

University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections

MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project

Lila Cockrell Transcript, April 9, 1997

Ruthe Winegarten: Wednesday, April ninth, nineteen ninety seven, I'm getting ready to interview Lila Cockrell. At the San Antonio Museum of Art.

RW: And what I was talking to Mrs. Cockrell about, was the fact that when she was elected mayor, she was the first in the state to head a major city, so she occupies a very historic position in our history, and I wanted to know if she thought about that at the time.

Lila Cockrell: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, uh, there was some interest from national media because at the time I was elected, I was mayor of the largest city in the United States that had a woman mayor. That was in nineteen seventy-five. And I held that role of being mayor of the largest city until nineteen seventy-nine when Jane Byrne was elected mayor of Chicago.

RW: I had forgotten that, uh-huh. Well, do you feel that the women's movement played any role in encouraging you to run, or, or, or getting women to vote for you or how did this play out?

LC: Well, I'm, I'm sure that it did. In my own way, I guess I held back a little bit because the current wisdom was, particularly in the sixties, that a woman could not be elected mayor of a major city. I was a councilwoman from nineteen sixty-three to nineteen seventy, and, uh, made my first swan song at that time, thinking I was going to retire from public life and just do other things. Then in nineteen seventy-three, the group that I had been affiliated with, the Good Government League, asked if I would come back and run again as a councilwoman, which was rather unusual, because the group primarily had their candidates serve two or three terms, and then had a rotation. However, I did run again, and was elected, and then in seventy-five, I was asked to head the ticket and run as mayor. And, uh, I was elected fairly easily, then served three terms consecutively until nineteen eighty-one.

RW: How many—well go ahead.

LC: And at that point, uh, I retired from public life, actually my husband was not well. He was having some heart problems and I felt that a less stressful lifestyle on my part would, uh, be very helpful to him. I, I was followed by Henry Cisneros, who had served three terms as a councilman on my, uh, council, when I headed it as mayor. And Henry served four consecutive terms. And then in nineteen eighty-nine, Henry announced that he would not seek re-election, and immediately the press began asking if I would run again. And I decided to do so, and I served one final term, uh, and so I served a total of four terms as mayor.

RW: I didn't remember that you had served another term.

LC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

RW: Kind of like Ma Ferguson.

LC: Yes, it came back again. So I ended up making three swan songs.

RW: When you first ran, I guess it was in seventy-five, what was your platform, or what were some of the issues you felt were important to address?

LC: I think I might talk a little bit about the opposition. I had, uh, two major male opponents, and I think there was no question that the issue of a woman running for mayor was there, it wasn't so much, uh, a public issue, but it was a subtle, more underlying issue. One of my opponents had big billboards, uh, saying "It takes a businessman to be mayor," you know, the man wasn't just singled out, he didn't just say "it takes a man to be mayor," but he said it takes a businessman to be mayor.

RW: He didn't say experienced in business...

LC: Right. But I had the opportunity to meet that particular candidate in the runoff, and, uh, on several television debates, I felt that I really defeated him, because I had served, I knew the city's business. I knew the background of—I knew the issues and I simply was able to address the issues and I think in a more, uh, forceful and direct way than he was.

RW: Did you address this question of being a woman directly in your, in say, your debates or your speeches? Did you say, “Yeah, he, there’s some implication that a woman can’t do the job but let me tell you why I don’t think that’s right,” or did you...

LC: No, I never, I never discussed it. However, in the, the second, uh, campaign—and that gentleman, by the way was Mister John Monfrey—and in the second, uh, my second campaign as mayor in seventy-seven, uh, Mister Monfrey again was in the run-off with me. And at that time, uh, it appeared that he might be gaining some strength. But I never, uh, challenged him directly on having made the woman thing an issue. But what I did was try to have a campaign that was, uh, a strong campaign, and a little bit of a macho type campaign. And I challenged him to a debate at high noon on the steps of city hall. So, I—and he declined and tried to laugh it off, saying that he felt I must be on the skids or I wouldn’t, uh, have challenged him to a debate like that on the steps of city hall. So, what I did was, uh, my campaign staff, uh, had the seating arranged at the base of the city hall, had our names on each of the seats, and at noon I walked down—right at high noon—walked down the steps, took my seat, looked over at his seat, which was empty, and, uh, then proceeded to debate the empty seat. And it made a lot of news, it was very newsworthy and on television. And, um, one of his campaign issues was that the business was going to Dallas and Houston and why was San Antonio’s business going to Dallas and Houston? And it just happened, that that very morning, uh, in the morning, uh, Express-News, there was a very slick sort of an eight-page rotogravure type section that he had put out, where he had spent a great deal of money on this slick publication. The minute I saw it, I thought it looked different from anything I’d seen locally, and I had my, uh, advertising agency check up on where it was printed. It was printed in Houston. So I, I brought that rotogravure down with me, and then held it up, and I said, uh, “Mister Monfrey wants to know why is all the business going to Houston. I have the answer, it’s because people like Mister Monfrey take their business over there. Why, why didn’t he use one of our San Antonio printers? Doesn’t he feel that our San Antonio printers are

qualified?" You know, why would he take business to Houston at the time when he is decrying—well, you know, you can get the trend. And so, it really, uh, it really made, made, made points.

RW: Is there video footage of you at the base of city hall? I mean, the debate, or...

LC: That was back in nineteen, uh, probably seventy-seven, and so, I doubt that it's still available, because, you know, the, the TV stations re-use their film, videos. I doubt that that would still be available.

RW: So, did your main support for your races come from, like women's groups? I know the League of Women Voters is non-partisan, but...

LC: ...it is non-partisan. But I did have a lot of support from women, civic-minded women, particularly at the grass-roots level, who helped as volunteers. Uh, I did have business support, through, as well. And, uh, so...

RW: You raised your--was the fund-raising as crazy as it is now?

LC: See, uh, actually, up until, through the nineteen seventy-five race, I had been a member of this team which had had a business-based sponsorship, and I had not had to raise money. But in the seventy-seven campaign, the Good Government League had made its departure from the local scene, and I had to run then as an independent, and had to raise my own campaign funds, which is challenging. Very, without any doubt. I think it is a little harder for women to raise campaign funds. But, uh, I raised enough to be successful, and, uh, so, it was—actually, I think you need to feel that campaigning is fun, or you shouldn't be in it. Because it can be very, very tiring, and of course you know that, uh, your opponent is going to attack you on issues, or other things, uh, just in order to try and get elected, and that's just part of being in the political scene.

RW: How much did you have to raise, do you remember what the—campaign?

LC: I always spent less than my opposition. If the opposition was spending about three hundred and fifty thousand, my campaigns usually ran about two hundred and fifty thousand. Of course, campaigns

have continued to get more and more expensive. And, uh, I personally just think it's terrible how much is spent on political campaigns.

RW: Were there other women serving on the council during those years? Or were you the only one?

LC: Well, I was the only woman for several terms. And then, uh, after becoming mayor, uh, there was, I think, at first, one other woman elected, and then two other women.

RW: Maria, was one...

LC: Well, one of the first was Helen Dutmer, and then some of the women who have served included Yolanda Vera and Maria Berriozabal and then, uh, others have taken their place. Ruth Jones McClendon, uh, served, and is now a state representative.

RW: Is she the daughter of Katie Jones, or are they not...

LC: No, she is not. M-hmmm.

RW: Well, I was talking to Rose Spector last night and she said that that after she and two other women were elected judges, that was about the time that you decided—I'm wondering if that influenced you.

LC: M-hmm, m-hmm. Yes, it was. It absolutely did, and it was very interesting in--Rose and two other women were candidates for judge of county courts at law, and that was in November, the election of November nineteen seventy-four, and at that time, I remember so well a lot of us who were interested in supporting women candidates were so nervous, but because we thought with three of them trying it all at the same time, maybe none of them would get elected, it might, you know, be kind of an overkill. But, fortunately, all three were elected, uh, so that worked out very well. I think the other two were Carol Haberman and Caroline Speers. And now the two, Carol Haberman and Caroline Speers are both district judges, and of course, Rose has moved on up to the Supreme Court.

RW: San Antonio seems to be fairly, have been fairly open to women candidates.

LC: Uh, I think that is true...

RW: Why do you think that is?

LC: Of course, we've had several women, of course, in the legislature.

RW: Yes, Lounell Sutton (sp?) went to succeed her husband for one term—like around that same time period?

LC: Yes, and then we've had others, uh, you know, elected since then, we have several up there now.

RW: That's right, Christine Hernandez (sp?) and you had Sylvia Romo...

LC: Sylvia Romo, Sylvia now, has been elected the county tax assessor-collector.

RW: Did the Hispanic population, the voters, sort of divide around your race, or did you have...I mean, how did that play out?

LC: Well, I know that, uh, Mister Monfrey was a beer distributor, and he, uh, had more signs that you can imagine, particularly, uh, on the west side and the near west side, and, uh, the, there was a good bit of support for him, particularly in the beer-drinking crowd. And, so, uh, I—however, I was able to win.

RW: Uh... go ahead.

LC: Well, I just found it a very interesting and challenging thing to be involved and the, uh, there were a number of candidates, actually, in all of the races. The first time, uh, the next, um, highest candidate was a local grocer, Mister Eloy Centeno (sp?). And then, uh, following that, Doctor Jose San Martin. Who was a very fine, wonderful gentleman that I had served with on the council earlier, was a candidate, and then, there were a number of other candidates as well. But fortunately, each time I was able to emerge, during that period, as the mayor.

RW: You've not, you've never been defeated in a political...

LC: Yes, I have been defeated one time...

RW: One time?

LC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

RW: For?

LC: But, I tell you it was the...

RW: For the Mayorship?

LC: Yes, uh-huh. And, uh, but, uh, I have been fortunate in having won, uh, about ten elections by the time you count the times I was elected, uh, and with runoffs, really it was more than ten when I count the, the runoffs.

RW: That's quite a lot. Well, I know that you were president of the League of Women Voters, both in Dallas and San Antonio. I think you left Dallas and around fifty-six...

LC: That's correct.

RW: ...which is about the time I got involved in the League there with...

LC: Is that right?

RW: ... Jo Fay Dodge (sp?) and...

LC: Oh, yes, Jo Fay is a dear friend, yes.

RW:...and Katherine Perrine (sp?)...

LC: Yes.

RW: ...and, uh, some of those women...

LC: Oh, yes. I had been very active and was president of the league in Dallas, and then my husband accepted a position in San Antonio as executive director of the Bexar County Medical Society. So, I moved to San Antonio with my two young daughters who were in elementary school, and joined my husband and made a firm resolve to stay home and mind my own business. And then, I don't know exactly what happened, but first thing I knew I was president of the San Antonio league.

RW: Well, uh, it seems to me that being mayor, even serving on the city council is a real logical progression from league leadership to...

LC: It is.

RW: ...city government because of it's...

LC: ...because you're interested in issues and is--in the league, we had studied local issues, we'd studied council manager government, we had studied many issues relating to, uh, local government issues.

RW: And water, I remember...

LC: Water, right, yes, mm-hmm...

RW: ...was a really big issue. I think the league was ahead of its time at that point, nobody wanted to...why they were spending all that...

LC: Yes. Yes...

RW: ...energy. And before they, you had served in the military.

LC: Yes, I, my husband and I were married in June of nineteen forty-two, and of course that was in war time. He was, at that time, a first lieutenant in the field artillery. And we were stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. And, then, after about a year there we, he was sent to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I accompanied him, and then from there, he and his unit were shipped overseas. They were shipped to Iceland. And, uh, then, at that point, we had not started a family, and so I volunteered, uh, and was accepted as an officer trainee in the WAVES. And so I went to the officer training school, which was located at Smith College in North Hampton and got my commission as an ensign. And then was sent to Washington, D.C. in the Bureau of Ships. And I served there and then my husband was, uh, became aide to the commanding general of Iceland, uh, who was in Oklahoma, and then my husband was in Oklahoma, and then it was kind of a tradition for the general to pick Oklahoma young men. So, uh, he served there and, at one point, the general and Sid came in, uh, actually on secret orders to Washington to check some of their shipments and so we were together and when he went back, soon I found that I was expecting. And so, that was kind of the end of my military career, 'cause at that time you could not continue and have a child.

RW: You were discharged?

LC: Uh, yes, you received an honorable discharge, and so, uh, then I went home to await the birth of my baby. Home then, was Kansas City, Missouri, where my parents lived. Mm-hmm.

RW: So you had—what you had administrative experience though, in the...

LC: Yes, that's right.

RW: What were your duties in the military?

LC: I was, uh, the officer for training and advancement in rating. I gave all the tests for military personnel--the seamen, the yeomen—others for their advancement in rating. They had to certify with their, uh, their educational, uh, training. And then they had to certify, of course, with their military side and experience before they could be advanced in rating. I was in the personnel office, and then I also commanded a WAVE company...

RW: Really?

LC: Yes, mm-hmm.

RW: What does that consist of?

LC: Well, we had military drill, you know, several times a week, we had a big review...

RW: I see, there was more...

LC: Oh, yes, we had a big review in the Bureau of Ships, and my company was judged the best commanded and performed company in the Bureau of Ships regiment of WAVES, so, I received an award from the rear admiral Cochran, who was chief of the Bureau of Ships.

RW: Who was the head of the WAVES?

LC: Um...

RW: Was it a woman?

LC: Yes, um, I'm sorry I can't recall...

RW: I knew her name...

LC: ...I knew her name, too, and I can't just, for some reason can't recall.

RW: You have a picture of yourself in your uniforms? Maybe not here, but at home...

LC: I don't have it here, I do have it at home, yes.

RW: Well, well, you certainly have a very interesting, uh, preparation for a career in public service. And since you left government service and you went into a business situation...

LC: Well, I left in, let's see, in eighty-one when I left at that time, I was planning to go into private business. I had been offered a vice-presidency in a very fine public relations firm. But I was approached by some leading business people in San Antonio and asked to become the executive director of a new organization called United San Antonio, and it was to bring the community together on issues surrounding economic development and try to reach some consensus and work on some areas that might be a disincentive to businesses coming to San Antonio. I did, I agreed to do it for a limited period of time, to get it on its feet. So I was in that position three years until nineteen eighty-four. And, during that time, some of the issues we worked on were, first of all, trying to get an engineering program approved for the University of Texas at San Antonio. We had no engineering program, and we were, trying to get, uh, engineering-related jobs coming into the city, and so we desperately needed to have those programs. So, although we were told the odds were very much against our being able to accomplish that goal, we did get approval, first through the board of regents of the UT system, and then through the coordinating board of Texas Colleges and Universities. For the bachelor-level programs in civil, electrical and mechanical engineering. And, then, since those programs were installed at the bachelor level, they evolve and increase to master level and the program has been very successful.

RW: Do you feel that that has made a difference here, in terms of jobs...

LC: Oh, I think it has. And particularly to offer young people here in San Antonio, who would like to be engineers, an opportunity to get their training locally, and to have that full range of programs available.

RW: And probably study...

LC: Yes. And other things we worked on were, uh, certifying—you know, we're facing up to the problem of the large numbers of persons, up to twenty or twenty-two percent, of our population who are functionally illiterate, and trying to, uh, address programs for literacy. Uh, these these are things, these are issues, problems that need to continue to be worked on in order, you know, to have San Antonio's population really ready to take the kinds of jobs we wanted to bring in and to have available for our citizens.

RW: After three years there, then what happened?

LC: Uh, then I had continued to want to go into private business. So, that was when I accepted an opportunity to be president of a travel agency. Which I felt would be fun, 'cause I love to travel and that's one of the benefits of being in that business, you do get a lot of opportunities for, uh, OFAM (?) trips, different things. So I, uh, took that position, then as I mentioned, uh, actually my husband passed away in nineteen eighty-six. And, uh, I continued to stay in touch with the mayor's office, and Henry Cisneros, and, uh, was, you know, friendly and supportive of his activities. And then, in nineteen eighty-nine, when he decided not to run for re-election, uh, I did come back and run, one more term. And, he, um, of course, has since moved on, he was in the president's cabinet and is now...

RW: Is he living back in San Antonio?

LC: No, he's not. He was, uh, offered, a wonderful opportunity to be president of the Univision television company, which is, uh, a major, you know, opportunity, and I think he is very well-suited for it. At any rate, um, uh, I came back and, uh, served until ninety-one, when I retired and made my final swan song. Then, um, I originally went back to the travel agency, but, um, the travel agency actually had been sold, a majority interest had been sold, and we were kind of winding down that activity. I was asked then to come on the board, first, of the San Antonio Museum of Art, and became very interested in the fact that we were planning to build a Latin American arts center. Which, I thought, would be wonderful. So, one day, uh, I read in the paper shortly after agreeing to come on the board, I read in the

paper in January of nineteen ninety-four that the city council was going to have a hearing on that very day on different issues to consider putting in the nineteen ninety-four quality of life bond election. So I called the president of the museum board, the chairman of the board, rather, and mentioned this to her, and I said, "I think we ought to be sure to get the museum and our Latin American arts center in that quality of life bond election." She said, "Well, we had talked to the mayor about it, uh, but it had been a couple of years." I said, "Well, we, you know, you've got to go down there today and talk about it and have troops with us, and have a number of supporters," and, which we did. And then she asked if I would go up and make the pitch, and, which I did, and, uh, uh, kind of coined the idea that the Latin American arts center would be the cultural arm of NAFTA.

RW: What a great idea.

LC: And so, anyway, we had, the council had supported NAFTA, and it was a popular issue in our particular city, so...

RW: Is that what they're building? Is that...what that is?

LC: ...the building. Yes. It's...yes, right, yes.

RW: So that's the Latin American...

LC: That's the Latin American arts center. So, I became very interested in that, and uh, the council heard our story, and then they said they would take it under advisement in the next year, next week, rather, they would be voting to to bring the issue into the bond issue. And, the next week, we came back and as I was coming in, I met the incumbent mayor, Mayor Nelson Wolff, and he said, "Lila, I've got good news for you." And I said, "Oh, tell me." And he said, uh, "We have found some money for the museum." And I said, "Well, that's wonderful, how much?" And he said, "Well, we've found half a million dollars, five hundred thousand dollars."

RW: And you said to yourself, "That's a drop in the bucket."

LC: And I said, "Well, that's very nice Nelson, but we need a million." And so he said "Oh, my,

that's going to be hard." I said, "Well, half a million just won't do. We need a million." And so, at any rate, the issue was called for three o'clock, and at three o'clock the mayor announced that they were still working on the package just a little bit and, massaging it and getting it ready. So it was not until about four that they called for the issue, and when the the different projects were read out, the museum of art, Latin American arts center was in for a million.

RW: It was a good phone call, huh?

LC: So, and so, what happened next was that the next morning at eight a.m., my phone rang. And it was Mayor Wolff, and he said "Lila, last night the council members and I were talking about who should be chairman of the bond election. And we all decided that you should be chairman." Well, obviously I couldn't turn them down after they were nice enough to fund the million dollar project I supported, so strongly, that I felt was so important. So, I ended up being chairman of that May nineteen ninety-four bond election. There were four major categories, there was streets and roads, and drainage and parks and, uh, public protection facilities, police and fire. The museum was in the parks and amenities section. And we were, I worked on that as the chief volunteer for three months...

RW: You were not paid.

LC: No, I was, I volunteered my time. Uh, we had, actually a staff, since it was, uh, not a, an issue where there were office holders involved, corporate funding was permitted. And so I was able to get a loaned executive from two major corporations to help me and be the staff, and so we did a very modest budget campaign and we got all four issues passed with over sixty percent of the vote.

RW: That's very unusual.

LC: Mm-hmm. Yes.

RW: So now you're sort of...

LC: And, uh, so then, of course we had to raise our goal, originally was nine million on the Latin American arts center, we ended up raising about eleven million...

RW: That was in addition to the bond...

LC: That was inclusive of the one million from the city bond election. So, uh, and it is now going to be named the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art, because the family of Nelson Rockefeller gave his wonderful collection of Latin American folk art to this museum, and also made a number of supportive gifts. That...

RW: How did you all make contact with the Rockefellers around that issue, or is it a secret? [pause in tape] So did someone on your board know a Rockefeller, or, I mean, did they come to you all, did you all come to them?

LC: There was a contact made, uh, Ann Rockefeller Roberts was the daughter of Nelson Rockefeller from his first family [tape ends]

[side two]

RW: So she was looking for a place...

LC: And she was looking for the appropriate place to place her father's collection. And, uh, she really did some research about, uh, facilities around the country. And we had a very fine curator of Latin American art, we were very interested in Latin American art, our city is, of course, a majority, now, Hispanic, and uh, a small part of the collection was given to a museum in San Francisco, but the bulk of the collection was given here. And, uh, then [pause in tape]

RW: Let's make sure that this is...so let me understand, is the collection here now...

LC: Yes.

RW: ...in storage, or what's happening?

LC: No. It's here now, it's in storage and it will be a very strong part of the collection, uh, for the folk art portion of the new museum, uh, wing. The wing will have gall—really galleries, major galleries of, uh, Latin American folk art, we'll have pre-Columbian, Spanish colonial, contemporary and folk art, uh, all Latin American, of course, and then there will be an introductory gallery and there will be a gallery

with changing exhibits.

RW: And when, how, when will it open?

LC: It will open actually in the fall of nineteen ninety-eight. Construction will be carried through the end of this year. And then the rest of the time will be needed for the installation of the art objects, and of course, that involves building the cabinets, the display and all of the, uh, instructional material that accompanies it.

RW: Well, now how did you get here on the staff now, when we left you, you were the head of the bond election...

LC: Oh, yes. Well, after the bond election, actually I was cleaning out my desk at the bond headquarters and I knew that they had been having trouble getting a development director. And, uh, I got a call and there was kind of a feeler about whether I might be interested in this, and, so I did, I indicated that, yes, I would be certainly happy to consider this. And, uh, then I received a call from the director. Uh, and really offering me the position of director of development, initially. And then in coming on the scene, there was a young woman Andrea Lubea (sp?) who was head of the uh, PR marketing side, and we decided to bring it all in together, and so the title became director of marketing and development. And now I have a staff of four people working with me, and, uh, an assistant, administrative assistant, and then a special events coordinator who also handles museum rentals, and a public relations manager and now a new, uh, associate for Hispanic marketing, under a Lila Wallace Reader's Digest fund grant that we've recently received. We are trying very hard to broaden our audience and make our collections more accessible to more people. So we're, we're particularly concentrating, uh, as a goal, on Hispanic families, uh, trying to attract them to the museum.

RW: So you've been here since about nineteen ninety-five, four?

LC: Since nineteen ninety-four. I came in May of ninety-four. The bond election was on May seventh and I started here May sixteenth.

RW: Well, you gave yourself at least a week.

LC: Well, I was cleaning out the office.

RW: Well, I think this as an interesting example, uh, you went from a volunteer, uh, position to a professional position.

LC: Mm-hmm, yes.

RW: Um, which leads me to this whole question of your cleaning out your desk, and UT San Antonio, I think maybe you got a letter with the information about the archives?

LC: Yes.

RW: And we're very, very eager to offer our services to your, to you, to set up a Lila Cockrell collection. I'm wondering if you would consider us as a depository.

LC: I've about made that decision. I had deposited some things with the San Antonio Public Library, particularly some material relating to issues, background, issues that we studied, uh, as a campaign staff. But I, it's just my feeling, that, uh, with the Center for Women and Gender now at UTSA, that that would be the appropriate place. Of course, you know, I have all this material, and each, each year, I keep saying to myself, "Now I'm going to write the book," and then I do ten other things instead.

RW: Well, but that—once it's catalogued and organized, I bet it would be easier for you to write...

LC: It might.

RW: ...and I'll be that they could find some graduate students to assist you, as research assistants who could help you with, you know, with just the organization and detail work. Well how can we, uh...

LC: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Right, there's so many interesting things, I have so many...

RW: Well, tell me what you have.

LC: Well, of course, I have all kinds of photographs, I have memorabilia, I have letters, uh, pictures, just, uh—and then I have a head full of funny incidents and interesting things that I really ought to put on paper...

RW: Anecdotes...

LC: ...yes, anecdotes. Which I could tell, just on and on.

RW: Do you have, like twenty boxes full, filing cabinets, or...

LC: Oh, I, uh, I have, I don't say it was twenty boxes, no, but I do—I have scrapbooks, I have...

RW: Maybe some artifacts, or...

LC: Yes. I, I don't know, just, you know, what kinds of things they might want...

RW: A potpourri, everything. Now, are there things at the San Antonio Public Library on loan to them, or are they just storing them temporarily or did you donate?

LC: The things that were, they were given, but they were mostly things relating to issues.

RW: Well, um, may I ask Jill Jackson, our archivist, to call you and set up a time when she could, uh, come and help look at these, or make some sense out of them?

LC: Mm-hmm. What I would like to do is wait until, uh, I see a free time when I could take a few days off and I have plenty of vacation piled up, and I'd just really like to go through things at home and get sort of organized and I think that would be fine.

RW: You think maybe by the beginning of the summer, would that be a good time for her...

LC: Yes, yes, I think that would be fine.

RW: ...to, maybe June first.

LC: Yes, yes, mm-hmm.

RW: Well, tell me some of these funny stories.

LC: Oh, I have so many interesting little stories. Um, one of them was the visit of Prince Charles, which I believe was in about nineteen seventy-seven. This was before he was married to Diana.

Anyway, Prince Charles was uh, going to be coming to Texas, he was going to be playing polo at, you know, a ranch, Anne Armstrong's ranch. Anne was, had been the ambassador to Great Britain. And he was going to play polo, and he had planned to visit Houston, so we called from my office, uh, to the

British consul in Houston and expressed an interest in extending an invitation to him to come to San Antonio, as well. So, he did accept and thought that would be fine. It was a visit of just a few hours, but we were thrilled to have him. And, uh, next, of course, we began working with his protocol officer on all of the arrangements. And of course it turned out that my husband was expected to ride in the second car, with his aide, and I was trying to get my husband up into the first car. And so we explored that, and it was made very firm, no, that protocol demanded that I would ride in the first car with the Prince and my husband would be in the second car with his chief aide. So, when he arrived at the airport, I had no idea that he had even been aware of these little conversations. But, he met my husband, he met me, of course, and greeted me and then met my husband and said to him, "I'm sorry about the car, old chap, but, you know, my dad sometimes has to ride in the second car, too." Which I thought was very cute. And then we had the Winston Churchill High School Band, for very obvious reasons, you know, and they were there playing, and there were five very attractive young ladies who were there as majorettes. So, the Prince made an instant command decision that he would go over and greet these young ladies. So he went down and shook hands and then we got in the car, and I thought he had a little funny look on his face. And I said, "Is anything the matter?" And he smiled and he opened his hand, and one of the young ladies had put her picture in his hand when they... And we looked at it and he laughed, and then he turned it over and there was her phone number.

RW: Well, that was an assertive young woman.

LC: She was all set in case she had that big opportunity.

RW: Well, it was amazing that she had her picture with her. She took the chance that he might...

LC: Yes.

RW: Well, what other things did he do in the few hours that he was here?

LC: Well, uh, we went from the airport downtown and, of course, he toured the Alamo and then, uh, we did a tour of the river, and, uh, people were lined up all along the banks and we floated down the

river and had a great time and greeted everyone. Then we went into the Villita Assembly Building where we had a very lovely civic luncheon. Of course all the...

RW: What did you all serve the Prince?

LC: I cannot remember.

RW: I'll bet Mexican.

LC: Well, I just can't even remember what the menu was, but, uh, it just, it was a wonderful opportunity, and there were so many people here of British heritage, that wanted to be a part of it, Daughters of the British Empire, and many other groups, Scottish Societies, and, uh, all of them wanted, you know, to be a part of the occasion, so it was fun. But that was one little, funny story. Another interesting thing, not a funny story, but an interesting thing was, uh, one morning I was at home with my husband, Sunday morning, sipping my coffee and reading the Sunday paper, feeling very relaxed and the telephone rang. And it was a UPI reporter. And he said, "I want to get your comments on how you feel about the fact that the Shah is now in your city." And I said, "You're telling me something I don't know, so first of all would you be kind enough to share the information with me." And he said, "Well, last night, a military plane picked up the Shah in New York from the hospital and he flew him into Kelly Air Force Base, and then he was transferred to Lackland, uh, to the Wilford Hall Hospital, and he is a patient at the Wilford Hall Hospital. What are your comments?"

RW: This is the Shah of Iran.

LC: Yes, the Shah of Iran. Of course, a very high security situation. And I said, "Well, if the President of the United States approved this activity to take place that he was moved here, and he's to be taken care of in the military hospital, I am sure that the citizens of San Antonio will respect the decision made by the President and be very cooperative." So that was it, so we hung up. Then I called, immediately, up to the White House, and I said, "Isn't there something that you forgot to tell me?" Because...

RW: Wouldn't you have thought they would have called?

LC: I should have been, without any question, I should have been briefed. Actually, I reached the one person I really knew in the White House and that was Sarah Weddington. And, uh, she said, "Oh, yes, you should have been called, Lila." But anyway, uh, it just sort of descended on us without any preparation. And we really needed to know it, because of course, then there were all kinds of things that began happening, uh, there were Iranian students were here and they came and wanted to have a sit-down strike or something on the steps of city hall, and they wanted to have a parade and various other things that were going to be security problems to us. I called out to Lackland Air Force Base and I spoke to the commanding general there. And said that I was aware that the Shah was there, and with his wife, if there was anything I could do to be of help from the city, we would certainly make that offer. Uh, if they did not, you know, want or need anything from the city that was fine, but if they would like to have us come to call, I would be happy to come and make a formal call from the city, and so the commanding general said that he would check it out and let me know. And, so, in a few days, the Shah was moved from the hospital into officer's quarters with his wife where they had an apartment, and where he was, I guess, getting out treatment. And, so I got a call from the general and he said they really would appreciate a visit, because they were, you know...

RW: Isolated...

LC: ...pretty isolated. So my husband and I went out and made a call, we stayed just about thirty minutes.

RW: What did you all talk about?

LC: I took books about San Antonio and I really just welcomed them to the city and said, I, perhaps they would not be able to get into downtown San Antonio, but let me, just, uh, share some information about the city, which I did, and it was just a very friendly visit. The Shah's wife, the empress, was, uh, obviously, it seemed to me, rather restless. She was, uh, just very confined, and I think was playing a

good bit of tennis, she was an excellent tennis player. And there were some of the officers who took her on as a tennis match, you know, at at the military base. The next day, I had a call from the commanding general and he invited my husband and me to a small dinner party that they were giving for the Shah. And, uh, we went out and went through—we were in a police—I mean in a police-driven, uh, city car, and went out through a lot of security and went to this dinner. There were a total of eight people at the dinner. The, uh, highest ranking general in San Antonio, Air Force General Benny Davis, was there with his wife, and he later went on to become head of the Strategic Air Command in Omaha, I guess it is. And then General Smith and his wife, and we had a very interesting evening, wide-ranging conversations...

RW: Did they speak English, did the Shah and his wife speak English?

LC: Yes, yes, excellent English. And the, he appeared very bewildered by all the events that had befallen him. It's just my sense that he must have been terribly sheltered by his staff, where he just didn't have a real sense of where the people were in the country, and their feelings and hopes and aspirations. I think he looked upon his own rule as having been very benevolent, and, uh, at any rate, he was, you know, obviously very torn about his circumstances. And so, anyway, we spent about, it lasted about four hours, it was unusually long. And then, the next day, was the incident of his nephew having been shot in Paris and they closed down all visitors, so we just had that little window of opportunity to have met him. And, uh, I sent flowers and, uh, on the occasion of the death of the nephew, but after that, there were just no more visitors permitted, because of security.

RW: How long was he here?

LC: He was here a relatively short time, but then...

RW: Was he here 'til he died?

LC: No. He left, uh, I think he flew to Panama from here. It seemed to me, uh, and they, you know, they just were people without a country, really, and it was hard to, for them to find a place to go, really.

RW: Is that where he uh, spent the last years? In central America?

LC: Um, I had in mind, yes, I believe it was in Panama. Um, I have in mind also that his widow went to Egypt for a while, that was my recollection. But we had, you know, a number of incidents with uh, some of the students and all that sort of thing.

RW: I think we've had, that whole thing didn't help. Was it Harry Truman that was the president then? That I think admitted him?

LC: No, I think it was, it seems to me it was President Carter.

RW: Oh, Carter, yes, I'm sorry, Carter. I think that did not help his candidacy.

LC: Yes, it was, it was, uh, just really it was a very tense situation.

RW: He was trying to be a humanitarian, as he is, but the politics of it...

LC: Yes, a very decent kind of a man. So that was a very interesting experience. And then we've had experiences with two Mexican presidents having visited.

RW: Oh, who were they?

LC: It was President Echevarria (sp?) and then, uh, later, the most recent president, President Salinas.

RW: He was here not too long ago.

LC: He was here in the spring of ninety-one. And, of course, this was at time when he was still extremely popular in Mexico.

RW: What, how—tell me about those visits.

LC: Well, um, I'll talk more about Salinas, the Salinas visit. Uh, Salinas, uh, the president was, uh, a very popular Mexican president, much has happened since he retired as president, but, uh, we had brought a delegation down to Mexico City to extend a formal invitation to him to come to San Antonio and to be here in the spring of ninety-one, when our museum, this museum was going to serve as the host for the Splendors of Mexico, the thirty centuries of Mexican art...

RW: That was a great exhibit.

LC: That was a magnificent exhibit, and we wanted to President Salinas to come and officially inaugurate the fair and so forth, the event. And, uh, so while we were there, he, for the first time in nineteen ninety-one, articulated this idea of what was originally conceived of as a Mexico-U.S. free trade agreement. Now, it was later expanded to include Canada and called NAFTA. But it was when my delegation that I headed was in his office in the White House of Mexico that he initiated this, this concept. And, in fact, we went from there to the U.S. embassy, where we were to be, uh, the guests at a reception, and we mentioned that the president had talked about this proposed U.S.-Mexico free trade agreement, and they were very surprised. They said, "You may have misunderstood, we have not heard anything about that." And, uh, we said, "Well, that's what we understood him to say, that he was favoring that kind of trade agreement." And so they called to the los piños, and then they came back and said, "Yes, that what he..."

RW: You didn't misunderstand.

LC: No. That was correct, yes, he is, you know, taking that position. So we've always felt very close to the issue, because it had been shared with us really before he had gone public with it. And we were sort of a testing ground, I guess, for his trotting out that idea. He did come and with many of the members of his cabinet, then, uh, in the early spring, it was April of ninety-one. And, we had a, you know, the equivalent of a state dinner for him. Uh, Governor Ann Richards came down, and it was a very wonderful occasion.

RW: What impact has NAFTA had on San Antonio, or can you comment on that?

LC: Well, I feel that is has been very favorable. I think, actually, all the Texas cities have benefited from it; Dallas, Houston. The, most of the trade that comes up or goes to Mexico, a lot of it, is through motor coach, which comes through San Antonio. And, uh, we have had, uh, warehousing facilities, and, uh, then various businesses have been started, uh, working with Mexico, new businesses.

RW: Isn't there supposed to be more tourism back and forth, or...

LC: Well, actually the tourism, of course, when the Mexican peso suffered such a terrible devaluation after Salinas left and they did a devaluation and that just really, the bottom fell out of the economy.

Um, the tourists really declined substantially, but now they are coming back. And I think the tourists from Mexico, or many of them, are shoppers, who like to come here, you know, when they did not feel comfortable about their own finances, they weren't going to be coming out of the country to shop.

And, but now they seem to be returning.

RW: Well, I had, in a way San Antonio is really a border city, isn't it?

LC: Yes, in many ways. Yes.

RW: I know it's not exactly on the border, but it has...

LC: Yes, but we're close enough that we really do have that trade.

RW: I think this is wonderful. You know there is so much I didn't know. I just want to say that in terms of tourism, I've been to a lot of cities and I've seen a lot of literature and I have never seen any literature or campaign for tourism material that I think is as good as San Antonio's. I don't know who is in charge of this, for the city, but it's, it's just great.

LC: Mm-hmm. Well, actually, the contract is held for the Convention and Visitor's Bureau is held by the Atkins Advertising Agency. And actually, we have just retained that agency to do a marketing job for the museum.

RW: Well, I think they are brilliant.

LC: Right, mm-hmm...

RW: When I see things in Texas Monthly, everywhere, you know, it just seems that you all are just far ahead of...

LC: Thank you.

RW: And Austin, poor Austin, we don't have, we have art museum or substance, we just hired a director...

LC: Well, the Laguna, uh, Gloria has now changed its name, is that right?

RW: It's changed its name, uh, uh, uh, a Hispanic woman has just been hired, Elizabeth Ferrer (sp?).

To be the director, of but she may not be...

LC: Oh really? I've, we met her.

RW: And there was just an article in the paper today.

LC: We met her. She came here and interviewed.

RW: She's like an expert on Latin American traditional art...

LC: Yes...

RW: ...so that's the direction we're taking. But, it's just kind of pathetic that a city, you know, as substantial as Austin doesn't have, I mean, the Gloria's not set up for any major exhibits...

LC: Mm-hmm.

RW: Now, we have a downtown building, an office space at eight twenty-three Congress that's being used for galleries, but, hopefully they'll get it together.

LC: Real good.