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

Bonnie Reed Transcript, July 23, 1997

Interview by Tori Beckman Wilson on July 23, 1997. She interviewed Bonnie Reed.

Bonnie Reed: There were a couple of things that we talked about or talked around the other day, but we didn't actually get to, and I wanted to make sure that certain people are given proper credit. The Women's Bar Association was started in response as I told you to us being slighted on not getting a bench and also the fact that we were not being asked participate in very high levels in the San Antonio Bar Association. But I want to make sure that it's noted that it's Nancy Anderson who really called the first meeting and people did not perceive her then and probably don't perceive her now as a woman activist, and that sort of thing, but it is one of those times in history that was absolutely critical that the right person called the meeting and got the right people together and the Women's Bar Association happened which is, as you may or may not know, has become quite a successful organization and has been very beneficial to this community. But I was it's second president. She served as the first president. I served as the second president. It was during the time that I was president, that some pretty radical things happened and one of them was that I put together a committee and I actually would call the meetings of this committee and I supervised it, but I did not do the work. And the purpose of this was that a number of us felt that women were being taken advantage of at the courthouse when it came to setting child support because men had far more resources to hire better lawyers and actually fight in court. The women were having to constantly compromise either to avoid going to trial either because they couldn't afford it or they didn't have the best lawyer or whatever, but they were constantly compromising fifty, a hundred, two hundred, three hundred dollars a month and it may not seem like a while lot of money right up front, but in the long run, especially if they had small children, this could

make a substantial difference in the child's lifestyle and the women of course would have to make up for whatever difference that the men did not provide. And so we felt if there was a formula that set child support that the judges all agreed that they would follow unless there extenuating circumstances that were shown to them that a lot of these cases would be resolved before they ever came to court which would save both parties money. Cause like why bicker over fifty or a hundred dollars when you know exactly what the judge is going to do. The judge is going to look at a formula. So then, once we got to the point where we understood the importance of there actually being a formula, then it came down to how we actually come up with a formula. And we did a whole lot of work, and when I say we, it was Marieth Sturdivant Musser (you see, I want to make sure these people get credit) and Charlie Childress who really did the lion's share of the work, although there was a committee of about ten or twelve of us. But they were the ones who really did a lot of the concrete work to put together a one page, easily understood formula about how to set child support. And so, you could, all you had to do was look down this chart. How many children, what your income based on net income that we had a definition for, and how you set the f..., and how the percentages worked and whatever. And then, once we came up with the formula it came to me to go to each of the judges, to convince them to accept the formula which they did. And it was revolutionary in San Antonio that this occurred because all of a sudden cases were settling right and left and women were getting what they were actually entitled to and instead of them having to constantly have it widdled away, based on their inability to fight it. But I feel like it's really important that be documented for history because right after that, within, I wanna say a year or year and a half the Supreme Court in the State of Texas set its own formula that became universal across the state and all of the judges across the state accepted the formula. And it became law essentially of the land that this is how you set child support. It was almost identical to the one that we had come up with. So, I feel really proud of us for having set the course but feel we had a great deal to do with what eventually happened that helped women all of the state of Texas. The other thing I got involved in (This is where

Pat's mother became really very effective to my life) is that one day she called my to go to lunch and told me that we had an opportunity in the state of Texas to get and an amendment to the Texas Constitution to allow for garnishment of wages only in instances where you had a spouse that, or a parent I should say, that was required to pay child support. And they needed someone that would head up the campaign in Bexar County. And she came and she asked me if I would be willing to do that and I said only on one condition and that is that Shirley Wills would agree to help me and Shirley Wills has her own public relations firm in San Antonio and is very, very creative but also is someone that I've learned to depend on absolutely. I can close my eyes, fall backward and Shirley catches me. She's brilliant about things like this and Shirley did in fact agree to do that. And the two of us became partners in this effort in Bexar County to get that passed. Shirley would make all the appointments all over town and I went and made the speeches. And, you know, reviewed with the newspapers and rev.. Oh, by the way, you might find this interesting. The.. One of the newspapers had a journalist call me, uh, a young man called me and say to me, "Well look, before I ask you about this garnishment thing, can you explain to me why men have to pay child support to begin with?"

(Pause and laugh) And I just want you to know kind of wherever they were, okay? And so I essentially said, "Look, I want another journalist. I don't want someone that's coming into this...talk about this from this particular viewpoint and he had to serve apologize, educate himself and then call me back. But, uh....

Tori Beckman Wilson: Did you end up working with that same person?

B.R.: Yeah, I did, but I had to make it very clear to him that what I wanted to do was that everybody else in the whole universe seemed to understand why men need to support their children. But this.. I didn't want to start from that point to have to convince him about garnishment. So anyway..

T.B.W.: Well, good for you!

B.R.: But the amendment did pass overwhelmingly in Bexar County which I was very proud of, but not without the efforts of the Municipal local caucus. They, Joey Stuart Cott did a whole lot of work on it and there some other people that did some other things that were involved in it, but the women's political caucus really took that issue and made sure that the amendment got passed and everyone in San Antonio knew they had to go vote that day. So, I'm very proud of them for the fact that they did that and I just want to make sure that they get credit. Now, about this incident that occurred to me. Okay.

T.B.W.: (Laugh) I have two questions about what we were just talking about. The year, the...Women's Bar Association.

B.R.: Since this is when I was still a lawyer, and so it I would have to be like 1983 I think was when we got the garnishment amendment and the.. I would say just about that same time we got the formula. Cause it was like '83, '84. Right in there.

T.B.W.: And the year you were president of the organization

B.R.: Right around then.

T.B.W.: It was about the same time?

B.R.: Yeah. I'm sorry I get kind of fuzzy...

T.B.W.: That's okay. I'm just trying to establish a time line.

B.R.: Yeah. I can't remember the last week real well. So.. but anyway. They say as you get older you remember those things better, but it's not true.

T.B.W.: I think it's the distant past.

B.R.: (Laughing) Right. Anyway, about this whole thing with John Longoria. Okay, how do we begin? In the state of Texas there is a law that says that if you are a legislator (you serve in the legislature), and you are a lawyer. That judges are required, they do not have any discretion, they are required upon a

motion properly failed with the court to postpone your case until one month after the conclusion of the legislative session.

T.B.W.: Okay.

B.R.: That is the law of the land. However, some years ago, I'm going to say three or four years ago, there was a case that was appealed based on the fact that a civil judge felt that to postpone a case where an individual had purposely hired a lawyer to postpone a final judgment in a child support case would cause harm to the children that was unreasonable. And that therefore, this judge made the election to refuse to give the continuance to the legislature. It went all the way up on appeal, and it was decided by the higher courts that indeed judges must have some discretion in order to decide when these cases can be postponed or when they may cause so much harm that to postpone it for that period on time would be onerous on either party, and therefore the judge can deny the continuance and that the case would have to go forward. But, it was only on the civil side. There was no such appellate decision that said anything about the criminal side. There had been one case and Judge Onion, who ironically heard a portion of my case, wrote an opinion saying that there was no compelling interest of the state to try a case earlier than the whatever the postponement would be. That there was no such thing as harm to any.. to the state by virtue of a postponement of a criminal trial. And so that was, at that particular point, the law of the land. Now, John Longoria has a case that is set in my court and it's very early in the legislative session, I mean we were only about a month and maybe three weeks into the legislative session. And he files a continuance to reset a case that involves domestic violence, which would mean that the case would have to be set like seven months off. Now this is a dock where we were making every effort to resolve cases completely within ninety days. That means have the trial within ninety days. This also was a case that had already been postponed by virtue of acts of the state. It had originally been filed as a felony and then was filed as two separate misdemeanor cases in the misdemeanor court. So by virtue of acts of the state they for some reason took a long time to make the

decision that they were going to lower the charges and put it in the misdemeanor court. So this case had already aged about eight or nine months. Now, it is not within my knowledge and it can't be except under very extraordinary circumstances for me to know anything about the facts of any particular case pending in my court. And so I have no way of knowing whether or not the parties are still living together, whether she's living in another state or not, whether she's safe, whether they may be living together and it's not safe for her at all, and she's not going to tell us it's not safe because she's in so much danger. I mean we have no real way of knowing and what's worse is that the person who knows the best which is the complainant in the case is usually the least honest with us because of the possible consequences of her talking about how fearful she really is. So here we are. This is the same dilemma I have with all of these cases and I here I've got this legislator who's telling me that he wants to postpone this case for a period of seven months, which is like unheard of in my court. And so I said to John, "John, isn't there something we can do to try to resolve this case without postponing it for seven days. I mean for seven months. And he said no.

T.B.W.: Flat "no."

B.R.: No. Not only did he say no, it was kind of a performance. No! And he had standing next to him a former judge, Fred Rodrig...I've just gone completely blank. Anyway, but he had a former judge that was standing with him who is very capable of trying the case and I said why can't you let this other lawyer who's standing right next to you that's obviously practicing with you. Why don't you let him do it? And he said, "No, no. I'm in private practice. He's just here, I don't know what he's here. He's not in capacity as the lawyer for the defendant in this case and no that won't work. I tried, well can't we do this, can't we do that. I tried every way to try to get him to resolve this case as quickly as we possibly could. And he was absolutely determined that he was not going to give into anything in the way of any compromise on this. And to anyone watching it, it was that he was fighting with Bonnie Reed. Not that it was some great principle. And what we also knew was that he was making appearances in other courts

during the same period of time to resolve other cases. So it made, I don't want to look into the head of John Longoria to try to determine what his motivation in any of this wa.. cause it may be that the reason he was trying to get this case postponed is cause he hadn't been paid. It may not have had anything to do with me, but it didn't appear that way to anybody who was watching it in court. You know, his thing was Bonnie Reed can't make me do anything. And I'm a legislator. And, anyway, so we went around and around and around and we set it for motions to be heard. We did some other thing and he would show up for that and it just kept.. but it was there. I mean I never let it go more than a week. And then we would come together again to try and discuss it and finally it became clear that the only thing that I could do was just to go ahead and set it for trial. And what I did was to accommodate John, I set it for Friday morning. At that point in the legislative session, the legislature only meets Monday through Thursday. So he would be free on Friday morning to begin a trial. But it is completely unorthodox to start a trial in the misdemeanor court on a Friday unless you intend for it to go on for weeks, kind of thing. And of course this was not a trial that was going to go probably any longer than a day or two. And I, I said to John that I would make special arrangements with the county court and with the district's attorney's office and with my court reporter so, and my.. the Sheriff's office and everybody else so that we could actually try it through the weekend. So that there would not be any time taken away from his time that he needed to be in Austin. And John would not agree to anything, but it didn't matter. I just went on and I set it. And the day of the actual trial came and once again they made oral arguments and submitted certain written materials to me and whatever. Of course I've read all of the case law and understood exactly what the law was, but what I was hoping was that this is a case that would go up on appeal and that just like they had done on the civil side, they would find a compelling reason that yes judges must have discretion in setting their (docettes)(sp) because they don't know what these situations may be and we know that women have died. We know lots of women have died when these cases are pending.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: So, here we are. We start the trial. We pick the jury. We put on all of the evidence. It gets to be about five, five-thirty in the afternoon.

T.B.W.: This is on Friday.

B.R.: On Friday we've heard all the evidence in the case. I've even read the charge to the jury or we've prepared the charge for the jury. All that's left, is for the.. for final argument. That's all which is twenty more of trial. And John Longoria, through this other lawyer, presents to me a motion, no, an order from the Fourth Court of Appeals telling me to stop the trial. At that point, there isn't anybody in the Bexar County Court House except us. I don't know if you know anything about what it's like on Friday afternoons, but we're the only people in the Bexar County Court House. And I've never in my ten year career as a judge been presented with an order from the Fourth Court to do anything. But particularly, I didn't know.. they didn't tell me how to stop the trial. All they said is "stop." And I don't know how you stop a trial when you've already heard all the evidence. And so what I mistakenly thought was that if I went on and I finished the trial that it would wash out an appeal. That somehow that either it would be reversed or it would not be, but it would just become one of the issues along with this continuance as it went up on the appeal. And so I went on and I continued the trial, finished the twenty minutes. The jury came back and found the defendant guilty the next morning. Okay. John Longoria then filed a motion with the Fourth Court of Appeals to find me in contempt for not following their order. The Fourth Court of Appeals did a few things and one of them was, they contacted Judge Onion who is now retired who was the judge who gave the opinion that I told you about when he was on the Court of Criminal Appeals. They essentially hired him to represent them in hearing the facts of the case and then to write a summary for them of the facts of that hearing. The next thing they did was they called in the Attorney General's Office to do a investigation about the contempt and to bring the case against me and

represent them in the case against me. Now you've got to understand is that that means that the Fourth Court of Appeals is represented in the judge and in the prosecutors and in the people who are ultimately, if I'm found guilty of these charges, going to punish me. Okay?

T.B.W.: Great.(laughing)

B.R.: Right. I mean this like unheard of. Usually in a case when I would find an attorney in contempt, there is another judge that hears it...

T.B.W.: Yes.

B.R.: Okay?

T.B.W.: That makes sense.

B.R.: ...and makes the decision about whether or not in fact I did the right thing in holding that person in contempt. But in this particular case, it is the Fourth Court of Appeals who is essentially the tribunal and or the prosecutors. And so, anyway. We had a hearing before Judge Onion. Judge Onion wrote up an opinion that was very detrimental to me. But I didn't expect really otherwise. But he did not understand any of the argument about the domestic violence thing. He did not put anything in about the urgency. And what made it even worse is that even though in the record there are three occasions where the prosecutor during the course of us having these hearings for the trial, indicated to the court that she felt there was some continuing danger. And when the trial was actually heard, the facts of the case were that this man and this woman had separated. And during that separation, she had had relationships with another individual. That one night the defendant showed up very, very intoxicated. When I say one night, it was like two in the morning. And out of some sympathy for him, she allowed him to fall asleep on the couch. And some time right after that, he woke up and came into the bedroom and began to hit her very violently. The children came running into the room and in the course of the struggle, he actually held, or she held one of the children at bay, and he when hitting her accidentally hit one of the

children. And that was a part of this case. But when the police showed up, this man held his children hostage in the bedroom (pause) and said that he had a gun and that he was going to kill his children if the police made an attempt to come into the bedroom to arrest him.

T.B.W.: Wow I didn't (can't understand)

B.R.: But ultimately, right of course not. And ultimately, what happened was the police were able to subdue, I don't know whether...I can't remember if there was a gun found, but that was his threat, and that was the case. Now, anyway. Meanwhile, the prosecutor had said on the record to me three specific times, "No, judge this is a case that must be taken care of quickly as possible. The state is concerned about this women being in continual danger." When the prosecutor who was assigned to my court got up to testify, at the point the district attorney's office had already said that they could not represent me because they felt that they were part of the prosecution in this case and that they had to cooperate with the attorney general's office. And so that prosecutor got up on the stand and said that there was no danger in the situation that she perceived which was an out and out lie, but the only testimony that was heard by Judge Onion unless he had read the entire record. But he never made any reference to that in anything that he wrote up having to do with the case. And over my attorney's objections, his original was what was submitted to the court of appeals. Whether or not it would have made any difference, it doesn't matter because the issue actually had to do with my contempt. And the reality was that I did in fact continue the case after they had told me to stop it. And I can't deny that. There's no way to get out of that. But none of the issues in this whole thing were ever, ever addressed. Meanwhile, there are some things that I would like to tell you where the Fourth Court of Appeals did some things that are not really kosher that we know about, but I don't really feel very comfortable talking about those things.

T.B.W.: Can I pause this for a minute and...

B.R.: Yeah. (After pause). Anyway, we had the hearing before the Fourth Court of Appeals. And the hearing took the full morning of the (a word, can't understand) arguments before the court and then we had our break for lunch and we came back for the court's decision and I stood up and Judge Chopper made a speech about judges having to follow rules like normal people and sentencing me to thirty days in jail.

T.B.W.: How did you feel when you heard that?

B.R.: I knew already that it was going to happen in my heart. My lawyer would absolutely would not believe that it was going to happen. They are not criminal lawyers. They are civil lawyers and I was pressing them during the lunch hour to find out what they needed to do to get me out of jail if I got sentenced.

T.B.W.: Um-hmm.

B.R.: And they... it was like no Bonnie. You don't need to worry about that. We're sure that's not going to happen. And it was like, no I'm not sure. I mean I had a sense that absolutely none of this was going my way. And there was. And they handcuffed me in open court.

T.B.W.: Now that is a...unusual.

B.R.: Behind my back, right, like where was I going to go?

T.B.W.: Exactly.

B.R.: And then took me out to the back. When we got to the back, the officer, the sheriff's officer who was in charge of me which was a female officer, was in tears. She was hysterical. "Judge Reed, Please don't think this has anything to do with me. I'm just doing my job." And I'm apologizing to my jailers. Okay. But they had made special arrangements for me to go down a special elevator into a van that had the special windows where people can't see in so that there couldn't be any cameras taking.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: And they couldn't have been more courteous to me at the jail. But there was... everybody seemed to know that I was getting out and all the only favor I asked was not to make me change my clothes because within a matter of hours that I was going to be released. And sure enough, before I was even through the entire process, lawyers were already waiting to get me out. And they were there with the bond and all of that sort of thing. When I was released, I was paraded out. There was somebody there that was of course a friend to pick me and all that had already been arranged and that was taken care of. But there was like press everywhere as you can probably imagine.

T.B.W.: Sure.

B.R.: And the thing is, what a lot of people don't know is how often the press had very little understanding about what they were reporting on and they got things confused because they were would ask me questions like. "Would you do the same thing again and deny John Longoria the continuance?" And I would say, "Of course I would." And it would come out in the paper that I was completely unapologetic for the fact that I hadn't followed the order of the Fourth Court of Appeals. Well they're completely two separate issues. And so while the case was pending, there were all these articles that were inaccurate that were being filed with the Express News that were giving signals to the Fourth Court of Appeals that Bonnie Reed is this person who's determined to be some kind of a martyr to a bad cause. She's made a terrible mistake. Well how sympathetic are they going to be to my appeal. There were just a lot of those kinds of things. There were... also there was a problem of none of the courts willing to take any jurisdiction of the appeal. The Fourth Court of Appeals refused to have a rehearing. Period, based on all this stuff that was coming out in the newspapers which had no reality to it. You know, no real truth to it.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: And meanwhile, the ...all the appellate courts refuse to take jurisdiction. Not that they didn't think that the arguments had merit because there was a great deal of very good argument that Jerry Goldstein wanted very much to have courts here. Because of the way this whole thing was handled, for example, this whole thing about the fact that how can you be the judge and the prosecutor.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: Those kinds of issues that he was just really anxious to get before court. But we were never ever allowed to go before a tribunal to actually hear the arguments heard. All that would happen is that the court would refuse to hear it which was completely in their prerogative. And so I was essentially refuse the full appellate process because Contentus sort of wanted these hybrids and the courts can refuse to rehear it, or to hear any arguments on any appellate issues. And so all the way up and down the line including the federal system which just said no. And so I will say this. The National Organization for women had their lawyers filing. Amicus Briefs. There were others that got involved in it. I was very, very pleased. There lawyers from across the state that contacted Jerry Goldstein that did a lot of the research...

T.B.W.: Really.

B.R.: ...on it. Everybody was doing it pro-bono because they were just completely outraged that this had happened to a judge. And anyway, it wasn't personal. It wasn't like, "We know Bonnie Reed and she's really great." It was just this whole issue of putting a judge in jail for this for thirty days is completely outrageous. And people were very upset about it everywhere.

T.B.W.: What's the usual kind of ...what you would think.

B.R.: Well see, there's not.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: Because usually there's not a contempt filed. That doesn't mean that there aren't judges that violate higher court orders. That does happen. Just nobody ever files the contempt. That never gets to this point. It's usually somehow even disappears. It doesn't happen like this. And that's why this case was so monumental in it's weirdness. That's the only way I can talk about it. It's just it's weirdness.

T.B.W.: It's so weird...so real the whole time you went through this.

B.R.: Right. It just doesn't happen.

T.B.W.: My gosh.

B.R.: But anyway, that's

T.B.W.: Let me flip this real quick.

B.R.: Okay. ...the case as best as I can describe it. Now I can...there was sort of a post script to this. My sentence was for thirty days for criminal contempt for violation of a court order. When I checked into the jail, there is an administrator who routinely...It's part of his job description someone in office's job description to sit down with each prisoner and interview them to get trustee status, which means to get them some kind of job within the jail. And once you get to that trustee status you get three for one. So I'd only have to serve ten days in jail rather than thirty days in jail. This is completely routine. And then once they get past that, then they sit down and they actually explain to you what hour, what day you are going to get out of jail, so you can let your family know when to come and get you and what kind of expectations to have. It's just fair, okay. So, within a matter of twenty-four hours, I had my interview with the lieutenant that was in charge of this. He counted. He told me that I would be eligible for trustee status, of course and they counted up the time that I would in and that I was going to be released at midnight on Saturday night and so I could contact someone in my family or a friend to make sure that somebody was there. So that was fine. The next day, sure enough, they came at a certain time of the

day to get me to go take me to this job that I was supposed to do which was doing some typing for the sheriff's office. And I was glad to do it because it made the day go faster, and...

T.B.W.: Well, sure. Yeah. Anything.

B.R.: But I was never called to go to that job again. And I later was notified that it didn't change my status as a trustee. The problem was is that the prisoners had made threats against my life, and they felt it would be a security risk to take me to this job. So it wasn't because of my behavior, but it was because of circumstances around my being in jail that it was determined that I was not going to go to this job anymore. But they did not take away my trustee status. And so the lieutenant reconfirmed with me that no, you're release date is still for midnight on Saturday. A week goes by, and we get to about the Thursday before the Saturday that I'm to be released. And out of the blue, this lieutenant comes down to my cell, which is completely unheard of. Usually, I was escorted to him. And he comes and he sits and he says, "Judge, I don't know what to tell you, but something screwy's going on." And I said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "It is my job to determine when people get released from the jail. To count up the days based on certain perimeters, whatever. The sheriff has decided that he's going to take responsibility for deciding when you're going to be released from jail, and that you're not going to be released on Saturday at midnight."

T.B.W.: (whispering) Why?

B.R.: It was like, "What are you talking about?" And he says, now you got to understand. This is like Thursday afternoon....

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: ...okay, and I've got to get... and I don't know what the... I've never asked really to use the telephone. So I don't know what the...like how do I get to my lawyer. This is...it's like the offices are right in front of us. It was a complete nightmare. So I only had Friday really, because it's the only

working day, to get them on this right away. And I knew that the primary lawyer in my case, Jerry Goldstein, is in Aspen, Colorado with his family.

T.B.W.: Oh.

B.R.: I called his offices first thing Friday morning because it's the first time I'm able to alert anybody about what's going on, and they immediately get on it. They go and they visit with the sheriff. They say, what's going on. And he says the statute is not clear to him that I get good time and that he's going to keep me in jail for the full thirty days (pause) based on a recommendation, or an opinion that he has gotten from the district attorney's office. So my lawyer's immediately go to the district attorney's office and say, "Did you write any kind of an opinion for Sheriff Lopez to tell him that he had to keep Bonnie Reed for thirty days?" They go, "What are you talking about. No, we didn't do anything like that. Isn't she getting out midnight on Saturday?" So they go back to Ralph Lopez, and they say, "We went to the district attorney's office. They said they didn't write you any memo." "Well maybe it was the attorney general's office." So my lawyer's get on the phone to the attorney generals, the assistant attorney generals that were involved in our case. They said, "Who's Ralph Lopez?" They didn't even know who the sheriff of Bexar County was.

T.B.W.: Who's this coming from?

B.R.: So, then it just got really confused, and finally it was friends that went and pleaded with Ralph Lopez. And what he ultimately did, was he agreed...my lawyers actually had to come and tell me that Ralph Lopez agreed that he was not going to keep me for thirty days. And he would let my lawyers know what day I was going to be released from jail on the condition that they would not tell me...

T.B.W. Why?

B.R.: ...when I was going to be released from jail. Because it would be a mean thing to do. (pause).

What other motivation could there be?

T.B.W.: What was he thinking?

B.R.: What other possible motivation could there be?

T.B.W.: I don't know.

B.R.: And my lawyers, you have to understand is that Jerry Goldstein is off somewhere, and he's screaming at Ralph Lopez over the telephone that this is a violation of the legal ethics not to disclose to your client information that you have and how dare you hold... And he says, "But that's the deal. Either she stays thirty days or I will I will tell you a date earlier than thirty days that she will be released, but you cannot disclose it to Bonnie."

T.B.W.: That is weird.

B.R.: The whole thing was weird. And when my lawyers tried to figure out what the possible motivation was for Ralph, the only thing they were able to come up with was that there was political pressure that was being brought upon him. And included in the circle of people that were advising Ralph, was the husband of Alma Lopez, who works for the sheriff's office. (Long pause) Okay. I'm just telling you that these are the people that mostly what we think was that these were people that were trying to advise Ralph Lopez on what was politically best for him.

T.B.W. Yeah.

B.R.: Now, whoever heard of a sheriff making a determination about the release of a prisoner based on his own political career?

T.B.W.: That's, that is so left field it's unbelievable.

B.R.: I know, but I lived it. And I know that that happened and I don't feel any remorse about telling you that story. However, I've never told the press that story. I never did anything to injure Ralph or anything like that because I'm not a person who does that.

T.B.W.: Right.

B.R.: I don't complain. But I think this is a story people need to know. And that this can happen to people because I have a certain religious belief in the criminal system, but not jailers anymore.

T.B.W.: No.

B.R.: Okay. In the entire time that Ralph Lopez has been the sheriff, and not only that, but in the entire time that this particular tenant had worked in the sheriff's office, which at that point was almost twenty years. In that job description he said that never has there been a time when the sheriff has intervened in the time that a person is serving in jail. So...

T.B.W.: Well, the only (one word, can't hear) real thing possible is,....

B.R.: So I made history in a lot of ways.

T.B.W.: ...you know, a boost for him one way or the other...

B.R.: Right.

T.B.W.: ...for his career.

B.R.: Anyway, after my time in jail and after all this stuff had happened, I did not like going to work anymore. It was not for me. There were a lot of lawyers that were very pleased that this had happened to me, and it was not fun to go to the court house and feel as though I no longer had the authority that I needed to have in order to conduct business in my court. It was not fun for me. I didn't feel as though we were getting anywhere. I had even, a year or so before that when I had to run for election, had said to my father that I did not want to go through the election, that I felt it was time for me to move on to, that I had done as much in this job creatively as I possibly could, and my father was the one who insisted that I go on for at least one more election, so that I would have ten years under the bench and because then my retirement would master something. And he just had something else in what he thought that was just real important. And I sat down with my family after I had went home and I had some time with them and I said. "I really don't want to do this anymore." And so, within a matter of a few weeks, I went on

and I submitted my letter of resignation to be effective in a few months that they could find a replacement for me, that they could appoint someone so there wouldn't be any, you know, just completely abandon my, and I went on and I made the decision to resign. But it was an extremely interesting experience, I think for anyone to go through. For one thing, people kept saying to me, "Isn't this the worse thing that's ever happened to you?" And I had to remind them, that no, my sister's death was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. And that the two didn't even compare.

T.B.W.: Right.

B.R.: The other thing was that I was, I really think sometimes that I must be the luckiest person in the world.

T.B.W.: Even after all this?

B.R.: No, there's no question about it. That even going through all of this, I never lost one friend in any of this, and people came out of no...I got seven hundred letter...

T.B.W.: Really?

B.R.: ...postcards, and yeah. You can't...I had so many people that were praying for me. I get letters from congregations that said that their minister had said a special prayer for me or for prayer groups where everybody signed the card or whatever. I mean, there were...you can't believe the numbers of people that, some I knew, some I didn't even know, that were sending me these wonderful messages. I got one letter while I was in jail from a man who I had placed on probation for domestic violence assault, that he had gone through all of the programs, and said in the beginning of the letter that mostly he thought that what I had done to him was a complete injustice. That what he done to his wife was not that serious an offense for him to have this severe punishment and that the classes were garbage and whatever. But one day he didn't feel good and he went early from work, and when he got home, his wife was in bed with another man. And that his first impulse was to go to the dresser drawer, and get a gun a

kill both of them, and then kill himself. But then he took a deep breath and remembered what he had learned in the classes, and he turned around and walked out of the house.

T.B.W.: Wow.

B.R.: And he said that I, that he felt I needed to know that I had saved three lives that day, and that he was very grateful to me and that his life had gone on. He had gotten a divorce, and his life was now better, and he was very grateful to me. I got letter like that over and over again. I mean there were..it's like people came out of the woodwork. I would go to park my car at the Gunter Hotel and the guy who parks my car would come over and say, "Judge Reed, don't you remember me?" And I say, I don't know whether they would tell me these stories before, but all of a sudden, it seemed like every day, I was getting a note passed to me at Jim's from some woman who was now sober because I had made her go through an alcohol treatment program. I was getting...it seemed like it was coming out of ev...I don't know how to explain it. But what was even more important was how my friends sort of circled the wagons. And no matter how bad things got, they were there to cushion all of these blows. They were there to ventilate. They weren't angrier a lot of times even that I was. They, certainly my mother was. She has this list of people she wanted to murder.

T.B.W.: I was going to ask about how your family reacted.

B.R.: Yeah, I mean it was... My father still thinks that I was some sort of martyr to a good cause. The papers in Dallas and Houston actually wrote me up as a martyr to a good cause. They would write these editorials about "finally a judge stands up to a horrible law," "Bonnie Reed, champion of domestic violence," and would talk about these great things. I mean Dallas and Houston had me...I was the Joan of Arc of San Antonio. It was weird, and in Houston...in San Antonio, the newspapers were completely split. I mean, you would read Rick Casey on one page and the same day Bobby Spenson would write this article about you know, "pay attention, these guys on the Fourth Court of Appeals must be out of

their minds.” What could they be thinking? And it was like, ying,ying-yang. They would...Rick Casey would write these terrible things and then on the front page of the newspaper there would be an editorial by the newspaper saying. “This is lousy law. Bonnie Reed finally somebody did the right thing. And maybe she made a mistake”, but you know. It was schizophrenic. But mostly the important lesson was that what I learned from my friends, which was to make lemonade, was the buzz word through this whole thing was lemonade. We felt like that finally domestic violence gone front page in the newspaper.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: That there was you know, this huge discussion suddenly that was taking place in a much more serious (ram?). It wasn't just a woman's thing anymore.

T.B.W.: Right.

B.R.: And that was really important for them to be able to write these articles that had to do with domestic violence and to talk about these issues and to bring it to light in another arena was really very important. And we would talk constantly about all the good things that had come out of this. And there were, generally, a huge amount of good things. For one thing, I mean I have a wonderful idea about who would show up at my funeral, I mean, how many people know that.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: You know? I know a lot about my friends and about the lengths that they will go in terms of their loyalty. I know a lot also about when other people are going through hard times. What really helps, because I now know what helped me get through that and so I'm very good about writing notes to people and calling them on the phone. I mean these are important lessons to know in life. But one of the things that I learned the most through all of this is that there is a public Bonnie Reed and there's a private Bonnie Reed. And the private Bonnie Reed was just fine. As it turns out, the public Bonnie Reed was better than she'd ever been, which shocked the heck out of me. I could not understand it. People were

starting to think about me running for Congress and starting to...I mean it was like, get real. I just went to jail. I don't think that's going to happen. But people started thinking of me in much grander terms.

T.B.W.: Oh yeah.

B.R.: I mean I became this sort of local celebrity where everybody knows who I am. And this is two years later. They still know who I am. People wanted me to meet their daughters in the grocery store. I mean there was this whole weirdness that was going on that I really have never understood. I never will, but I also knew that because of the response of non-profit organizations, the minute they found out that I was going to leave the bench, I got phone calls from so many non-profit organizations inviting me onto their boards, inviting me to be in charge of fundraising for them for the next year. They...there was a real sense that not only had the public Bonnie Reed not suffered, I actually had been elevated. And so, I find this whole thing bizarre. I don't want to make it sound like I'm like really proud of this, but when we've tried to examine it, a lot of it has to do with the fact that without me knowing it, there was an impression that people had already about who Bonnie Reed was. And they did not believe anything they read in the newspapers that was bad about me. It was bizarre. I thought people always believed what they read in the newspaper.

T.B.W.: No.

B.R.: Apparently not.

T.B.W.: No. And especially in I think probably what was at work there, was people finally started realizing through the stories in the newspapers talking about your background and what you had done with domestic violence. That's probably what tipped the scales. I would think.

B.R.: I don't...all I know is that it seems like an awful lot of people knew about me. And as all this stuff was going on, I had to go out into the public just like I always did, and I would put on red and put on a great big smile on my face as if nothing was wrong because my friends had counseled me about the

importance of...to look defeated means that you are defeated. If you don't look defeated, that's the message that people get. And so we were constantly aware that that had to happen. And not just for the public Bonnie Reed, but for the personal one as well. I didn't want people that really worried about me to be panicked. I did not want to worry them anymore than they absolutely had to be worried. I have a lot of friends that have this sort of rescue personality and they had been so wonderful, but I'm a person that rescues other people and I could not stand all these people worrying about me. I'm a person who goes to work sick. And the only person who knows I'm sick is my mother. I don't brag about illnesses. I don't look for sympathy. I was not raised that way.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: And this was just another occasion of me being more worried about the people that worried about me than me.

T.B.W.: It's hard to take that kind of attention.

B.R.: Right.

T.B.W.: And you're usually the one who's...

B.R.: Right. I'm having to ...I never would know what the response was going to be to me when I got out there. I can remember years earlier when there was a very powerful politician that had gotten into some trouble, and I remember seeing him walk into a political function where it used to be that people would come to kiss the ring. And suddenly the seas parted as he walked...nobody wanted to be seen with him. And I thought that that was what was going to happen to me and that I had to make these appearances, but it was going to be difficult. Well, as it turns out, not only was it not difficult, I mean people rushed to me and I would overhear people at this party stating my case. I don't have to tell my story. Other people told my story. So I don't...as much as people think this is like the worst thing that ever happened, it's like, "No, you don't understand." There were so many wonderful things that

happened out of this, that this may be my best moment. The fact that I actually survived it with such grace and the fact that I seemed to have survived it for real...

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: ...is just phenomenal. And it may actually, when I look back on my life, I may look back on this as being my best moments, not my worst. And I owe a lot of that to my friends.

T.B.W.: Oh yeah.

B.R.: There were just there a (gagan) percent. I mean I just don't know how to tell you. I would get these...Mary Denman and I talked to each other three or four times a day, just so that I can ventilate and I could cry with her. I didn't cry with anybody else. You know there were just things like that. But Mary Denman just took it all and gave it back. There was a lot of that. But there were people, Jane Mackon and Pat's mothers and Ginger Purdy. I don't even...Holland Jacobson and Esther Vexler. I mean I would come home and my tape recorder would be absolutely filled with messages from people that I have so much more respect for. Duncan Winfries, Red McCombs.

T.B.W.: Really?

B.R.: So much...but it was really, everybody. But it was people that I had so much more respect for than my detractors that it was one of these really heady kind of things that doesn't happen too very often. But you begin to realize that I was very lucky because I had already lived a life where I had contact with so many who knew what I was really, really like. That any demonization that they did in the newspapers they were angrier about it than I was. And I've got and I've from the minute this thing was over with, a philosophy that I absolutely live by and that is that anger doesn't get you anywhere. There's no value in it. It doesn't correct any of the situation. It doesn't accomplish anything, that you need to let go of the

anger and move on. And so I did. It's c-(one word, can't understand) where I am now. Does that answer all your questions.

T.B.W.: Yeah. I just, I think that's wonderful. Really. I mean, I remember the reports from the (one word) Four and like I said, I had just moved to town not long before that. I was thinking, you know, that's why they have such a good showing of people, so many people that obviously cared so much. I was impressed. You know. I didn't know you at all or anybody there, but I was impressed by that. That must be a real good feeling that probably would make anything that could happen in your life easier to know you have friends like that. That's wonderful.

B.R.: And there's so many wonderful little stories of people that worked in the jail that at risk to their jobs, would come down to visit with me and tell me things like, "I think that you may have saved my life because you put my husband in jail at a time when..." I mean, you just have no idea that when you're in jail, and have all of this stuff happening to you, I mean it was just a very, very weird thing. By the way, there were some funny stories about jail, too.

T.B.W.: What was that like? I mean, was it...

B.R.: It was very odd. They put me on the mental ward because...I don't know why they did that, but evidently for them, strategically that was the best place. I had my own guard twenty-four hours a day that stood outside of my cell and I was essentially in solitary, which is usually reserved for punishment if you've done something bad. But they felt compelled to do that for my security which I find really interesting because people say, "Oh, Bonnie Reed. I'm sure she got special treatment at the jail." Well, damn right I did.

T.B.W.: Yeah you did, but it wasn't the good kind.

B.R.: Right. Not the good kind. And there were a lot of things like that. For example, there's a rule about clergy having access to prisoners. And it's not a rule so much for the prisoners, although certainly

it protects their right to have access to their clergy, but it's also a right that the clergy has to get access to the people in the jail. And within twenty-four hours, you know already, there were two rabbis and a priest that had come to see me. I'm very involved in the ecumenical community of San Antonio. So, ministers and priests and rabbis and everybody was starting to line up to come see me because they knew they could.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: And so within twenty-four hours the head of the ministry at the jail comes to see me. And, "Hi, I'm Judge R(can't understand name)" you know, whatever. And he introduces himself and then he says, "Listen. The administration has sent me down here to tell you that you can't be having all these clergy visits.

T.B.W.: Excuse me?

B.R.: Right. You have to understand, it's like, I didn't invite these people. They just show up. Like it's not like I have control over what's going on out in the real world. These people just show up and they say sign up. They want to come see Bonnie Reed. Who am I, you know? You can't be having all these clergy visits. So what they've said is that they are going to designate one clergy person to be your clergy and only that person can come to visit you.

T.B.W.: Oh.

B.R.: And I said, Okay, well who are you going to designate? While I'm a reformed Jew, they designated the Hacedic Lavavich Rabbi of San Antonio which is the ultra Orthodox Rabbi of San Antonio to be my clergy. I happen to be friends with (Haim?) like I am with all the rabbis in San Antonio, but he's not my rabbi.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: But I had this resolution. I wouldn't have complained about anything. So I just...I wasn't sarcastic. It was like, okay. Haim, now feeling this huge responsibility that he's the designated clergy, starts coming every day.

T.B.W.: Oh.

B.R.: So at that point, I get another visit from the head of the ministry at the jail, and he says, "Judge Reed. The administration says you can't be having clergy visits every day." And it was like, well okay. When can he come? He says, "Well they've said that he can only come on the Sabbath." And I said, "Well, this is kind of a problem."

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: And they said, "What's the problem?" I say, "Well, he's an Orthodox Rabbi. He can't drive on the Sabbath. Are you going to put him up? (Laughing) Okay? And it was like, "Well, let me talk to them." And so what they did was they designated a day other than the Sabbath that now Haim Block could come to visit me. I mean it was...but it was things like that that just became part of the humor of being there. There were things like...there was a guard that was assigned to me from the early morning hours until mid-afternoon. And whenever there was like my visiting times or when one of my lawyers was there to see me about something, whatever. She would escort me to the area where you see visitors.

T.B.W.: Oh, okay.

B.R.: Okay? In the afternoon, there was a different person that was assigned to me. And when any of these circumstances would arise where I had to travel within the jail, she would have two guys from the Swat team that were in complete...they looked like robots. You know they were like in complete gear with their batons raised and everything. They would get on either side of me. Actually, one in front, one in back, and then she would stand on my side and escort me to the wherever I had to go within the jail. It was just a difference of philosophy about how you dealt with Bonnie Reed's security. Well, I wasn't

the one who asked for these things or I wasn't...I just found it kind of amusing that this is what she thinks I need to have in order to.

T.B.W.: You mentioned earlier that some people had made some threats while you were in prison?

B.R.: Yeah. I didn't know that. The way I found out about it and I don't even know whether it was really true, was that there was a press conference during the time that I was in jail that Ralph Lopez or somebody from Ralph Lopez's office had and talked about the fact that Bonnie Reed was in an isolated place and that we had this heightened security because. And gave their justification for what they had done, and that's how I found out was I watched the news on television.

T.B.W.: Well, that kind of makes me wonder right off the bat. After the release thing. Was there?

B.R.: Who knows. But the thing is that it's not unrealistic that it would happen, because a lot of times the guys in the jail sort of bragging, or they're, I don't know. They wanna...some of them are mentally ill. Some of them....and some of them I had put in jail.

T.B.W.: That's what I was going to say.

B.R.: And so I don't know how truthful any of this is...

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: ...or how real there was a threat, but you know, I had plenty of security. I mean it's not a problem.

T.B.W.: Yeah, that must have seemed funny, shuffling through the corridors with these Swat members surrounding you.

B.R.: You know, it's like get over yourself. I just really...I couldn't....it was hard not to laugh when all this was happening.

T.B.W.: Oh yeah. I bet. So you ended up...you were in jail for exactly almost thirteen days.

B.R.: Thirteen days.

T.B.W.: Thirteen days.

B.R.: I was finally released. And just like they promised, I did not know when that was going to happen.

T.B.W.: So what happened....

B.R.: My lawyers did notify my parents.

T.B.W.: Oh, that's good.

B.R.: And my parents were there when I got out.

T.B.W.: So they weren't able to tell you, but they could tell somebody else to be there to pick you up.

B.R.: Right.

T.B.W.: Oh, that's sweet.

B.R.: Right. And they couldn't call a press conference and say or they couldn't...they had to pick it in wraps. Mary Denman knew, and they had a party for me that afternoon. I came home and took a real shower. They had this button that you push and it comes on for fifteen second and then it shuts and you have to keep pushing the button to get...

T.B.W.: Really?

B.R.: And I shared the shower..of course it's like

T.B.W.: Uh-oh.

B.R.: This is jail. It's not real glamorous. But they had this sort of...there's like this corridor that all of the cells open onto and then there's an area where the shower is that opens onto this common corridor. And it meant that the other prisoners that were there were using the same one and it turns out that like one of them had lice and one of...you know it's like I'm sharing the shower with people that are...have certain problems and are mentally ill, besides. But what they did was they would let us out one at a time into this common corridor where usually the cells are just open all day and you can come in and out of

this common corridor. But I was isolated and I only had my like one hour in the morning where I had to do my shower and I could...I later found out I could use the phone at that time. You see, I wouldn't ask for anything.

T.B.W.: Right.

B.R.: And so they had finally one of the guard would say, "Don't you want to call anybody?" The day before I left, finally one of the guards said, "Do you want a newspaper?" You know, it never even occurred to me we could have been getting a newspaper every day.

T.B.W.: Yeah. I wouldn't have thought of that.

B.R.: I never would've...it never occurred to me. There were things like when I first came to the jail, they asked me whether I had any special dietary needs. This is all routine. And I said, "Well, I don't eat red meats." And I said, "It won't bother me if it's on the plate or anything, but I just hate for you to waste it." And they go, "No, no, no. We'll put that you don't eat red meats and they'll make a (can't understand)." Fine. The next day, some lieutenant comes down to visit and starts screaming at me, that I'm not a prima donna and I don't just get anything I want. It was like, "I didn't ask for anything." And he says, "If we give you hot dogs, you eat hot dogs. And if you don't want it, you just leave it on your plate." Fine.

T.B.W.: That's what you said in the first place.

B.R.: That's what I said to begin with. You know, it's like, okay. Thank you. But I'm telling you, he just screamed at me. I didn't even know this guy. But it's a lot of it...jail. And you gotta...I've got to guess that people get treated really badly there and this is terrible. But, okay. I didn't expect it to be fun.

T.B.W.: No.

B.R.: And it was kind of like, well, okay, thank you. Are you finished now?

T.B.W.: You did that? But yeah, you wouldn't expect it to be fun, and I wonder just...people see someone who has come from what they perceive as a more elevated status in society or something. They've fallen, so here's my chance to step on them and blah, blah, blah. Who knows?

B.R.: Who knows? I didn't try to get in their head. I just know how they dealt with me. It would be so uneven. It was just very, very strange.

T.B.W.: Yeah.

B.R.: But, you know, I ...unlike other people that go to jail, I knew always I was going to get out.

T.B.W.: Oh sure. Yeah.

B.R.: I mean, someday. I was going to get out and my life would be just fine.

T.B.W.: And thirty days at the absolute maximum.

B.R.: Right. And so, you know, you just kind of gotta get through it. And that was my attitude through the whole thing. It was just...I want...as a matter of fact, I wanted to go to actually check into the jail, a day before I was supposed to go because of the way that they counted the time. And I had asked my lawyer for permission you know could I go at midnight on Saturday night rather than waiting until Sunday afternoon kind of thing. And he said, "No you can't." I just wanted to get it started so it would be over with sooner.

T.B.W.: Yes, exactly.

B.R.: Because that was kind of my thing. It's like, at least I won't have to talk to the press for ten days.

(Laughing)

T.B.W.: One good thing about it. There has been one question we've been asking everybody we interview, and I'd like to give it to you as well. The question is what kind of advice would you give to young girls who are trying to decide career paths? Would you recommend yours?

B.R.: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. You have a wonderful opportunity as a judge to do a lot of really wonderful things. And not just on the job, but even outside of the job because you carry a great deal of influence. People will listen when you are a judge and that is a very, that's a wonderful gift to be able to have, is the opportunity to do something that's really important. I think that's it's absolutely critical that we have talented women on the bench because I think women hear cases differently than men. It's a sort of unfortunate reality. And that in order to have real justice in this community, you should at least have a shot at getting woman judge. You may not get it, but at least the fact that it could be possible that you could get one is a very, very important statement that this community makes. Yeah, absolutely, I would recommend it. I know that I have gotten a great deal of pleasure out of the job, even with all of this other stuff. I really feel like...and it's easier now. With the election of every single you know, new woman that gets on the bench and as they get more and more accustomed to them...I was an odd ball there, because there hadn't been one in such a long time. And I was a lot younger than the other ones, and I was a lot more idealistic. It was a different time. It's going to get easier and easier and easier. They are not going to have the rough time that I had. They'll have some rough times, because it's still a male dominated place, but they will not have as rough a time as I did. And I did a lot of work to make sure that was true for them. And so I want to see there be more woman judges because that was my plan all along is that I shouldn't be by myself. There should be a lot of us over there. And I think we're very well suited for the job.

T.B.W.: Absolutely. Is there anything that we have not hit upon that you would like people to know about you.

B.R.: I can't think of anything.

T.B.W.: Okay. Well, thank you so very, very much.

B.R.: Well, I'm very flattered to be asked to do this.

T.B.W.: Well, I'm probably more happy to be here.