly clever with the restrictions limiting access to the point where even though abortions are safe and legal, there aren't very many places where you can get them, and they're trying to shut those places down too. And, that has such a profound impact on a woman.

Women will get abortions. I have a good friend who has daughters who are in their maybe 30s. She asked one of her daughters what she thought would happen if *Roe v. Wade* were struck down, and her daughter said, "Well, I guess there'd a lot more babies that we'd have to take care of." Well, no, there won't be, but there will be a lot more women who—well, there probably will be—but there'll be a lot more women who

either have been maimed or who will die, because women will get abortions whether they're legal or not. They always have. You just have to look at other countries.

And I don't think people fully appreciate just how much control is taken away from them which is why I say this has nothing to do with babies. It has everything to do with controlling women's lives. There are a lot of young women who are beginning to understand that and are fighting very hard to keep that from happening.

RP: Right. So looking back in retrospect, and also toward the future I guess—.

JA: Yes.

RP: Because it seems like you are very much—.

JA: Yes, I intend to keep looking toward the future, yes.

RP: Right. This is very much an ongoing struggle for you?

JA: Yes it is.

RP: But how do you feel about the impact the women's movement has made?

JA: Oh, I think it's been incredibly terrific. I mean women's lives have been just totally changed. I mean my whole perspective back when I was looking at the possibility of three different things maybe I could do, but then I would get married, and settle down, and have children. There are just endless possibilities at this point. It's just night and day. I'm not terribly good at articulating things like this.

RP: So what do you think then is the most important thing that we should remember about what women like you worked on, and tried to achieve, and have achieved?

JA: Oh, I don't think in terms of most important. I just think that it's helpful for young women to understand where some of us have been and the women before us, the

women who were out there marching for women to get the vote, and continuing to recognize efforts to take us all back to that. It's amazing to me that the right wing, the Bush administration, a lot of congress people, talk glowingly about the good old days, and so on, and they really want to take women back to where they used to have control over them.

RP: Okay, well those are all of my questions.

JA: Okay.

RP: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or bring up?

JA: I don't think so. I think you've covered more than enough. [laughing]

RP: Okay. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your taking the time to talk to me.

JA: You're welcome.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED BY SHARON CAUGHILL JULY 19-20, 2006.