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R.47. Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present, and Future of Feminism

Interview R-0877

Kate Farrar

December 15, 2015

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ABSTRACT – Kate Farrar

Interviewee: Kate Farrar

Interviewer: Rachel Seidman

Date: December 15, 2015

Location: Washington, DC

Length: 2:29:59

As of 2019, Kate Farrar is the executive director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund. In this interview, undertaken in 2015, Farrar walks through her life as a feminist, beginning with her childhood in a quietly feminist household in Connecticut. She describes how her mother's life work in reproductive health combined with her father's varied pursuit of jobs influenced her to enter college as a natural feminist and as a student who felt empowered to pursue her interests freely. She began her career in women's issues and activism while earning her BA in political science from the University of Connecticut, interning for NARAL and for lobbyist Judy Bly. Farrar then walks through her experience lobbying on behalf of non-profits, earning a master's degree in public administration, campaigning for John Kerry, moving to DC, and getting involved in women-focused non-profits at that point. After working at Wider Opportunities for Women, she moved to a position at AAUW in 2008, which she held for eight years; the second half of the interview describes her tenure at AAUW, including the organization's growth during her tenure and her pet project she managed, Elect Her. In discussing Elect Her, Farrar goes into detail about the importance of women in leadership and how early political involvement, like college women in student government, leads to later continued political involvement and runs for office. She also ties this work to her own desire to run for office, which at the time of the interview, she was just making steps toward. The interview wraps up with Farrar discussing her future goals and her experiences and intentions with online activism; she addresses the (in her view) erroneous idea that online activism does not translate to real change, the sense of community-building she feels in online activist spaces, and her own learning curve for social media.

This interview was collected as part of Rachel F. Seidman's research for her book *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*.

FIELD NOTES – KATE FARRAR

(compiled December 15, 2015)

Interviewee: Kate Farrar
Interviewer: Rachel F. Seidman
Interview Date: December 15, 2015
Location: Interviewee's apartment in Washington, DC

THE INTERVIEWEE. Kate Farrar was the Vice President for Campus Leadership Programs at the AAUW, and had recently decided to return home to run for public office in Connecticut.

THE INTERVIEWER. Rachel F. Seidman is an historian and associate director of the Southern Oral History Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place in Farrar's walk-up apartment on the top floor of a wood-framed house, where her Corgi energetically chewed on a bone which can be heard on the recording at times. Because Farrar had recently decided to run for public office, it was clear that she had been constructing a narrative about why she wanted to serve, and that narrative was prominent in this interview, as was a kind of caution common to interviews with candidates and public officials.

NOTE ON RECORDING. Recorded on a digital zoom recorder.

TRANSCRIPT - KATE FARRAR

Interviewee: Kate Farrar
Interviewer: Rachel Seidman
Interview date: 15 December 2015
Location: Washington, DC
Length: 2 hours, 30 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

Rachel Seidman: OK, so this is Rachel Seidman. I'm here in Washington, DC, with Kate Farrar, and we are undertaking an oral history interview for a project at this point called #Feminism, Speaking Up and Talking Back in the Digital Age. And Kate, I'm going to ask you to start by just getting me situated with your family and have you tell me what you know about your grandparents. Did you know them?

Kate Farrar: Sure.

RS: They were part of your life growing up?

KF: Well, I am fortunate that I knew both sets on my mother's and father's side of grandparents for a significant part of my life, which I feel very grateful for. My mom actually grew up Ohio, and that's where my grandparents spent most of their lives as well. And they lived in Ohio after having all of their kids as well.

RS: What town?

KF: They lived out in Mentor, Ohio, which is an hour east of Cleveland, and my childhood, actually, I associate it with Ohio because I would spend many weeks at a time, a good chunk of a summer, out there with my mom. We'd drive out to Ohio, and I'd have this neighborhood childhood. I would explain it as such when I would go out

there. They had a pool in their back yard, and I got to really have all these neighborhood friends when I would go out and visit them in Ohio. And my grandparents—my grandfather passed away when I was in high school, but my grandmother survived into her early 80s, and she just passed away a few years ago. And so, therefore, my mother's side of the family is still very tied to Ohio, and, whenever we have family reunions, it tends to be out there still.

RS: What had your grandfather done, or your grandmother, for work?

KF: My grandfather actually for years had really been in the business sector and a range of positions, but he had come to those positions after being in the Army during World War II. He came back, and he had been a part of several companies in the area selling a range of different products. And my grandmother, because they had six kids, she was really the primary homemaker. And with all of their children, they had two boys and four girls, unfortunately one of the boys passed at the age of 16. He was hit by a car when he was bicycling to school, and so the five kids continued on and had much, you know, longer and fulfilling lives. But that death, just like any child's death, really challenged their family and split the family in some ways. And what's interesting to me, actually, is, as well, in my father's family—which I can share when I talk about them a little bit—is my dad also lost a sibling. And I think often what I see in any family, and especially in my family, is that any death is a moment of either bringing families together, or it can often tear them apart. And I think that both of my parents dealing with sibling death was something that neither of them expected in their lives, but was something that they could really relate to each other around and had really gone through

that and seen their parents go through what it's like to lose a child, which is something you never really expect.

So my grandparents in Ohio, I would see them big time once a year, but then my parents of my father—my dad grew up in Connecticut, which is where I grew up, and so I saw them every other weekend. And so I was much closer to them, and they cared for me and babysat me a lot as a kid as well. And with them, they grew up and spent the majority of their lives in Waterbury and Naugatuck, Connecticut, which is very central in the state. My grandfather was Italian, and my grandmother was Lithuanian, and so, when they met and fell in love, they went and eloped since it was frowned upon in their families that they had this relationship. So they eloped and spent their lives raising two kids, my dad and his sister, in Naugatuck, Connecticut. And so my relationship with them, I would say, it was just much more familiar; it was much deeper because I spent more time with them. And because of that, I really, as far as family identity, I really identify more with the Italian side of the blood in my family since that was a much stronger aspect in my growing up with them.

RS: Did you grow up in a community that had many Italian-American families in it?

KF: No. So what's interesting about where I grew up compared to these Midwest Italian neighborhoods that my dad grew up in is I grew up in a town in Connecticut, very small rural town called Norfolk, Connecticut, way in the northwest corner of the state: two thousand people, no stoplights, not really many neighbors. And so I grew up in a very rural, homogenous place. In my graduating class, which was four towns, about a hundred kids, there were probably three to four nonwhite students. My

exposure to the greater world outside that rural community was really due to my parents, because they really believed in showing me new things, showing me ways in which I could live my life that were outside of that, whereas a lot of kids that I grew up with in my hometown really didn't have that, didn't travel to other parts of the state or even outside the state.

So, for me, my childhood was very idyllic in many ways, but it was also—again, there wasn't a lot of community beyond that small town community. And a lot of the distinction in that town is there is a good amount of New York families that own summer homes there, so there was always this distinction of if you were a townie or if you were a New Yorker, and our town would double in size in the summer with all the New Yorkers. So those were really the only distinctions in my town growing up, and so the Italian-American presence was really found about an hour south, which is where my dad grew up, in Naugatuck, and that's where I would get a better sense of that community. But my mom actually worked in Waterbury, the city of Waterbury and the city of Bridgeport, and when I would visit those places with her and also visit other parts of the state and the area with my parents was really when I was exposed to much more than my two-thousand-person town.

RS: And what did your mom do for the city?

KF: My mom her whole professional life has been a nurse practitioner, and she was a part of the first wave in the [19]60s and [19]70s to be trained specifically around women's reproductive health care. So when she was in nursing school in Ohio, she went on as a part of really starting some of the first family planning clinics in the state. And so, for me growing up, she worked at several Planned Parenthoods around the state, but

she also worked at several city health clinics. Now, she works for the city of Hartford specifically on communicable diseases, so HIV and STDs. But that's been her life's work the entire way, and that's what brought her to many of the cities in the state.

RS: So did she talk to you about those issues growing up? Did she talk about reproductive rights?

KF: Oh, yes. I often have articulated that in my household growing up, it was—some people have conversations like once with their kids about sex, and, in my house and in my experience growing up, it was like I just wanted her to shut up about it. Because she wanted me to be educated, and so we had books, we had conversations, and it was uncomfortable as a kid feeling that your mom wanted to keep offering so much information and to keep having this conversation. But I know because of it that it really did shape how I perceive my body, how I perceive sexuality, how I perceive reproductive rights, so sometimes feeling like she was nonstop about those conversations and that feeling of being uncomfortable in those situations really did have positive effects.

RS: Did you see her—was she ever scared to be working at Planned Parenthood? Was that part of that back then?

KF: There was some of that. As a kid, there was one instance I remember in particular. I think this was at a time she was working at the Planned Parenthood in Torrington, Connecticut. I believe there was a point at which there had been threats; I don't think particularly at that clinic. And that clinic actually didn't perform abortions, so it wasn't as targeted, but I didn't hear about that a lot, certainly, I have no doubt, because she didn't want to worry me. But it was something for her, I would say she ended up—she did certainly enjoy her work at Planned Parenthood, but one of the

reasons over time, and specifically over the last 10, 15 years she worked with the city, is she liked having a diversity of clientele and actually not just working with women. She really liked being able to work with men and women and have that ability to influence and care for them. So I never heard specifically from her that she was fearful. I think it was more about, over time, what really fulfilled her from a patient care perspective.

RS: Did she talk to you about reproductive rights and abortion—not just sex but the bigger political issues—as a young person?

KF: What's interesting is that I have no recollection of that whatsoever, but what happened was, when I was in college, I had—a big turning point for me in my career trajectory that I had no concept of at the time was, when I was in college, I interned for a state legislator, and she's now the Secretary of State. Her name is Denise Merrill. And from that internship, I met a whole community of advocates in the state of Connecticut, and I secured an internship at NARAL [National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws] in Connecticut for that summer. And it was a no-brainer for me, but it was never—it was interesting because what happened was, I was in that internship, and I was suddenly advocating for reproductive rights and abortion, and I was having this moment with my mom where we suddenly knew all of these same people. But I never thought of it. I never considered that that would even happen or how full circle it really was that I was suddenly advocating for all these things that she had a very different aspect on in regards to making a difference. And when I was at NARAL of Connecticut is when I think I first had this recognition of how much my parents' views on feminism had really influenced me without me even knowing, because I wrote an article for the newsletter that summer where I really pointed out my mom in particular as fighting for

these issues, working on these issues through many years, and of empowering me with this feminism ideal I didn't even really consider was different.

And I remember quite poignantly that after that—because I had told that they were going to have this article in the newsletter, and she read it, and she said, “I’m really glad that you have reflected on this and you realize all these things, but it’s not just me, you know. It’s your dad too. He’s a feminist too. It wasn’t just me who wanted to make sure that this was how you thought and saw the world.” And so that time period, in particular, I think was the first moment that I realized this is how this is all connected, this is how I’ve been so influenced over how I’ve thought about these issues.

RS: So now looking back do you see the things your dad did?

KF: I think from my father what I really gained from him is he is someone who, hands down, has always believed in women’s equality, and that just came through in who he is, how he treats people, how their relationship was, how they managed their roles in our family, and how he just expected me to do what I wanted to do and to be happy. And there was really no question in his mind of what I should [dog interrupts recording; some discussion of what to do about the noise].

RS: So your dad had the ethos of a feminist?

KF: Yes. I wouldn’t say that—again, because clearly there wasn’t something that triggered, that I put in that article, and I was reflecting on how I became a feminist. So there wasn’t a moment that he shouted to the world, “I’m a feminist.” But clearly, once my mom said that to me, it was like, “Oh, of course this is who they are and this is what they believe and what they’ve tried to ensure is a part of how I view the world and how I’m empathetic of others.”

RS: So how would you describe yourself in elementary school and as a young adult?

KF: I think I've actually always been quite curious. I've always been quite engaging and social and wanting to be around people and know about people and entertain people. And from a curiosity standpoint, as a kid, I think what's demonstrative of this a bit is I would always have some new craft project I was really into. Like, for a certain amount of time period, I was extremely into cross-stitch, and all I wanted to do for a year was cross-stitch, and I'd go to the craft store, and I'd buy all the patterns and the thread, and I would just spend all my time doing that. And then, I got really into calligraphy and so I would buy all the calligraphy books, and I just wanted to become the best at that. And I'd have these intense phases of this curiosity, and then I'd want to move on to the next thing and learn all about that as well. And as a kid—I'm an only child, and so a lot of it was to entertain myself and coming up with things to do that. And so I played library in my house and created my own Dewey Decimal System and actually used the old typewriter to come up with little labels for every book, and then I made everyone, of course, come to the library, and I'd have to stamp them out and everything. I just created that by myself. There was no one to play with, and that was what I was going to come up.

Because I lived in a rural area, I didn't have kids right down the block and so I really valued the friendships that I had as a kid and would spend a lot of time at those friends' houses and after school. But when I came home, it was just me, so I think I just was very curious, very engaged, and wanting to be around people since, otherwise, it was just me. And I also, as I got older—I was just actually bringing this up to a friend the

other day when we were in China because we were talking about how, in China, kids are raised in an authoritarian mindset—you know, respecting authority—and that's how the entire system is really set up. And I was laughing because, as I grew older, probably around the age of ten, when I started to argue with my parents, I would throw in their face, "You taught me how to challenge authority." And I definitely played with that as I got older and tried to push those boundaries of what they expected, but me pushing against that and using their philosophy against them in a way.

RS: What did your dad do?

KF: My dad I often describe as a master of all trades. He's someone who has done everything from driving a bus to being an auditor to being a diving coach to—gosh, what are the many other things? He painted houses. He's been a landscaper. But his two real loves—he did go to college, and he graduated with a business degree, but he never, you could say, officially went into the business side. His two real loves was he was a luthier, which is a guitar builder, so he went to school when I was just about one to build acoustic guitars. and so he did that for several companies and then on his own for many years. And then, his second love is he went back many years later to a certificate program as well to become immersed in golf course management, and that's what he's been doing for many years now. And he is all on the side of taking care of these golf courses, and what appeals to him about that, I think, is all the knowledge you need from the horticultural side to make that happen, which has always been an interest of his.

So he's really been in our household—my mom was always the stable breadwinner, and my dad would always do just what he had to do. And there were absolutely points in my childhood that he was unemployed for stretches of time, and it

was always about what's going to be that next thing that my dad does. So that's why I really do see him as someone who can do anything as needed, but I do see him as an artist in many ways because of his background in the guitar building and just his creative side that comes through even now.

RS: As a child, was that a stressful thing for you, or was it something you admired?

KF: I don't think at the time—when you're a kid, you don't really know any different. More than anything, I think what it gave me is it gave me a lot of time with my dad. And I think, for me, the points at which I remember him being unemployed, it wasn't stressful on me. It was more, I think, I saw him wanting to do something and just being bored. When you're home for stretches of time and him not really feeling a purpose, I never personally felt any stressors from that and saw any financial stress from that even though I know that absolutely existed. So, for me, it was more that I came to understand that, for my dad, there wasn't this straight career path, and for other families that's just how their families worked, and that was typical, but that wasn't going to ever be typical in our family. And I do think it definitely influenced me down the line in regards to not feeling like I needed to choose one thing that I do with my life. But for him, I think he's someone who he never really needed that career path to feel successful or to feel worthy, and so it was never something that he really sought either.

RS: So did you have your own path in mind? Tell me about yourself and going off to college. What were you thinking? Where did you go?

KF: So here's the thing, is that I was very successful academically as a student. And I had, I guess I would say, very high expectations for myself as a student. I think in

high school my parents were even, like, relatively concerned about the stress that I would put on myself and them not feeling they were doing that. They were really feeling like I was the one doing that to myself. When I was actually applying to college, we started visiting—because I was an only child, they were like, “Why not?” We started visiting colleges when I was a sophomore just for fun, and it really was a fun thing, it seemed, at the time. But because I had all of these high expectations, I was extremely picky about—if I didn’t like one thing on the campus, I was like, “I’m not going there.” It was a very warped view of life, I would say, at that time.

So, interestingly enough, the school I was so in love with was UNC Chapel Hill. And I applied there, but what was actually very telling about my high school time period compared to now, what I know about others, is we had very poor college guidance. And my mom didn’t go to college. She got her nursing certificate. My dad did go to college, but it was very haphazard and somewhat not directed, and so they didn’t really have a background to guide me. And the guidance counselor that I had at the time suggested two reaches and two safeties. And so, even though I was this extremely strong academic performer, I came up upon my senior year being extremely disappointed because it was going to end up that I didn’t get into my reaches, and I only got into my two safeties, and one of those was the University of Connecticut, which, at the time in the late 90s, I just saw it as a total failure to go to the state school. It just seemed like what did I work so hard for to go to this really ridiculous school that I could have gotten into if I had done way worse? But that was what I was dealt, and so I had decided in my mind I would go for a year, and then I was going to transfer to UNC Chapel Hill. And that was just what I was going to do.

And in going to college, it was an expectation, certainly, by my parents like, "This is what you will do," but I didn't have in my head anything about what I would do from that. It just was, "I'm pursuing my education. I'm going to keep being this strong academic student." What happened was, when I went to University of Connecticut, they asked what my major was, and I chose political science, which the only reason I chose that was I had a class senior year in high school called Asian Studies, and it was the first time I had any type of historical or contemporary events class that was outside an American world view. And it was a very small class, about fifteen of us, and I felt like it just opened my eyes to this entirely different world perspective that I hadn't gained in any of these other classes I had ever taken, and so it really intrigued me to learn more about this international affairs perspective. And, at University of Connecticut, that was included in political science, so that was the sole reason that I chose this major, was because I really liked this one class in high school.

So I chose political science. I go to the University of Connecticut very disgruntledly, and, like most freshmen, I had a very challenging first semester just from the standpoint of getting adapted to college life. But by the end of my first year, I knew that I wasn't going to go anywhere. I had just really fallen in love with being there and my friends and how I was being challenged at such a large and different place. And I kept taking these political science classes because I just liked them. I never really thought about what you did with them. No one asked me what I was going to do with them. Because it was such a large school, there was no handholding from that perspective. But what really directed me was I had a class junior year, and it was called Women in Politics, and in that class we had to interview a woman in politics, which was

a very novel idea for me because I'd never even met a politician. I'm a junior political science major, and I've never even met a politician in my life. My parents vote and talk about politics, but they never volunteered anywhere. I never went to an event of any sort.

So I reached out to a woman politician that was recommended to me who was the state representative for UConn at the time, that region, which was this woman, Denise Merrill. And I met up with her, and I interviewed her, and there were several things that really changed my perspective in meeting her. One, I thought all politicians, that's what they did. It's like that was their whole lives, and that's entirely not who she was. She was someone who had been a concert pianist. She'd been an educator. She had run a nonprofit, and then, later in life, she decided to run for office. So that really changed my perspective on who politicians were. Secondly, I really had no concept of how few women there were in politics. Because I was raised in this feminist household, I just thought everyone was a feminist, and why wouldn't you be, and why weren't we further? So I didn't have a sense of how few there were of her, even in my, what I considered a progressive state of Connecticut.

And after that interview, she said to me, "You should come intern for me." And like most of those moments, you say, "I should just say yes." When someone offers you something, you should just say yes. So I said yes, and I went to intern for her at the state capitol, and it was the first time that I had any sense of how the political system worked without reading it in a book. And what really drove me is that I saw her advocating on all of these issues that I really cared about and that there were all of these other people really trying to make change through the political system. And so she was the one who introduced me to really kind of a small network of nonprofit advocates in the state of

Connecticut who really embraced me. And it was through her that I got my first internship at NARAL. It was through that internship that I met who would be my first boss and significant mentor, who was a woman named Judy Bly, who is a lobbyist for nonprofits in the state.

And so, after college, Judy, after I had interned for her, offered me a job of working for her. And it just seemed like a fabulous job to get paid to advocate on issues that you care about. But right after college I had really had the urge to run away. I hadn't studied abroad in college and I really wanted to go away, out of the country. I wanted to find any way I could to do that that was not financially stupid. I didn't have money, or my family didn't have money for me to just take a long trip or something. It had to be somewhat reasonable and rational. So right after college, I actually secured a work visa for six months through a great program called BUNAC, and I flew to London on September 10th, 2001. And I wake up in London on September 11, 2001, and so I experienced full post-9/11 life abroad for six months. And I worked there for an American lawyer who did copyright law, and it was really my first time abroad on my own, and it really shaped my consistent sense of adventure and needing to know about the world. But what was really fulfilling about that is that I knew I was going to come back, and I had a job. And I came back, and I lobbied for Judy.

RS: So hang on for a second. What was living through 9/11 in London like for you?

KF: There were a few things that I remember very clearly. One was that I woke up in this new city, this very foreign place, and we had an orientation that day at what were the BUNAC offices. And in this orientation, they just welcome you and give

you your work visa and direct you to how you might find a job. And during that orientation, because of the time difference, was when the planes were crashing into the World Trade Center. So during that orientation they said, “We need to stop this orientation. What we know is there are planes crashing into the World Trade Center. We don’t know any more, and we’re sending you, in essence, back to the hostel.” So I remember I took the subway back to the hostel.

RS: Were you with other—?

KF: I was with other people who had just gotten to the country, who were just a part of getting their work visas, Americans—but I mean around the world—Australians. Who else? I think it was mostly Australians or Americans who were in that group that day. And the hostel that we were staying in then was one they owned and recommended for you when you first arrived before you found a more permanent housing situation, so everyone in that hostel was not from there and had relatively gotten to London recently. So I remember getting back to the hostel, and there was just one communal room where the television was, and we all were sitting there just watching the coverage, stunned just like anyone else and trying to make sense of it. And what I remember clearly is trying to figure out how I could get in touch with my parents because—I’m trying to think at that time. I don’t even know at that time if I had called them yet because I had been so—and it wasn’t like we had cell phones then. I had to get a calling card and use the pay phone. And so I had a calling card, and I remember I kept trying to call them, but all the circuits were busy. And so it was many, many hours on that day before I was able to get in touch with them.

And they were, understandably, overwhelmed to speak with me, but not surprisingly they wanted me to just come home. And that just wasn't something I planned on doing. For them, they were glad that I was safe and that I wasn't going anywhere, and I was with others who were all going to be updated by this office who had helped us with our visas, but more than anything no one really knew at that time what was going on. What I remember as a next memory was when people around the world were gathering together in memoriam. A whole group of us went to St. Paul's that had this significant memorial for all of those that had passed, and everyone had American flags, and they were playing the "Star Spangled Banner" here in this foreign country, and everyone there was supportive of America and our loss. And that really set the tone for my many months after that in Europe because it was a time of, as soon as you said you were an American, people wanted to show you how much they supported you and how much they cared about supporting a response to this attack on democracy. And it was a time during those first six months after 9/11 that you really felt this strong sense of international unity.

So in all of my travels during that time period I was there, that's what I felt. And there were a few points in time that, subsequent to that first call to my parents, that they were like, "Should you really be going to Ireland this weekend?" But at the end of the day, I was like, "I'm safer on this discount airline to Ireland than I am riding the New York subway." I think they could start to see that. So it was very challenging, actually, when I came home from being away, because I didn't come home at all during that six months. So I came home January 2002 to start my job, and it was very weird because I felt like I had missed this shared experience, and I couldn't relate to it or understand it in

the same way that everyone else did. And I almost had a delayed grieving. When I came back and saw how it had changed people and how it had changed people's view of the world, I couldn't understand that until I came back to the United States.

RS: How did you see it changed people's—?

KF: I think people's sense of security and American dominance, too, and just the simplistic—of how it changed how you go to the airport, and, just in conversation, how it changed people's view on war. I still feel to this day that my friends that I made through my London experience, that—I have three incredible girlfriends from that experience. I feel very connected to them, not just for the six months that we had together, but really because we didn't experience 9/11 in the States, and we can relate to that. And we can all acknowledge that it was different being abroad as an American during that time period than being here.

RS: Sounds like being abroad you felt embraced by others.

KF: Yeah.

RS: And here people became much more suspicious in some ways.

KF: I think there was this very unique time period that America was viewed so positively right after 9/11. And what happened for me is, yeah, I came back in January of 2002, and then subsequently, when I would travel internationally, I saw the shift in America not being seen as this unifying force. And so I was there during that time when that seemed like a true hope and reality, and when I came back there had already started to be that shift of—I remember it starting to happen where, when people would talk about America's role, it was initially a part of this international effort, and then, over time, people really started to question, really, what is our role in responding to these attacks.

And as that changed, I wasn't abroad, and I was in the States more, so I saw more of that aftereffect than that initial nationalism that happened here.

RS: So you come back, and now you're going to have this job lobbying on behalf of nonprofits. Just all nonprofits?

KF: Every single one. Judy Bly had at that time, I want to say, 20 different nonprofits that were clients, ranging from Planned Parenthood, NARAL of Connecticut, to hunger organizations to the League of Women Voters to social workers. So issues that I was advocating on were everything from health care to nutrition to women's rights to voting rights. It was a big range. And it was her, another colleague of mine, Carolyn Treiss and myself, and we were the threesome. Every day, during a legislative session—in Connecticut, it's half a year legislative session, so you are day in and day out keeping track of everything that's going on and going to many hearings and meetings and bill creations and really looking to advocate on behalf of what our clients' interests are. And for me, because I was the youngest and most junior, I was taking direction from Judy, and it was really a trial by fire. Some of the things I appreciate about her style is she just says, "Go do this," and she doesn't necessarily tell you how to do it and try to just figure it out. You come back with a solution. So a simple thing like, "Go find this legislator and tell them X." OK, I'll go figure that out. Or, "We need this language changed in this bill." OK, I'll go figure that out.

RS: What did you learn about lobbying, but also about, I guess, power or politics?

KF: I know, right? Very big takeaways were that some people say that when they have political experiences it really sours them on the process, but I would say my

experiences really made me even more hopeful, because what I saw was that the majority of legislators, of staff, of people that I worked with, they really wanted to do the right thing. They really weren't there for the wrong reasons. And that was even somewhat surprising, I would say, to me. So I really took that away with me. Another really strong takeaway was how much you can influence the process just by showing up. One of the reasons I felt so strongly about advocating for our clients is that they had so little resources and, often, so few volunteers to step up and speak up for them, whereas you could say other interests had a lot of money to put against that. And it really was us finding a legislator at the last minute and saying, "These constituents who you've been hearing from, we're talking to them too, and this is what they're really feeling about this particular bill," and unless they heard that from you or you had rallied these particular constituents about this particular issue, that would not have occurred to them. It really demonstrated to me how important it is for that individual voice to be heard within the political decision-making because it just might not be considered otherwise, might not even come to the mind of that decision maker.

And then, I also learned how critical relationships are at the end of the day. My boss, Judy Bly, had lobbied at that point for over ten years, and she's very respected, an extremely soft-spoken but effective advocate. And because she had such long term and respected relationships, I could see her go into a room and advise legislators on what they should do, and they would listen to her and know that she represented this range of clients and really see that she had so much power from those relationships that she had built over that time period. And that me, someone who had the same cause and the same

pitch potentially, I wouldn't be as effective in that because I just didn't have those strong relationships. So those were some things that really struck me about that time period.

RS: Do you remember any particular bill that helped get changed or something that you—.

KF: There was a very significant bill that first—I worked for her for two sessions—for the first session, which was when we got the smoking ban passed in Connecticut. Connecticut was one of the first states to do that. And that was a very broad reaching coalition effort, and, not surprisingly, we were up against significant resources and other lobbyists to make that happen. And I was one piece of, when you looked at the whole coalition, probably a 20, 25 person team that was trying to make that happen. And it was probably one of the first times I saw a significant coalition build around one legislative effort. And Judy had two of the clients who were a part of the coalition, American Heart Association and an organization called Match, which was in the state solely for the purpose of pushing for antismoking legislation, and so working with those two, but then working across all these organizations and with a whole cohort of legislators who were really working for this. I remember every step the bill would take and counting votes and going to hearings and trying to track down legislators, and then you'd get to the next committee and getting to the point where the bill had passed both the house and senate, and you were up late because, like many legislatures across the country, you do things at the very last minute session. So you're up there 12:00 a.m., midnight, 2:00 a.m. on these session nights. And then, it passed, and the governor signed it, and there was this significant celebration, and it really was nuts to bolts, me seeing how years of work could coalesce into one legislative session of getting it done and

getting a significant piece of legislation passed that would make the difference in the health of so many of our citizens. So that's an example that I think of quite often.

RS: Did you feel that Judy, the three of you, was there an articulated feminism in the office? Or it was just three women working on issues?

KF: I don't know if there was, but we really did—probably less Judy and more my colleague Carolyn Treiss, who—Carolyn is now the ED of our permanent commission on the status of women in Connecticut. Probably more, she is someone I incredibly look up to as well, and she worked for Judy for more years than I did. And Carolyn has more of a spitfire personality, I would say, than—Judy is a little more soft-spoken. So I think there was more than enough times that Carolyn and I felt like we were the woman power going out there to fight for these causes, because a lot of the legislators are male, a lot of the business lobbyists are male, and so it was a male dominated environment. And it was really one of the first ones that I had been in and, even since then, have really worked in in which you feel like you're this woman trying to push this other voice in the room.

RS: So then you went from there—you went to Wisconsin?

KF: Good question. I did. So between the legislative sessions—it's worth noting because it speaks to my personality—I went out and worked in Yellowstone National Park for a season, because Judy really only needed me for the session. So I worked one session with her, went out for four months, and worked in Yellowstone as a hostess at the Old Faithful Inn, which is very odd for most people that work there because everyone else that worked there, they didn't have a job. That's what they did. It was transitional resort work. So it was a whole other realm of people that I was introduced to

when I was out there. But for me, it's my favorite park in the country, and I had always wanted to spend more time there, and it was a way for me to do that. Being out there actually solidified my graduate school plans because I had been considering what I wanted to do further in my education, and, like many people who have found that they like advocating for issues and they're interested in politics, law school comes up. But I wasn't sold on that, and I was trying to figure out what I really did want to do. I didn't imagine being a lobbyist forever even though it was great work. I just didn't feel satisfied that that was going to be it for me.

So when I was in Yellowstone, I hadn't had a single political conversation in months. It just wasn't a topic of people I worked with. They didn't know what I did outside of being a hostess at the Old Faithful Inn. But I remember, actually, there was one night about three months into me being there that I got into a significant political debate with three other coworkers. And I felt so alive, and it just really hit me that that's who I was, and I was really missing that. And it really convinced me that I was on the right track, but I needed to go a route that I was learning more and getting more skills to be more effective in the political realm. So when I was looking at a range of programs after I was in Yellowstone and I came back for the session, law school was way too much of a commitment for me. I couldn't imagine committing three years to something I didn't know if I really wanted to do. And I was looking at policy schools, and the reason I narrowed in on public administration and specifically going to the Maxwell School at Syracuse was it was this yearlong program, and it was this mixture of policy and politics and management. And being a generalist and acknowledging that a little bit at that point in my life, it felt like it would give me this intense year experience, boost all of these

skills and knowledge, and then I'd be able to go jump, do something else. So I was accepted and went to Maxwell for a year, and after that year I definitely was more solid in wanting to go the nonprofit management route and wanting to continue to work but in a nonprofit, like not go back to lobbying.

RS: And why?

KF: Just to gain a very different perspective. I felt like I had learned about the advocacy side, but I wanted to know more about the other pieces and more about the management of the organization overall. So, in that spring, I was applying to jobs all over the country, really, a whole litany of nonprofits, mainly in the fields of healthcare, anti-obesity work—because that had been some policy work I had done in Connecticut—and then women's rights. And I wasn't really getting anywhere, and so, after graduation in May, myself and several other graduates, we were unemployed and like, "How did this happen? We went to graduate school; we were supposed to get jobs, and now we don't have any jobs."

RS: What year was this?

KF: This was 2004. I would say where I was stuck was I was very noncommittal about where I wanted to live. I was applying to things in New York. I was applying to things in San Francisco. I was applying to things in DC. And no one really believes you or wants to hire you until you're usually there. So I kept applying for things. I had interviews that whole summer, and that's when, in 2004, I just got to the point—I was like, "Why am I doing this? I should just go on the campaign, the presidential campaign." So I had a friend who had been on the Kerry campaign from the beginning, and she told me about the last round of hiring—because I had to get paid. I

had to get paid for something. And she connected me with an opening that they had in Wisconsin, and I was excited about it because I wanted to go—if I was going to go on the campaign I wanted to go to somewhere I'd never been, and I wanted to go to a state that was a swing state, that really mattered in the election, and that was Wisconsin.

So I packed up the car, I drove out to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and showed up and started working there and then created my own staff office north of there in Manitowoc county. And was there for three months through the election starting up and organizing all the volunteers in that county. And that, just like so many of these other things, this was incredibly eye-opening, but more than anything I think what I learned from that—because I'd volunteered on campaigns before but had never worked in a campaign, had never worked on a presidential campaign. In any campaign, you believe you're going to win. You wouldn't be working on the campaign if you didn't believe you're going to win. And not winning was a big shock to my system because I had this idea of, "We're going to win this campaign, and then I'm going to go to DC with all these other Kerry staffers."

RS: Did you win Wisconsin?

KF: We did win Wisconsin. It was Ohio; they lost Ohio. So that was the plan was, "We're going to win, I'm going to DC, I'm going to get a job, this is going to be the start of this new path." So when we didn't win it was like, "What do I do now? Do I go home to Connecticut," where, wonderfully, Judy was like, "Just come back and you can work for me." "What do I do?" So I took the jump anyway and moved to DC without a job, like many people here do. And because I had been down so much during graduate school and when I was trying to find a job, I'd done a lot of networking then, and so I

started interviewing for things and really, within a month of me being here, I found a job. And that was at this small women's organization called Wider Opportunities for Women. And really I'm convinced that they hired me because the project I would be working on was something called the Self Sufficiency Project, and it had 36 state partners, and one of the state partners was the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, and I knew those individuals very well, and I knew how state politics worked very well, and that was going to be important in this project. But I'm pretty convinced it was my Connecticut relationships that sold the organization on hiring me.

So it was a small nonprofit, about eight staff at the time. They were formed in the [19]70s when federal legislation was passed around nontraditional careers for women, and they were the first organizations that did all of the nontraditional training. And it really morphed in the time I was working for them into an organization who had a mission of moving low income women to economic security. And I was hired, and then, the day I started, the woman who hired me told me she was leaving. So I was in one of those scenarios like you are in a lot of small nonprofits where not only do you do everything, but sometimes you do more than you even initially intended you're going to be doing, quicker than you thought you would be doing. So I had a lot of responsibility there early on in managing this self-sufficiency project, which was a measure—alternative measure to the poverty standard. So it was the only measure out there at the time that measured what it took for families to make ends meet in their own community. And I had that measure in all these states, and I worked with all these coalitions in all those states to move their agendas using that standard. It was great because I got to use my state experience and apply it to all of these other states and get to see action happen in

all of these different arenas and learn so much about how different Utah is than even its neighbor, Idaho.

So that role was great, but it was one of those places, because it was small, there was very little mobility after a few years of me being there. And I had a friend who told me about a job she knew of that was at this organization AAUW [American Association of University Women], and I was like, “I’ve heard of them.” Hadn’t really interacted with them, but I heard of them. And she knew that they were looking for someone to come on board and run leadership programs. That was never something I had really considered before, but what caught my eye is she told me that one of the responsibilities would be running a conference that they had that was called the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders. And it sounded very familiar, and that’s because I went to it in college. I went to it between my junior and senior year, and it was one of those experiences that you go home and you’re, like, 17, and you tell your parents, “My life has changed.” That’s how I had felt about that conference. It was three days in DC, and I’d never been to DC on my own, and all these women from across the country and learned about all these organizations.

So when I heard that this conference was still going on, it really piqued my interest. And I said, “OK, maybe I’m interested.” So it was a unique time, and AAUW because they had had an interim ED [executive director] and the interim ED was, interestingly, trying to fill this position before the new ED came in—seems very backwards, and it likely was. So in any other circumstance, I have no doubt that I would not have gotten the position. I was someone who had familiarity with this one thing she knew was going to be a part of the position; I had nonprofit experience, and she was

trying to fill this position before this new ED came in. So I had two lunches, and then I was hired. It was a big risk because I didn't know who I would be working for, in essence.

RS: So you knew she was on the way out?

KF: She was on the way.

RS: She was interim, yeah.

KF: And they had been in the process of hiring the next person. So I didn't know who I'd be working for. I didn't know therefore if, what was even in the position would be what I was doing. But what I did know is that it was a much larger organization and I wanted to experience that. Also, the position was supposed to have staff, and I wanted to experience having staff.

RS: Staff that reported to you, you mean?

KF: Right. And it also was going to pay me a lot more money, which, in the nonprofit world, especially in women's rights, seemed like, "Why wouldn't I take that risk?" So I accepted the job, and I started in January of '08. It ended up turning into way more than I could ever imagine because the new ED came in; she brought with her other new leadership.

RS: Who was that?

KF: Her name is Linda Hallman. She's still there currently, and she brought in a COO who became my boss. What I was given, which was this one conference and no staff, turned into, seven years later, seven national programs and a team of ten and impacting now tens of thousands of women and girls a year versus a few hundred when we started. For me, what became extremely powerful about the position that I was able

to develop for myself personally, but then all of the program work we were able to build, was I started to recognize all of the advocacy that I had done, absolutely it was so important. And as you can tell about my point around showing up, that never fades, the importance of that, but I realized over time that I also had an opportunity to impact who those decision makers were and, if there weren't women decision-makers at the table how could we really make long term substantial change? So for me getting to come at making a difference in a very different way and trying to build up and encourage women's leadership was very fulfilling because I felt like it was really getting at the root of what I saw, so many of these issues we were fighting against.

RS: So tell me about some of the ten programs.

KF: Sure.

RS: I know there's Elect Her, right?

KF: Yeah.

RS: Which you created?

KF: Yes. So within the first few weeks of me being at AAUW, I got a call from a woman named Sarah Burrer [phonetic] who was, at the time, assistant director of the American University Institute of Women and Politics. And she said to me, "I have this program I started at AU. It's called Campaign College, and I want to talk to you about it." And I'd known Sarah. We actually have tried to figure out—you know when you know people for a long time, you're like, "How did we really meet?" I think we met through—and this might have come up in other conversations you had in DC—WIN, just this network. It was called the Women's Information Network, so I think we met at a WIN event at some point. And she knew I'd started at AAUW, and she said, "I have this

program, and I want to talk to you about it.” So I sat down with her, and she had started this one-day training called Campaign College at AU [American University] because she saw how few women were running for student government at AU, and she was like, “I’m right here; I can do something about it.”

So she put together a few speakers, and she was just impressed at what a difference it had made in that one day at AU because, that one day, they had more women run and, subsequently, more women win. So she said, “I think this is a great program. I think it could go somewhere, and I know you, you’re at AAUW, and I also know these two other women, Jessica Grounds [phonetic] and Susanna Shakow [phonetic],” now Susanna Wellford, who had created Running Start. And Running Start was, at that point in time, a relatively new nonprofit. Now, they’ve been around ten years. They had been created solely to encourage more women, young women, to pursue political office, programming-wise. So they had a high school program they had started, but they hadn’t really started anything at the collegiate level. So she got the few of us together for a meeting and explained this program she had created, and we both said, “Yeah, I think it sounds great. Maybe we can figure out a way of piloting it at a few other campuses just to see how it would work.”

So I go back to AAUW, clearly I’m new. My boss is new. Everything we’re doing is new, so it’s a time for new things, trying out new things, and she’s open to it. She’s open to trying out a pilot of this program with Running Start and AU. So we pilot the program in the first year just at two locations who went along with us for the ride, and we did the program exactly how AU had done it just to see how it went. We got some positive responses, but, like anything, you realize what more you want to do. And it was

at that point in time that Sarah actually departed AU, and her incoming replacement there at the center decided they didn't want to participate with us in the program any more. So it was this moment of, "Well, you created the program, and we really want to have this relationship, but we understand you don't want to participate anymore," so it was a moment for Running Start and AAUW and myself to really reformulate the program and turn into a much bigger and deeper curriculum than the one had been at AU and name it Elect Her and create a workbook and a more significant curriculum.

We started training facilitators, since we were going to put in an application and accept college sites. We needed to have more than just a few people facilitate, and so we pulled upon a really diverse range of political professionals in DC who all really cared about this work, and we started training them. And every year, we would seek to take on more sites for this daylong training. Once a school site was approved, we would go back to them year after year, and that's for us how we would see change happen. Because one year, absolutely, it's great when a few more women run on campus, but what we're really looking to do on a lot of these campuses is change the culture, especially the political culture there, and that doesn't take just one year. Now, we're on campuses where women are running for president every year now because now there's a pipeline to get to that point.

That program in particular—you can tell a little bit in my background—really became my baby because I was able to really connect the dots of what I was trying to change in the political system and these collegiate women that I just saw so much potential in changing their views of themselves in politics. When you're able to do that in an intense one day experience and then support them along the way, it really allows

you to feel like you're making change at all these different levels. And for me, it became very personal because, over time, and me spewing this message of, "You need to run not just for student government, but we want you to really see yourself as a politic leader," for me personally it just really started to make me question when I was going to take that advice. And that's why, in June, I left AAUW, because I'm moving my life back to Connecticut actually with the goal of running for the state legislature in two to three years. So that program and all the programs in which I got to really build up and develop women's leadership was an opportunity for me to feel like I was making a change in their lives, but, just like anything, it really helps you reflect on what you care about and how you want to make a difference, too, and why you're telling others to take risks and leaps but you're not taking one yourself. So that has really come to fruition for me now.

RS: That's really cool. So I want to get to your goals in a second, but are there studies and stuff that show that people who run for office in college go on to run for office later?

KF: Yes and no. There is not any data set that actually takes all of the legislators at the state and congressional level, men and women, and asks them that question. What we did do though, AAUW and Running Start, is the last Congress—not this current one but the last one—they made calls to all of the congressional offices, female congressional offices, and out of—it was like 56 or 60 percent of all of the female congressional offices, they had all been in student government. What the other piece, though, is, is that there is great research that, actually, Jennifer Lawless—who is at American University Women and Politics Institute—has put out recently about political behaviors and perceptions of particularly the 18 to 25 set, is how much more dominant

even at that age group men are in politics than women and that it really starts to divide from an equal participation in middle school and high school. The divisions really start to happen in that 18 to 25 range and that, during that time period, you see less women in student government, less women in the party clubs on the campuses, less women in political discussions. And therefore, you see a real distinction in that age group of men versus women and who wants to really get involved more in politics.

Interestingly, from Jennifer's research, she says there are many things you can do to combat this, but one of the ways to combat it is programming that is specific at this age group in particular, because this is where some of the divisions start to occur, which is how we think Elect Her really helps with that. Some of the other interesting factors in the report play a really significant role in perceptions of wanting to be a political leader are absolutely parents and how much they talk with their sons or daughters about politics. Also interesting in the research is women who had participated more in sports are more likely to want to pursue political leadership. So there were some very interesting findings in that that relate to other aspects of a woman's life that can be influenced around their political perceptions, but I would say overall what you find time and time again is there are a lot of perceived and actual barriers for women to get engaged in political leadership. And when you have an experience, just like would I have even gone down this road of being engaged in politics at all if I hadn't had that initial opening of the door and seeing what it was like from the internship? Just like that, when we have women running on campus and losing and saying, "I'm so glad I ran, and these are all the things I gained from running," I do have faith that they see that taking that risk isn't so scary when they think about political office after college as well.

RS: We've really seen a major shift at Duke.

KF: Yes, we were at Duke. We were at Duke when Ada Gregory was at the Women's Center. She was the one who had applied and brought the program.

RS: Ada and I started Democracy Project together.

KF: Right, I remember that.

RS: So I remember one time there was a poster for, "Run for office," or something like that, and it was a picture of a man in a suit and tie with no head. And these women brought it to the Women's Center, "Look at this." Anyway before we jump to your next phase, I want to pick your brain a little bit more about AAUW and these older, big women's organizations that have been around forever, have a national presence, and yet, just like you, many, many people have barely heard of them.

KF: Oh, entirely.

RS: I was interested, when I was thinking about people to interview in DC and doing research and sort of looking—unlike in New York or some other places—it's hard to identify a feminist community or many grassroots, but there's lots of these big national organizations.

KF: And they all have their distinct histories.

RS: And you played this interesting—because many of these groups struggle, I think, from an outside perspective it seems to struggle, to connect with the young women.

KF: And we do as well. There's no doubt you all do, and you're all trying to figure that out.

RS: So you played this interesting bridging role. Can you just talk more about that?

KF: I'd be happy to. As you said, I'd heard of the AAUW, didn't really know more about them until I started working for them, and then you're like, "Whoa, how did I not know about you? How was I not told about you when I was in college?" What I found in AAUW when I went in with this new leadership, it was a unique time because they had gone over a decade without a significant executive director. There had been several short term and then this interim, and so it was a little chaotic when I came on, but it was an opportunity more than anything else for me because the leadership really encouraged us thinking about things differently and not doing things the same old way. So I was at an advantage that I didn't know much and that I didn't have expectations about the organization or the membership or anything. And it really gave me a chance to figure out what was needed. And what had happened over the years at the organization is there had also not only been—it had been somewhat chaotic within the leadership overall and, hence, for the staff, but particularly in what you could consider the younger member prospect in the college/university area, there had been really no strong investment in keeping those relationships with the institutions or the students.

And that was, again, just somewhat of a chaotic time at the organization. So when I came on, the board was really questioning whether they were even going to keep the college/university membership status. So historically, at AAUW, we've always had individual membership, and then they created this institutional membership that a college or university could be a member. And then students were affiliates because still, in the membership bylaws, in order to be a full member you needed a degree.

RS: So you don't need to be faculty, you just need to be someone who has—.

KF: Just need to have a degree. And decades ago, they also originally had been that you needed a bachelor's, but decades ago they changed that to an associate's. So anyone with a degree, men or women, could believe in the mission of AAUW to empower women and girls and be a member, which meant paying \$49 a year into this organization. And what I learned was there were these institutional members who were paying a few hundred dollars a year; no one really knew what we were offering them, no one was contacting them, and we had this category of student affiliates and there were student affiliates, but no one was engaging them, no one was really communicating with them. So this was actually initially not even indicated in my job, that this audience was desperate for a connection. It was something I learned as I started working on these programs that were supposed to be for the college audience that I was like, "Oh, we really haven't been doing anything for these individuals so what do we want to do for them?"

And therefore, it was an opportunity that my boss really believed in because my boss, Jill Birdwhistle, she had her PhD, she had been a faculty at some point, so she understood the campus environment. She knew how critical the college and the universities and students were to AAUW's future, and she really fought to make sure that, when she came in with Linda and me, that they weren't disregarded. And it meant that this national conference that had been struggling and some of these other program ideas we had, we knew those could be offerings to these schools, but we knew that there needed to be way more attention to them than a single staff member who was supposed to be managing programs could provide. So it was at that time that I created and Jill really fought for a new position at AAUW that was what is our college/university relationships manager. And instead of being under membership, that position was under my

department. It was this brand new idea of a position, and the people who have been in that position have come from the higher ed environment, and it's really been all about developing those relationships and building that membership base.

So when I came on, we had still on the books maybe two to three hundred schools. Now, we're over the eight hundred mark. We had, again, maybe a few hundred student affiliates out there; now, we're close to the ten thousand mark. And it's really been this commitment and having, yes, someone they could build a relationship with, but these are the schools that are engaged in all of our programs. And so they're seeing the value of that relationship. Some of them just have their school join because they want to say, "For \$350, we support women," and that's all they want to do. And then, we have other schools who apply for Elect Her and apply for a campus action grant and develop a student organization and have a relationship with our local branch and get activated around doing voter education. So, just like any membership, we have the super-engaged and the non-engaged, but overall the organization has seen that this is a long term investment and that all of these students that are getting to know AAUW now are the ones hopefully 50, 60 years from now that are lifelong members. And that was really encouraging to see an organization take that risk, and it was a necessary one because, just as you articulated about some of these very long term women's organizations, if you go to any of their meetings or you look at their leadership it seems like how are you not just going to fade away in 10 years?

So it was absolutely the writing on the wall. I think AAUW wishes it had made this type of investment years ago, but it's better late than never. And you do want to keep doing more and more. One of the challenges for AAUW is, because we have a

membership model—more than anything I think the membership model is what is challenging because a lot of the other women's organizations, they say they have members, but they don't actually have paying members. You just sign up online and you're a member, right? So our real challenge is that we have a paying membership model, and that is built around a branch structure that there are physical branches that you go, and you have meetings, and those branches really decide how they fulfill the AAUW mission. And so some of our branches, they might really think that they're fulfilling that mission by having lunches every month, and then, once a year, they do a book drive to raise money that they send to the organization, which is great, but some individuals in an area might want to do more, and that's not available to them, whereas we might have other branches who all they want to do is advocate on their public policy issues. So the one thing they do a year is participate in the state lobby day, but that's all they do.

So it's been challenging for AAUW to—if you think about it, we do so many things from policy to fellowships and grants to legal work to our programs, and it's challenging for the organization to maximize how to engage all of these different ages and members, all of this different geography that they're a part of, in all of these potential ways that they could work with us. But that's why, from the youth perspective, us really investing in the collegiate women no matter where they land, the goal is that they find out what AAUW is doing, and we hope that they continue to see value in that initial experience so that it can play out somewhere longer down the line.

RS: So now tell me about running for office. You left AAUW to start a consulting—and that was to make it possible for you to plan this next step?

KF: Yes.

RS: So what are your hopes for the next thing?

KF: I just hope that I am fulfilled and challenged and happy. I mean, this is the thing is that there's something—I find it in a lot in people in DC, and I find in a lot of people wonderfully that have been a part of my life, but it is unique that I have always felt this particular responsibility to make a difference, and it's just there. I can't get rid of it. I almost wish sometimes that I could get rid of it. And not just to make a difference, but to feel like I'm that stone that's thrown in the pond, and I get to make bigger and bigger ripples of a difference. And so I'm always driven by how can I fulfill that purpose. I had often thought about wanting to run for office, but I kept putting it off. And my husband is absolutely one of my biggest cheerleaders, and he would even say, when I finally brought up in the past year, "Is this the moment?" and he—I'm really, personally, just still questioning if this was even a smart idea. His perspective is always like, "Of course, this is what we're going to do. Of course, this is what was going to happen. I knew this when I married you." Whereas to me it was still a question if this was a path to try out.

So in thinking about the now, kind of like, "What am I waiting for?" and the path to get there is, just like anything, I've lived here for over ten years, my husband has been here for much longer than that, and you need to figure out a way of transitioning your life. So it took me a little while, even when I started to think, "Do I want to do this and move home back to Connecticut," which seemed, "Why would I do this? I love my life in DC, I have great work, I can keep doing other great work." It took me a little while to even tell my family or friends that I was thinking about this. Because I knew, once I said it, it was real, and they were going to be all for it, and that was really scary. And scary

from the sense of—the way I’ve been able to wrap my head around moving my family and going on this road that is so unknown is I’ve been able to think about it as, “OK, we’re on this adventure, and five years from now, if we’re totally unhappy, we’ll just choose another adventure.” And that’s allowed me to let go of the uncertainty of it all. And it’s meant that, over the last year really, at this point, I really started talking about this idea with all these people in my life, with all of my wonderful former Connecticut colleagues, and I started to try to figure out how to move back and what to think about professionally. Because I was really at a place professionally where the next thing I would do would probably be an ED of a small nonprofit, which I absolutely would want to do, but I don’t necessarily want to do it right now because I want to pursue running for political office, and it’s difficult to have the time and ability to do both.

So when I started applying actually for some jobs in Connecticut, it became difficult for individuals I was interviewing with to see me in a lower position, even though I want—I mean I would like a lower-level position because then it would allow me to pursue these other goals. So once that started to become clear and I knew that I couldn’t wait any longer, I felt an immediacy to it all. I decided that I should just go on my own, and that meant developing this business. I never thought that would happen. It was very surprising that that happened, but it seemed like a good means to making this transition happen. And so what I was able to do was I had a contract with AAUW over this past five months, I had a contract with an organization in Connecticut, and it allowed me to go back and forth and really start to figure out where we might live. And it’s looking like we’ll be moving early 2016 and I’ve started to secure work in 2016. And it has really meant just starting to think about what I want to run for, when that might be,

and it's great because everyone in my life is like, "Just tell me when and where and I'll be there and I'll knock doors and I'll give you money." I'm like, "That's great, but there's so much that I need to figure out in my life to get to that point." But I really do feel like it's been a great new challenge and very exciting to think about going back and making a difference somewhere that I care about so much. And I don't know what that's going to look like, and I don't know if I'll be successful, but that is really the essence of taking a chance and trying to be a leader in a new way.

RS: Do you—it's such a complicated political time, I feel, right now. And this is maybe particularly coming from North Carolina, and I don't know that much about Connecticut. Is it a Democratically controlled—?

KF: It is, house and senate. Interestingly enough, we tend to like to elect Republican governors. We have a Democratic governor right now, but historically that's what we've tended to do.

RS: It's been such a funny period because we have this incredible feminist Democratic president and his wife, and yet we have this incredibly anti-feminist mindset.

KF: And like every other state it seems like—yeah.

RS: And so many people are so disgruntled with politics.

KF: Oh, entirely, right.

RS: Including a lot of young people, very sadly. You've seen the inner workings, and you've talked about how you really have—.

KF: But honestly, I don't know how I'm going to feel when and if I'm a legislator. I might go down that path and run and win as a legislator and be like, "This is horrible." So that's another risk in a way because—and I know that's some of what—I

mean, even Obama himself will acknowledge he didn't really enjoy being a senator. It was quite challenging. He didn't feel like he was getting anything done. So I'm aware that that could really be a reality, and it's upsetting. What it gets at, though, is I think my perspective always is you can be upset and annoyed and pessimistic about it all, and there's plenty of others that feel the same way, and, at the end of the day, if you aren't going to try to be an individual to change it from the outside or the inside, then unfortunately we're just all going to have a lot more to complain about and be pessimistic about and hit our head against the walls about. I do question, and this is what goes back and forth with people who are in DC who end up doing work at the state level. Some could say you can have great impact working for a national organization in DC because you get to work at the federal level that needs you, or in these states that are incredibly anti-feminist that need you, why would you go to this state that seems very progressive and feminist and try to make it more so or work defensively?

To me, what it's all about is, I really think, that from my perspective there's so much [more] opportunity for policymaking at the state level than there is personally, in my perspective, at the federal level, and that's really because of the stalemate that we've had at the federal level for so long now. So I am somewhat pessimistic about what can happen at the federal level, and therefore I do have friends who have said, "Just go to Virginia. Can you go and run in Virginia? They really need you." But Connecticut is my political home, and I'm not one of those people who feels so strongly about running that I'll just move to the one corner and I'll just run there because that's politically expedient. I really felt that if I'm going to go down this path, and, if I'm going to take this risk, it needs to be somewhere that I authentically really care about and I'm really

passionate about. And so it needed to be Connecticut, and there are significant challenges there even though it seems like a friendly place to women. We have some of the richest and poorest cities in the country. We have significant brain drain. We have unfortunately—we're not that high in the numbers when it comes to women in the state legislature.

So in any of these states, there's so much to be done around ensuring that women are seen as equals, and I have no doubt that my idealism will be challenged. My husband has smartly suggested that, in going down this road of political life, we have a safe word so that, when I'm really done, he knows I'm really done because in his perspective he will keep encouraging me and pushing me to keep going, but we need to know when he should stop doing that. So I am open-minded about that idealism being challenged, but I do feel like, for me, the state level has been consistently where I feel change can happen quickly and substantially. And it doesn't mean that I won't stop volunteering for those presidential campaigns or keep giving or see the value of national organizations, but I have become somewhat pessimistic and impatient about the federal political prospects.

RS: I've come to see the importance of state politics from the opposite view just because of the incredible shift.

KF: Yeah.

RS: And I feel like that is one thing that I have really changed in my teaching is getting—.

KF: Oh, entirely, like, look in your own backyard. Because we're taught so often in our knowledge of civics about—I mean, in my perspective—the federal government and about national politics and so little about what's happening in your own

community. So you tend to grow up thinking that DC is where it happens, but I don't believe that. So I'm glad to hear that, but I know it's been incredibly frustrating for so many in North Carolina to see that shift.

RS: Let me just quickly look at my questions for you. I think that's all my questions. Is there anything you wanted me to ask that I haven't asked or things you'd like to talk about?

KF: The only thing I would acknowledge, because you had commented that you had seen more of this newer development of online activism and how much of a change that could happen in regards to the feminist conversation, I would just comment that, more than anything, I would say feminist online activism has made me feel less alone in the work that I do. I feel like, before, we had our own little communities of support, and I have really just felt hopeful in a new way by what the opportunity of online activism has allowed around certain issues and campaigns and callouts.

RS: So do you participate in particular—?

KF: And I would say I would never be online if it hadn't been for—I would never be using Twitter or Facebook in the way that I do without it being instrumental in my work. So when I started at AAUW, the reason I joined Facebook, I remember, was because I needed to for work. That was like 2008 or something. And it was really through learning about those tools and learning about how to engage all of these program participants and all of our members that I really discovered how effective they could be in building new attention and a new form of successful advocacy that, when I started that job in 2008, wouldn't have been possible. And when I was at AAUW, what I was really proud of during the time there is they invested very early on in having staff whose sole

job was social media and that I didn't see immediately at a lot of other large women's organizations. And they entirely have now built this interdepartmental team, of which all of the departments pitch content and pitch stories, and it's seen as this critical organic communications mechanism now. That developed in six years from having one person who was just going to post what they came up with, you just post a link, and that's what you did with it.

So, personally, I've learned a lot from seeing all of that collaborative social media activism develop within the organization of AAUW. I learned a lot from that. And, personally, it really influenced me in just getting engaged with different Twitter chats or signing on to different petitions or posting those things on my wall or getting others to post them on theirs. It really changed, again, how much I felt not just connected in my immediate work to the AAUW members and program participants I was working with, but really connected me with people that I built relationships with because we participated in a Twitter chat or because they found something that I posted on Facebook. There are people like Soraya and Holly, who I would say are my social media feminist idols because they're extremely active, and I view them as significant experts in leading that, and I feel like more of a follower in that. But I still find great value, and I feel that my networks on social media expect a certain amount of content that I'm providing them around women's issues and women's leadership, and that's why they know me.

RS: Are there particular campaigns—you know, there are people—I think they're fewer now, but there have been people who say, "It's just slacktivism, it's not—"

KF: "It's not real activism," sure.

RS: “It won’t make a real difference.” Are there particular campaigns or moments you remember where you got involved or you saw this thing happen online that had a real impact on the ground in some memorable way?

KF: Yeah. I feel like there was just one last—this isn’t the one that’s coming to mind whatsoever, but so I feel like there was one last year around a particular product that I wish I was thinking of. But as an alternative—this isn’t a really good example, but it’s one I’m thinking of right now—there were all of these typical holiday gift guides that would go up around toys you should get your kids, and I remember one year, in particular, there was some online activism around why are these all anti-feminist or so gendered toys. And there was a lot of online pushback about some of the lists that had gone up. And so, at that moment in particular, AAUW decided they’re going to come up with and create blog of the top ten feminist gifts you can get for your kids. And it was this positive, proactive response to what had been this online conversation about, “Can you believe this? Oh, this is what’s really needed. We need to get out there proactively and say these are the greatest gifts and where you can get them for your kids this holiday season but aren’t anti-feminist.”

So it’s somewhat simplistic, but at the end of the day, if there wasn’t somewhat of that initial chatter and online Twitter bashing of those initial lists and individuals and organizations participating in that and saying, “This is kind of ridiculous,” now it’s something AAUW does every year; they put out this annual holiday toy guide that has these feminist toys. And that wasn’t produced before. That kind of purchasing power wasn’t suggested. So it’s just a simple example I thought of recently because they just posted the new blog, and I was thinking about how it had come up initially, but I do feel

like I can see how there is judgment on, “What do all these tweets mean at the end of the day if we can’t get legislation passed,” right? But policymakers and decision makers, they pay attention to tweets. They pay attention to their followers and what public perceptions are being put out there. So a policymaker’s public persona is very much defined by social media these days, and how they’re engaging in that social media sphere and how they’re hearing from people in that social media sphere, that impacts their decisions, and it impacts that persona that they’re trying to maintain.

So I do think that it’s—could you say that one tweet that you send, is that as powerful as making a visit to your congressperson? Depending on the congressperson, it might well be, because if you show up at their office, you’re probably not talking to them; you’re probably talking to a staff person, whereas some congresspeople, they actually manage their own social media accounts, and they may actually pay attention to that tweet. So you can’t really know and distinguish what is more of a form of activism than the other, but, again, I think some of the powerful things from social media is it really makes and builds community, particularly around some of the activism, in a new way that just isn’t possible across the same geographic bounds.

RS: So I have two questions. One is, what role do you imagine social media will play in your own political life?

KF: First off, I feel like I’m just always learning. I am not someone who is ahead of the curve technology-wise at all. My husband actually is convinced that he is legal IT support for me in every part of my life. But I am someone that sees the value in technology and sees the value in what it can really do to engage individuals and to bring people together and to get your message out and to make you feel seen—I shouldn’t say

feel—feel and seem, I guess, more real and authentic. Those political figures that are really—they all have their social media accounts, but the ones that you could say are seen as more effective to me are the ones that are just more real and authentic. It's when, for instance, Obama went to Alaska, the fact that he took over the Instagram and was taking pictures, that just engaged everyone in a whole new way. Or when Debbie Wasserman Schultz tweets that she's at her kids' soccer game, that connects people to her in a different way than how they see her on the House floor.

So from the standpoint of the current tools, I feel like I'm going to be just figuring out how to be my authentic self on them, but quite honestly I fully expect by the time that I'm running there's going to be something new, and I'm going to feel like a total newbie using it. I'm going to have to really depend on others to guide me on how to use it effectively. And more than anything, I hope that I view the social media tools that are continually developing and coming out as a way to more actively engage with my constituents and that I don't just see it as a push opportunity but that I see it as a pull. That's how I really envision them being of most value, and that's how I really would hope to use them.

RS: Last question. Have you read Rebecca Traister's book about the 2008 election, *Big Girls Don't Cry*?

KF: Yes.

RS: A lot of the book was focused on the media and how they cover gender. Much of her argument is that even though Hillary lost, it wasn't a loss for feminism, that feminism completely transformed, or women completely transformed the political, not just—the whole political culture, whether it was Tina Fey and Amy Poehler or all that.

KF: Sure, yeah.

RS: Do you think that your decision to run now has been shaped by a changing political—?

KF: That's a good question.

RS: That there's a new place for women in politics that there wouldn't have been even 10 years ago?

KF: I don't think I view that it's more possible for women or that it's a different time for women. I think I'm inspired by more women. I think that's what every woman who runs really does if she knows it or not. She inspires other women as a role model. And I think what I've been exposed to in the last ten years of being in DC is more women than I ever was prior to that who have run, have lost, have run again. And that inspires me, every single one that I meet. So in that way, it's like a domino effect for me. Again, I don't think I view it as that it wasn't the time of the woman before. I think for me I had felt so challenged and fulfilled in the work that I was doing that it hadn't been the time that I wanted to pursue that particular goal, but absolutely each and every woman that runs, when I see that, even though for me, personally, I might have way more interaction with these women than others do, it's never old to me yet. It still feels so new and groundbreaking when these women are running. That's why I really feel like I need to follow in their footsteps.

RS: Great. Well, thank you so much.

KF: My pleasure.

RS: It was really great.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Susan Savoy, April 25, 2016

Edited by Emily Chilton, June 20, 2019