

**University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections**

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

**Fay Sinkin Transcript, May 13, 1997**

**Ruthe Winegarten:** So Fay was saying that, uh...

**Fay Sinkin:** In nineteen forty-two, when I married Bill Sinkin, who was born in San Antonio, and I had never really heard of Texas. But he wooed me in New York, and, uh, he really sold a bill of goods to my father, who said, "If you're interested in the guy, I'll stake you to a trip to Texas."

**RW:** And then what happened?

**FS:** Well, I came down here because I love to travel. And, uh, I guess I was overwhelmed. Of course, he wanted to marry me right away. So I went home and we got married and I came to Texas. And, of course, it was unbelievable, San Antonio in nineteen forty-two was pretty, a pretty desperate place. It was during the war, and I knew I was going to have to do something, because my first introduction to San Antonio was at a hotel that had Wop Salad on the menu. And coming from New York, that was pretty dreadful.

**RW:** It was like a cuss word.

**FS:** Yes.

**RW:** Let's just do a sound check here [pause in tape]. What was his [Bill Sinkin's] profession?

**FS:** Well, actually, he was in business with his father, and they ran a wholesale dry goods business and manufacturing.

**RW:** What was the name of that business?

**FS:** N. Sinkin. It was also a manufacturing business, and they were making, uh, Eisenhower jackets for the Army, so he, uh, had a deferment from the Army.

**RW:** And did he serve, I mean, he spent the war period manufacturing things for the Army.

**FS:** Manufacturing, yes, right. He came up every six months for review. So, but, uh, we had a child and, uh, so that sort of helped him with his deferment. He probably is sorry he didn't serve. [laughs]

**RW:** Did you have the one child?

**FS:** No, we have two, we have two sons, six daughters-in-law, we have three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

**RW:** Wow, I guess you start your holiday shopping early.

**FS:** Really, yes.

**RW:** So when you first moved here, did you join some clubs or were you a young matron—what did young matrons do in those days? Or did you go to work for your husband's business?

**FS:** Well, I did, I helped him for a few years and joined the League of Women Voters. And that's where I got my start. And five years after I came to San Antonio, I became president of the League of Women Voters, in nineteen forty-seven.

**RW:** They were the first organization that understood about water. Because when I joined in the fifties, water was the big thing and people were going, "What on earth are they talking about?" Is that how you got interested in water?

**FS:** Well, not at that point. There were other things in San Antonio that needed help. Primarily, um, health. We had no sewer system.

**RW:** In nineteen forty-seven you had no sewer system?

**FS:** No.

**RW:** Well, what—did people have outhouses in the city?

**FS:** Yes, we counted twenty-five thousand pit privies.

**RW:** Did you all go door to door?

**FS:** Door to door on the west side. And that was our first activity when I was president. It was just, it was pretty unbelievable. They were selling water, there were no water lines.

**RW:** They didn't have any indoor...

**FS:** No. They had outhouses and pit privies and water was a spigot outside. Now that wasn't for everybody, but that was for at least fifty percent of the population.

**RW:** Is this in the Hispanic and or Black area...

**FS:** Yes. In the Hispanic and Black neighborhoods. Exactly. And, um, so we just, we felt that we could focus on—we didn't have council-manager government. And so we focused on trying to get the health department out of the aegis of the mayor, who was using it to put all his cronies in.

**RW:** To work?

**FS:** To work in the health department. And you can only, um, change the charter of the city of San Antonio once every two years. So that was our first effort, was to change that charter to get it out of the hands of the mayor. And, um, we lost that battle because the men decided that this was a great opportunity, after we had gotten out and gotten petitions and everything else, about let's get the health department out of the aegis of the mayor. They decided they needed council-manager government, and they wouldn't have been able to do it for another two years, so they used that opportunity to get council-manager government, and that's how San Antonio got council-manager government.

**RW:** That is interesting.

**FS:** So we were really the providers of that, which was very interesting.

**RW:** Well, what happened with the privies and the water, I mean, what...

**FS:** Well, that's an interesting story, I think, and kind of funny, too. It has some humor to it. We went to the mayor, and we said, "Look, we..."

**RW:** And who was the mayor?

**FS:** It was Alfred Callaghan (sp?).

**RW:** Not a Hispanic mayor.

**FS:** No. Well, he was, actually, but he had his Irish name. I guess his father, but I think his mother

was Hispanic. At any rate, we went to him and we said, “We need extension of water lines, we need extension of sewer lines, please. At least hire a sanitary engineer.” And I loved his answer, and everybody in the room loved it. He said, “The man is superfluous.” [pronounced it super-flewus] And of course, we couldn’t correct him, because he went on to say, “Why don’t you all go home and cook your husbands’ supper?” [laughs]

**RW:** What does superfluous, what did he mean?

**FS:** Well, he said superfluous [pronounced super-flewus]. Which of course, was marvelous, because it was sort of right on. But the man is superfluous, we don’t need a sanitary engineer.

**RW:** I see, you go home and cook your supper and be nice girls.

**FS:** Yes. And be good little girls. Well, what actually happened was, we went home and cooked our husbands’ supper, but we also plotted and planned to cook his goose.

**RW:** That’s a great title.

**FS:** That’s right. And we did, you see, he never was elected again. Not ever, ever, ever.

**RW:** Were you all just furious, or shocked or what?

**FS:** We were mad. We were really angry that he treated us in that fashion, that he had so little respect for us. But we, that was only our first experience, we had many others. The League of Women Voters had a very nice luncheon for me, because it was the anniversary of my fiftieth year as president in nineteen ninety-seven. And so I told some stories about those first years, and one of the stories that I like to tell is about the fact that, um, well, there are two, actually, two stories. One is the fact that we had a man who did streets as a councilman, a commissioner of streets. And, uh, I thought of Tosca’s quantum, because our petition drive was such a success, that he came to me and said, “How much?” So anyway, in nineteen fifty, they were bribing, and I wonder if it’s any different now.

**RW:** How long did it take before the, so did San Antonio finally hire, once they had a council-manager form of government did they hire a sanitary engineer and install...

**FS:** Yes, it actually evolved. As a result of council-manager government.

**RW:** How long did it take before those privies were removed?

**FS:** Well, I would say that it took about ten years.

**RW:** It's shocking that this is after World War two, I mean, think of any other city in Texas, it was not in that situation...

**FS:** I know. I haven't known any other city. But it was pretty bad. We also, uh, were trying, through, uh, our state league and it's agenda, we were trying to get a, a juvenile court for San Antonio. We were getting an increase in juvenile crime, even in those days. And we didn't have a court that just handled juveniles, and we were asking for that. And we went to Austin, and that's a funny story, too. The, uh, they told us that our legislators were at the Driscoll Hotel, in room so and so. And so we knocked on the door, and when they opened the door, here were all these scantily clad women. And our legislators in the state of undress. And before the door was slammed, we could actually see all of this. And I asked the other day, "Is it different now?" And the answer from one of the gals was that "Now all the Republican legislators have their own rooms." [laughs] So things haven't changed.

**RW:** So you saw some floozies, huh?

**FS:** Right.

**RW:** Well, those men must have been, well, very shocked.

**FS:** Well, they were, you know. I mean, the door was open for maybe thirty seconds.

**RW:** But it was long enough.

**FS:** Long enough for us to see, and then, of course, it was slammed in our faces.

**RW:** And then did you all later visit with them privately?

**FS:** We didn't. We should have. And, uh, but, you know, in those days, you sort of treaded lightly. And we did. We tread lightly. We didn't really want to ruffle the waters any more than we had already. But they learned to respect us, and I thought that was a good deal. So it was an interesting

four years.

**RW:** So you served as president of the league for four years, from forty-seven to fifty-one.

**FS:** That's right.

**RW:** Do you remember some of the other issues that the league was dealing with?

**FS:** Not really. I don't, really. Of course I stayed with the league as a member, and it was in nineteen seventy-six, now that's several years after this episode, that they asked me if I would organize a group to save our aquifer.

**RW:** I see, so now we come to the aquifer story. But before that, I wonder where the league's papers are? I'm wondering if they are at the center? Do you know?

**Tori Beckman-Wilson:** Yeah.

**RW:** You do have the League of Women Voters?

**FS:** Yes. You do have them.

**RW:** Good, well that will supplement your story. And you are also giving me several video tapes? You were interviewed before, right?

**FS:** Right.

**RW:** So, the league asked you to do what now?

**FS:** Well, they asked me if I would set up a committee to kind of save the aquifer. And, um, it was under attack from UTSA.

**RW:** In what way?

**FS:** Well, they were going to build out there.

**RW:** Really? You mean where that campus is now?

**FS:** Oh, yes.

**TBW:** That's the recharge zone.

**RW:** It is?

**FS:** Oh, yes, it's on the recharge zone.

**RW:** So they built on it?

**FS:** Oh, yes. It was a land bill, Connally's land bill.

**RW:** O.K., our friend John Connally?

**FS:** Our friend John Connally.

**RW:** Whom we all know so well?

**FS:** Whom we all know so well. That's right. And, also, of course the Health Science Center was going to be built. So, it was under attack by developers and, um, the league wanted to do something about it, so they asked me if I would organize this committee. And I organized an organization called the Aquifer Protection Association. And that was wonderful, because I think I invited about twelve or fourteen people, leaders of organizations like the Junior League and the Council of Jewish Women and others to come to a meeting, and they all came. They were very interested. And we had a very successful, now this is the second petition drive, to overturn the zoning on a big development called the largest mall in the southwest at 281 and 1604. And that was in nineteen seventy-six. We had the election, we won with seventy-eight percent of the vote, but the supreme court—no it was actually another court—that said we didn't have the right to have a referendum because the state constitution doesn't allow initiative and referendum. And this was a referendum, so they negated our work. But the man never built the mall and still doesn't build, except that development out there is still taking place right now.

**RW:** Is that near UTSA?

**FS:** Yes, it's not far from UTSA, maybe five miles.

**RW:** So, did that, did the construction of UTSA damage the aquifer a great deal?

**FS:** Well, we don't know what the eventual damage will be, there are two, two areas that are of concern. One is because they're building on the aquifer, they're plugging all the sink holes, o.k., that

give us our recharge for the aquifer. And that's TENRAC that's doing that, the Texas Natural Resource and Conservation...

**RW:** Alleged or so-called...

**FS:** ...so-called. Anyway, they, um, they allow these developers, on the basis of the fact that if they leave these sink holes open, they will pollute the aquifer, so that's the excuse they use to plug, but of course, they are also diminishing the quantity of water, that's one area. Then the second area is that with all the run-off that is taking place from all the development with its pollutants, its gasolines and oils and insecticides and all the rest of it, we're going to pollute the aquifer. And that's so dangerous, because we have no way of cleaning it up. You can clean up a river, you see where the pollution comes in, you see where it goes out, but you cannot clean up an aquifer, because the wells are dug so deep, and they're individual, they come out in different places. So you don't know, you may have, we have eighty-two pumping stations, we may have to build eighty-two clean-up...for the aquifer.

**RW:** What do you see as the future of the, is this the Edwards Aquifer? What do you see happening?

**FS:** I don't have much hope for it. I think that, uh, eventually, it will become polluted, and unless we get some technology that knows how to clean it up, which we don't have now, uh, we're going to be faced with enormous expense for surface water, someplace. And where it's going to come from is another question.

**RW:** You feel there will be a big crisis?

**FS:** Oh, I do, I think there will be a big water crisis. Because we haven't had the vision to take care of something so simple as our aquifer. It's our sole source of water, we don't have any other source of water.

**RW:** Feel free to ask questions.

**TBW:** That's something that has, has bothered me. I'm a resident of San Antonio for four years now, and it just astounded me that Applewhite failed. It may not have been the best idea, perhaps, given, but,

just the idea of another source of water seems...

**FS:** Inevitable, doesn't it? Well, there is an organization called Trans-Texas, and I serve on their advisory committee and I believe that they're going to come up with some kind of solution, and it will be supplementary water, in some fashion...[doorbuzzer sounds, tape paused]

**FS:** Let me see. One of the, I thought, one of the nicest things I probably did was organize the Junior Urban Coalition. Do you know what that is?

**RW:** Mm-mm.

**FS:** Well, the Urban Coalition was a, it's in operation now, it's primarily a black organization that tries to, uh, reach out to other groups, Anglos, Mexican-Americans and so forth. And our son and my husband organized the Urban Coalition in San Antonio. It's a national organization. And I thought it was such a good idea that I went to the schools, to the high schools, and organized a Junior Urban Coalition. And took children of Alamo Heights, which, you know, is very upper class, very Anglo, and Lanier, which was Mexican-American and Wheatley, which was segregated, actually, so it was all black. And we got six students out of their senior class and had them rotate their schools, just so they got an idea of what it was like in these other schools.

**RW:** You mean they actually attended schools?

**FS:** Yes. They actually attended, for a whole period, another school.

**RW:** Wow, what a great idea.

**FS:** And I loved that idea. And the kids did too. And I was so worried when the black children were going to come to Alamo Heights, I thought, 'Oh my goodness, what kind of trauma is going to be the result of that.' But do you know what they said to me? They said, "Look, give us the teachers, give us the equipment, give us the books and we can do it, too."

**RW:** And did they?

**FS:** Well, eventually, when, you know, when segregation was done away with and when the kids got

decent schooling. They did. And we have some wonderful black students coming out of our school system now.

**RW:** Did you ever follow any of those students after high school to see whatever happened, if any of them became leaders in...

**FS:** Only one of them, that I knew of, that kept in touch with me, as a result of it, and unfortunately he was from Alamo Heights. He became one of these people on the National Geographics, that go around the world filming. He said he really got the inspiration from this experience that he had.

**RW:** Was he an Anglo?

**FS:** He was an Anglo student, yes.

**RW:** Where did you learn these community organization techniques? Had you had an opportunity to go to college? Was your mother an organizer? How did all this come about?

**FS:** No, I think, possibly, it was my dad. It's in the genes, I think. I really do think so.

**RW:** Well tell me about him.

**FS:** Yes, I will. He, um, worked for William Randolph Hearst.

**RW:** Oh, I see.

**FS:** And, when he left Hearst...

**RW:** Was he a journalist?

**FS:** Yeah, well he organized King Features Syndicate. And he, so he was an organizer. And when he left there, he worked for uh, Milton [unintelligible second name] which was an advertising agency and developed 'Call for Philip Morris,' and I have Johnny at the door.

**RW:** I listened to that all the time when I was growing up.

**FS:** when you were growing up. Well, that was my Dad. He had met Johnny and Johnny was a midget. He was very impressed with him, thought he had great potential, and so he developed this advertising paper around him, and did a lot of other work. But, he was a very organized individual.

Completely. When he died, it took my brother and me maybe an hour and a half to settle his estate.

That's how organized he was.

**RW:** Everything in order.

**FS:** Everything was in order. So I feel like maybe that's in the genes.

**RW:** What was his name?

**FS:** Joe Blum, Joseph P. Blum.

**RW:** What about your mom? Was she a member of the PTA, or...?

**FS:** Well, my mother was, no not, really, she was...

**RW:** Were they native born?

**FS:** Yes. They were native American, if that's what you're talking about. My mother was born in New York and my dad was born in Manastic (sp?) Michigan, but lived a good deal in Chicago, until Mister Hearst sent him to New York. But, at any rate, it was, um, my mother was a writer, and I have that ability also, which is so nice. And so, I'm very grateful to both my parents, because I think I got the best of them.

**RW:** What was her name.

**FS:** Amelia.

**RW:** Her maiden name?

**FS:** Kronish, K-r-o-n-i-s-h.

**RW:** When you moved to San Antonio was the fact that you were from New York—did people say, “Oh, she's a Yankee,” did you get any resistance to being accepted into the community because you were from the east?

**FS:** Oh, definitely.

**RW:** Really?

**FS:** But I had had that experience before. I went to Randolph Macon my freshman year of college,

and there I was a real damn Yankee. And not only was I a damn Yankee, but I was a Jew, and that, they had sororities, but they had no Jewish sororities. And, uh, it was, you know, I called home about four times the first week and said, "I'm coming home." And my father said, "No, no you're not. You're going to stay there." I stayed a year. But it was a trauma. It was hard.

**RW:** So how did you deal with this emotion? Did you just—what did you tell yourself?

**FS:** Well, it was sort of a challenge. And I think I've always been—and this will sound terrible—but I've always been a sucker for a challenge. [end of tape side one] [side two]

**RW:** So you told yourself it was a challenge?

**FS:** Yes, it was a challenge. I had a—you sign up in the basement for classes, and the woman, I unfortunately went on the shortest line, the woman I went to said, to me, "You're Jewish aren't you?" I said, "Yes." She said, "I don't like Jews, so you'll have to do very well in my class to pass."

**RW:** Well, she was honest about it, anyway.

**FS:** She was. So that...

**RW:** What subject was this?

**FS:** English. So that, and, uh, that was laying the gauntlet down. So I picked it up and she gave me an A in the class, so I did very well. So that was part of it. But the other thing that was even more significant was the way blacks were treated in Lynchburg, Virginia. And it doesn't surprise me that Paul Will is out of Lynchburg...

**RW:** Just that name, Lynchburg.

**FS:** Yes. Because, if I walked down the street, any black who walked down the street had to walk in the gutter. And they didn't have any transportation to school, it was in the boondocks. Oh, it was just unbelievable. So I was prepared for San Antonio, in a sense.

And Bill was very well-known in this community, so they were very resentful that he had to go to New York to find a maid. And I, you know, I didn't blame them, there were plenty of girls...

**RW:** Well, he was probably considered a very desirable catch, so to speak.

**FS:** That's right, he was.

**RW:** Well, do you think that your experience at Randolph Macon—what years were you there?

**FS:** I started there in thirty-four. I was there for a year.

**RW:** Do you feel that this sensitized you to the condition of other minorities?

**FS:** Absolutely, absolutely. I had lived a very cocooned kind of life, and my dad was in another world, I mean, not necessarily Jewish. As a matter of fact, he did not really, he, he always knew, and we always knew we were Jewish, but he didn't like organized religion. And when the Rabbis—we lived next door to a synagogue on seventy-ninth street in New York—when they would come to call on him, he would, you know, practically throw them out. So it was not part of his life. So, so that part of it, uh, having met up with it the first time at Randolph Macon, was such a shock, that you had to focus on it, face it and say, "I've got to do something," not only about myself, but about these other people for who it's just so unfair. So, that's probably been the motivation for most of the work that I've done, the fairness of it.

**RW:** Of course, in New York, you don't have to do anything if you're Jewish, I mean, everybody, a lot of people in New York are Jewish, whereas in the South, you do have to make a decision.

**FS:** That's right, you really do.

**RW:** I'm going to guess that you all affiliated with a congregation.

**FS:** Oh, definitely, yes. Several. Not in New York, but here.

**RW:** Beth El.

**FS:** Temple Beth El. Right. We're also [unintelligible]. Well, let's see, what else there was. Oh, during the Johnson administration, they actually asked Bill—now that's interesting about Mister Johnson, President Johnson—he was also open to hiring people of minority faith, I mean, origin, so he asked Bill if he would be interested in doing some minority recruiting. And at that time, Bill was very

much involved in Hemisfair. He, he was, organized Hemisfair.

**RW:** Was he active in the Democratic Party?

**FS:** Oh, always. He's a yellow-dog Democrat. Right. So, Bill suggested, Fay should be the minority recruiter, and they actually hired me.

**RW:** So you worked for the Johnson administration?

**FS:** Yes, I did.

**RW:** Looking for staff people?

**FS:** Looking for, yes, agronomists, people to go overseas with the Agency for International Development. Um, and that was a perfectly marvelous experience, because there, I really got to know, I went for instance, to Prairie View, to look for agronomists. And spoke for thirty minutes to twelve Ph.D.s at Prairie View University. And, uh, there wasn't a crack on anybody's face. And I asked the man sitting opposite me, Doctor Lewis, who actually became the head of Urban Studies at Trinity, eventually, I asked him if anybody smoked, because I needed a cigarette. And he said Doctor Evans smokes, the president. So I turned to Doctor Evans and I said, "Please have a cigarette so I can have one." He said, "Well, I'll smoke one of yours if you smoke one of mine." Well, a light went on, I reached in my purse and got my cigarettes out and handed it to him. He went into his pocket and handed me a big cigar. And that broke everybody up, I was O.K., you see. And I asked him, I said, "Why did you do that to me?" and he said "You can't imagine how many blue-eyed blondes would come in here and talk to us the way you did, and we'd never hear from them again." But I actually got several people out of Prairie View, who went overseas and I felt so good about that, because I was low woman on the totem pole. And I was, I could identify them, but they had to go through a long process before they actually got hired.

**RW:** Where else did you go to recruit, did you go just in Texas?

**FS:** Yes, only in South Texas. I went to the University, and of course, there were no blacks at the

University.

**RW:** University of Texas at Austin?

**FS:** Yes.

**RW:** What year was this?

**FS:** This was sixty-three. In sixty-three.

**RW:** Right after...

**FS:** Right after he became president, yes. And the interesting part was, and I thought of us, Jews, that the Mexican-Americans were all in pharmacy. That was their area. The reason was, they could open a drugstore, they didn't have to work for anybody, they could be independent and their own boss, which is so like us, when we first started.

**RW:** There were not even a few blacks at UT Austin?

**FS:** No. There weren't any.

**RW:** So you went to like, Laredo, Brownsville, Galveston?

**FS:** Oh, yes. I went to all of the, uh, all of the valley. And I was looking primarily for immigration officers and people who had that kind of training. And many of the recruits that finally got hired went to South American countries because they were Latin and developed civilian police forces. See, most of those Latin American countries had military forces, but not civilian. So it was kind of interesting.

**RW:** That's a really interesting and different story. I had never talked with anybody who had such a job, and especially for a woman to be going into the minority communities at that particular point in time. You were probably talking mainly to men.

**FS:** Oh, I was only talking to men.

**RW:** And so, there weren't too many Hispanic or black women even probably qualified to fill any of these jobs...

**FS:** The only woman that ever got hired by them, uh, was like a docent.

**RW:** Like at a museum or something like that.

**FS:** Yes. Who had gone, not to a museum, but who was doing sort of training or was being trained in Washington and she, she's now, uh, a big shot in Washington. She became a legislator.

**RW:** Who is she?

**FS:** I'm trying to think of what her name is.

**RW:** Not Karyn Jones-Connally.

**FS:** Yes, that's who it is, that's exactly who it is. She's the one that I...

**RW:** Where did you find her?

**FS:** I found her through her mother...

**RW:** Katie Jones.

**FS:** Katie, that's exactly right.

**RW:** And you knew Katie probably through Girl Scouts or something...

**FS:** Well, I knew her through the league. I had been exposed to her through the league and loved her. And it was Katie who I, uh, she always pats me on the back.

**RW:** Well, yeah. That probably gave her her start.

**FS:** It did give her a start. But of course she had all the, all the assets.

**RW:** Yes, she did, but still, it takes somebody to help you open the door.

**FS:** Yes, always.

**RW:** So where else in South Texas did you go and where...

**FS:** Well, as I said, I went to the University, and traveled the whole valley, Harlingen...

**RW:** Well what did you do? You would go into Harlingen and what would you do there?

**FS:** I would first of all, go to the newspaper. And I would ask the newspaper if they could direct me to who I should talk to about recruitment. And they would generally send me to the county judge.

Well, see, I was looking for policemen, and I was looking for, as I said, border patrol people. And then

I would either go to the border patrols and interview people right there, to see if there was anyone who was interested in doing this kind of thing. And then when I got their names, then I would submit their names to Washington and then somebody would come down and interview them.

**RW:** I was going to ask you if your husband was supportive of your activities, but since he recommended you to have this particular job, I'm assuming he was a feminist type of man who...

**FS:** I couldn't do it unless he was. I couldn't do it unless he was.

**RW:** Well was he generally always supportive of whatever you were doing?

**FS:** Yes. He's really remarkable. He is a remarkable person, because growing up here in the south, in this environment where everybody was, where a woman was to be seen and not heard, and to have babies, he was truly remarkable. And, as I said, I couldn't possibly have done it without his help. He was very, very supportive.

**RW:** Was his mother the sort of person who was active in the community?

**FS:** His mother was a businesswoman. She was right in the business with her husband and he may have had some help there. But I think instinctively, now he hired, now this is in nineteen forty-six, he hired a woman, Marie McGuire to be head of the housing authority of San Antonio. The mayor almost ran him out of town.

**RW:** How was it that he was in the position to hire...

**FS:** He was the chairman of the housing authority. And that, of course, was a volunteer job, but he was the chairman. And he hired Marie McGuire at ten thousand dollars a year to run a ten million dollar business. And it was unheard of. And of course she became Jack Kennedy's senior citizen housing commissioner in Washington.

**RW:** What had her background been? He must have had some good reason...

**FS:** She came from Houston. She was the assistant at Houston, and so he knew about her. And we went to breakfast, I mean, he had me go to breakfast with her to see what I thought, and of course, I was

so enchanted by her, she was so terrific.

**RW:** Did she do a good job?

**FS:** Absolutely fabulous. Absolutely fabulous. But the mayor of the city at the time said, “How dare you do anything like that. My political career is at stake. Hiring a woman.” Can you believe it?

That was forty-six.

**RW:** So who, did you know Lou Nell Sutton?

**FS:** Oh, very well.

**RW:** Tell me about her.

**FS:** GJ and Lou Nell.

**RW:** You knew George also?

**FS:** Not George as well as GJ. GJ—I ran for the school board early in the game, because of two things. I thought we ought to have a, oh a dietitian actually run the cafeteria. And I also thought that because we had two bright sons, that there ought to be some classes for bright children. I was called a communist. That was in fifty-seven. I was called a communist.

**RW:** Because you wanted a gifted...

**FS:** Because I wanted these two things.

**RW:** Well that was during the whole McCarthy thing.

**FS:** That’s right.

**RW:** Well, when you stop to think that doesn’t sound very radical today, does it?

**FS:** Oh, of course not. And as a result of—of course they put fifty thousand dollars against me, because I was this radical communist—and as a result of defeating me, we moved, which was a very good thing. But, they initiated both things almost immediately.

**RW:** It sounds like Houston, with Hattie White, you know what’s going on there? And there was also a Jewish woman who was later a colleague on the school board. They wanted free, they wanted to use

federal funds for free school lunches and this was considered, this was in the fifties, this was considered a big communist plot. Of course, as soon as Hattie went off, they did it. When you said you moved, you mean you moved from one district to another?

**FS:** Yes. We moved from the San Antonio Independent District to Alamo Heights.

**RW:** And you were running in the San Antonio district?

**FS:** Yes. I thought 'If you complain, do something.' And that's true, um, and has been sort of the way I have operated. I will not complain unless I can see a solution. And then I fight for the solution.

**RW:** So how much, what was the vote, do you remember?

**FS:** You mean, the numbers? No.

**RW:** Were you beaten very badly?

**FS:** Not badly, but beaten. So I said to Bill, I think we need to get out. We had a very sensitive child, who was extremely bright, and that school over there, they were shaking him down for knives and stuff like that, and I said, "No, we can't send Lanny there, so let's get out." And we did. We went to Alamo Heights, and he went to Harvard, and was a Fulbright Scholar and so forth and so on, you know.

**RW:** The school he went to there, was he happier?

**FS:** Well, yes.

**RW:** What school was that?

**FS:** Well, the junior school in Alamo Heights. And Dick was in the senior school. The senior high school at Alamo Heights.

**RW:** Did you ever run for any other office?

**FS:** Yes, I ran for the Edwards Underground Water District and won.

**RW:** You did.

**FS:** Yes, I'm the first woman to serve on that. It's in here.

**RW:** You seem to be the first woman to do....

**FS:** I've done a lot of things.

**RW:** ...on the grand jury. When was that?

**FS:** That was also in fifty-seven. That was an interesting experience, there's so many stories. Now I was the first woman, and it was traumatic for the men. They couldn't tell their dirty stories, they couldn't ask their, you know, pornographic questions, and what they did was, on that grand jury, was to say, if the prosecuting attorney brought in a case that had an Anglo name, they would always say, "Is he or she black?" Until finally I thought my hair would stand on end, I would ask them, I did ask them, "Why do you ask that question?" And all of the sudden they realized what they were doing. And so...women have a great place in all of these situations because there is a sensitivity that they have, I guess as a result of them being a mother, that men simply don't have. I really feel that way. And so here was a perfect case of where that happened. And, I guess, that grand jury was never the same.

**RW:** You raised their consciousness.

**FS:** Yes.

**RW:** Well, of course the suffragists always felt that they would, by being part of the political process, they would raise the level of conduct of the men.

**FS:** Yes, and I think they did.

**RW:** Certain things would no longer be acceptable.

**FS:** Acceptable. True, absolutely true.

**RW:** Do you feel that you were influenced in any way by the women's movement? Or you had gotten involved, I suppose almost before Betty Friedan and

**FS:** Oh, yes. Long before. And I was just terribly proud that they were involved in it. That was wonderful, because, you know, you can't do anything by yourself. You need lots of help, so that was great help. And it made a difference.

**RW:** Did you get involved in any women's political caucus or NOW or...

**FS:** I was involved with them for a while, but I found that they didn't really meet my needs, so...

**RW:** Do you have any advice for the women's movement? In terms of how they can be more effective? I know the women's movement is a big umbrella, that there are a lot of different branches.

**FS:** Yes, I do have some advice. [laughs]

**RW:** Well, just tell us what it is.

**FS:** My advice for the women's movement is to learn how to circle the wagons.

**RW:** What does that mean?

**FS:** That means that when men get in trouble, other men circle the wagons and help them out of their trouble. When women get in trouble, or even when they run for office, women do not, they are still individuals, and do not know how to come, to coalesce and how to circle the wagons and really help other women. It's an interesting phenomenon to watch, and I've seen it many times.

**RW:** So, is it because they're afraid that they will personally be attacked and they're afraid of criticism?

**FS:** Not so much that as it's been so tough and they finally have a chance to achieve something, monetarily, politically and so forth and so on. And so they don't want to ruffle the waters around them, and they just don't know how to, as I said, coalesce and get groups to support them and so forth and so on, they don't know how to do it yet. But it's essential, it's absolutely essential, because the men do it automatically. They don't even think about it, they do it automatically.

**RW:** I haven't heard this viewpoint, it's very interesting. I notice then, the two times you ran for office they were for non-partisan boards, you were not running as a Democrat. But have you been active in the local, Bexar County Democratic Women's Club?

**FS:** As strange as it may seem, I don't like politics. I really don't like politics. I think you expose yourself to so much unhappiness if you do. And, uh, the, this woman that introduced me on Saturday...

**RW:** Do you have the program for that?

**FS:** Yes, I don't have an extra copy. Maybe we can get one from the league.

**RW:** Call the league.

**FS:** I thought the woman that introduced me said something that I was sort of interested in, she said, the newspapers had a great of respect for me. Now that's interesting. Because they don't have a lot of respect for a lot of people.

**RW:** What did she mean?

**FS:** Well, I think, well the woman who is the head of the editorial section of the newspaper, is a friend of mine...

**RW:** And who is that?

**FS:** That's Lynelle Burkett. And so, she probably called Lynelle, she knew she was a friend, and she said, "Tell me about Fay." And Lynelle must have had some very nice things to say, which is so nice to know. So, I'm sure it's not a hundred percent, but I think I have a good reputation. And that is nice to hear. It's nice to know and nice to hear. I feel comfortable going any place.

**RW:** Well you fell good about looking back at your body of work, there's some things to be proud of, and children. I'd like to just come back to this—I'm really fascinated by your skill—I'm a social worker by profession, I studied community organization. I worked for the Jewish Federation in Dallas, the Anti-Defamation League before I switched to being a historian. But I'm really fascinated by how you approach, uh, a problem or an issue and, um [end of tape one] [begin tape two] So I know that each issue or situation or problem or project would be approached differently based on the nature of the problem, but I'm just interested in your thought—how you approach a problem when someone comes to you and says, "We need to do something about..." I don't know, what's a problem in San Antonio?

**FS:** Well...

**TBW:** Well, I can think of one, Kelly Air Force Base closing down and the Mexican-American middle class losing all these jobs...

**RW:** The Mexican middle class will be losing these jobs. So, do you have a little checklist that you go down—well, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but how would you approach a problem, if someone said, "Fay, you're the chairperson..."

**FS:** Well, let me take it to something I know.

**RW:** Alright, alright, fine.

**FS:** Kelly is too big for me. [laughs] I did have someone come to me and say to me, "There's an awful lot of prejudice in this town." And, uh, what can we do about it? And, that interested me, because nobody really was doing anything about it. I learned at the league, when I was president of the league, do your homework. So I went around to find out what kind of prejudice was available, I mean, what were they doing? Well, they were, we, Bill and I, were really responsible for integrating the restaurants in San Antonio.

**RW:** Is that right? Tell me how that came about.

**FS:** It was simple. It was so simple. We simply went up and down Broadway, right here, all these restaurants, and this is so many years ago, before the Supreme Court decision for integration. And we said to them, "Would you serve blacks in your restaurant?" And their answer to us was, "If everybody does it, we'll do it, we'll be happy to do it." See how simple that was. Just like the Wop Salad. When I went around to them and said, "You know, wop's a dirty word and you shouldn't be using it. Would you be willing to use Italian tossed salad on your menu?" They said, "Wop's a dirty word? We didn't know that. We'd be happy to do that." So it isn't that difficult.

**RW:** So then when you told all the other restaurant owners that everybody—well, what did you do?

**FS:** Well, that's what we did. We went from one to the other, and said, "If you'll do it, he'll do it, and if you'll do it, he'll do it." And they did it.

**RW:** Was this in the early sixties?

**FS:** This was even earlier.

**RW:** Earlier?

**FS:** Yes. In the late fifties.

**RW:** And then did you all test this out by bringing some black friends?

**FS:** Yes. We did. And that was because Bill had brought a black friend to a restaurant where they didn't serve him and wouldn't serve him.

**RW:** And then what happened?

**FS:** Well, I mean, he kept coming. Bill kept bringing him in and saying, "Look, we're going to settle this once and for all." Now that was downtown, that was not Broadway. But that's what was the catalyst for integrating the restaurants.

**RW:** And after that, they all went...

**FS:** Yes, they did. But what they did was, and that's the homework that I did on this issue of prejudice, they would put them at a table in the back near the kitchen...

**RW:** Where nobody would see them.

**FS:** Where nobody would see them. Exactly. Right. And the same would happen when my friend would go to a department store like Frost. If anybody was Anglo around, they would wait on them first, she would have to wait. So what we did, was, and here I organized again, called a panel of American Women.

**RW:** Yes, we had that in Dallas, too.

**FS:** You had that in Dallas, too. I'd heard about this and thought, what a great idea.

**RW:** I'd forgotten about it.

**FS:** And it meets the need of this particular project. So we spoke to thirty five thousand people in San Antonio, we were tremendous. A huge success.

**RW:** That's a great...it's still a good idea as a way of handling things.

**FS:** Isn't it? Absolutely marvelous. And we had very few people walk out on us. They were mostly

teachers, because we had on our Mexican-American panel, a woman who said that she learned how to lie in kindergarten, because when she was asked, “What did you have for breakfast?” she had tortillas and tamales and all of the Mexican food, so she never got a gold star. The only people that got gold stars were those children who were served eggs and bacon and orange juice and, you know, milk and stuff like that. You know, it was really powerful. I mean, really powerful, it got to the guts of things. And so these women were very popular, we just had a wonderful time. And I spoke as a Jew and told them about my experiences at Randolph Macon.

**RW:** And so you were able to change attitudes through these very personal kinds of...

**FS:** Yes. And I still hear, and that’s been many years ago, maybe twenty years ago that we did this, I’m still hearing, or I meet people in the grocery store, “I heard you, and you made such an impression.” People are so...

**RW:** Now getting back to this, today’s work on prejudice—you say there’s still prejudice in San Antonio.

**FS:** Yes, there is.

**RW:** And can you describe a few examples?

**FS:** Well, I have to talk to my friend about that.

**RW:** But you’re presently working on that?

**FS:** I think it’s much more sub rosa now than it used to be. It’s not overt, but you know it’s there.

**RW:** So basically you at first go around and do some investigation and see the nature of the problem definition and try to diagnose what...

**FS:** Yes, and then think of how you can approach it, uh, so that it will do some good, so you will have a positive result.

**RW:** You’re not interested in just grandstanding.

**FS:** Oh, heavens no. That’s such a waste of time. A real waste of time.

**RW:** Well, do you normally think of going to opinion makers? Or do you think of more of a grass-roots approach or does it depend on...

**FS:** It depends on the subject matter. Now I notice when Bill, uh, he's working on consolidation now. And he's eighty-four years old. And that's wonderful isn't it?

**RW:** What's that? Consolidation of the schools?

**FS:** No. consolidation of city and county. A big proposition.

**RW:** O.K., that's like metro governments that have all these separate units, which is such a tremendous waste of...

**FS:** Absolutely, a tremendous waste. And San Antonio almost reaches the boundaries of Bexar County.

**RW:** So why do we have a county government? It's really obsolete, isn't it? It's like Robin Hood.

**FS:** It is obsolete. Now he will go to Tom Frost and all the...

**RW:** He probably knows all those guys.

**FS:** Well, he does, they're his best friends. So he will do that. But I really like to go below and go to the grass roots and find out from them what it is. What it really is. And how they really feel and what they think might be a way to approach it. So that you have a sense of where you might go.

**RW:** So you involve the thinking of other people who might have some expertise.

**FS:** Oh, yes. Uh-huh. Right. I really enjoy that. I like doing that.

**RW:** Well, what advice would you have for young women coming up today who want to be active in the community.

**FS:** Well, I think there are very few of them. Most of them are now looking for jobs. They're, uh, they're thinking about their careers. I'm thinking about my granddaughters. One of them is a petroleum engineer, she has a big shot job with, um, Chevron out in San Francisco. And, um, she loves to hear my stories, adores it, but it's not part of her genre.

**RW:** Doesn't resonate with her.

**FS:** No, it doesn't resonate. It may, later on...

**RW:** Is she just too busy to be....

**FS:** Yes, she is very, very busy. She schedules all the barges that go between the islands of Hawaii with their gasolines. You know, she's got a wonderful job.

**RW:** Well, let me rephrase it then. What advice would you have for young women in general whether it's about their careers, their life or just about achieving as a woman and not, maybe facing the prejudices we did, or maybe they face other ones, I'm not sure.

**FS:** Well, I, my advice would be to understand yourself, first, and be very, very patient. Patience is really a virtue. [phone rings] We'll just let that go. And, um, to do some analysis of yourself, weaknesses and strengths that you possess, and put an emphasis on your strengths so that you feel satisfied and are happy with yourself. I find too many people unhappy with themselves. And that disturbs me. The only way I know how to cope with that is just to sit down and do some analysis.

**RW:** It's almost as if they have too many choices, we didn't have that many. And so it's, they have difficulties in other ways because, uh, they can go in a lot of different directions.

**FS:** That's right. They can. I was dying, not today, I was dying to be a highway engineer. That was impossible in my day to be a highway engineer. I think highways ought to be designed by women, not men. I really do. I don't think men do a very good job. If you think about it, you'll see. Our highway system is a disaster.

**RW:** What would you do differently?

**FS:** Well, I mean, goodness me. You don't cut across three lanes to get on to where you're going. Just those simple things, you know. And also an architect, in the same fashion. A woman should be designing a home to live in.

**RW:** As well as these buildings that only have two stalls in the bathrooms. I wonder who designs

these things? I mean, women are waiting out in the hall. Well, have you ever thought about writing a book about your life?

**FS:** No. Yes, I guess maybe subliminally I have thought about it, but not really. It would be fun, I think, to try, but it's too me-ish. I'm not...

**RW:** Maybe you could find a graduate student to help, I mean, there's a, if there's not a book here, I don't know anything about writing. I've written a lot of books myself. I mean, your interests have ranged so far afield and, uh, you've been so much a part of the major issues for the last, what...

**FS:** Fifty years. [laughs]

**RW:** ...fifty years, I mean. Fifty years of achievement. I think that that's a remarkable...

**FS:** Well you have to be lucky, and I think I was lucky. I had a husband who supported me, both physically and mentally and also economically, so I was free to do what I was able to do.

**RW:** Did you have some household help?

**FS:** Oh, yes. Lots of it, so that, too was great.

**RW:** If you had worked from eight to five every day, you couldn't have been...

**FS:** Nah, couldn't have done it. Couldn't have done it. And had children who, um, were not problems. That also is very helpful. They weren't sick, they did well in school. I could always talk to them. We always had these wonderful conversations. There was, it was fun.

**RW:** Where do your sons live?

**FS:** One lives in San Diego and one lives in Hawaii.

**RW:** Oh, wow. So do you do a lot of traveling back and forth.

**FS:** We try, yes. We're celebrating fifty-five years and, uh, at the end, in two weeks, so we're going to have a family reunion.

**RW:** Here?

**FS:** No, in Baja.

**RW:** Oh. Yeah.

**TBW:** Great. A very central place to go.

**FS:** It is a centrally, yeah.

**RW:** Was there anything else you'd like to say as we conclude the interview?

**FS:** Not really. You're very nice to do this, and I appreciate it so much.

**RW:** Well, this is a situation in which everybody wins. Your story gets recorded for researchers, and historians and hopefully you'll feel good that we appreciate you in, uh—let's look at this little permission form. Basically, this...

**FS:** Yes. Do you have a pen?

**RW:** Yes, ma'am, I do. I used to work for this man who said you never use a red pen. It's a dress for success thing.

**TBW:** Well, I just finished student teaching, so I used red pens a lot.

**FS:** Do I sign where it says interviewee?

**TBW:** Yes.

**FS:** Right up here? Then give the date?

**RW:** Yes. What is it, the thirteenth?

**TBW:** Yes, it is. Time's flying. Well, this has been very interesting, very interesting.

**FS:** Has it?

**TBW:** Yes. I was a journalist for about twelve years, so I'm used to interviewing and used to listening, but this is a completely different way of doing it, and I think I'm going to enjoy it tremendously.

**FS:** Oh, I bet you will, I bet you will. Oral histories are fascinating, because they are real people.

**TBW:** I've been wanting to do this—yes, exactly, I've been wanting to do this for a long time. This is my first opportunity this summer.

**FS:** Is it possible to get a tape of this? Can you send me one?

**TBW:** Sure. Sure, I don't see why not.

**FS:** That would be very helpful. We're making a kind of reference like those two tapes there, for our kids, and they may never play them but you never know.

**TBW:** Sure. It's a good thing to have. And we also, uh, we'll be sending you a transcript of this for your edits, for you to take a look at...

**FS:** Edits, oh that would be nice.

**TBW:** Now, I wrote down the names you mentioned, purely out of habit. And I'll check the spellings on those, so you won't have to on the transcript.

**FS:** Great, that's good. My goodness, did I mention all those names?

**TBW:** Yes, you did. And probably a couple more that I missed.

**FS:** Today's the thirteenth.

**TBW:** I haven't been doing this professionally for about three years now, so I've lost my touch.

**FS:** And where are you? Tell me about you.

**TBW:** I just finished my master's degree in history at UTSA, and I was working with Doctor Schott most of that time.

**FS:** I see, Linda.

**TBW:** Yes, she's wonderful.

**FS:** Isn't she wonderful?

**TBW:** Mm-hmm. And I am planning to be a secondary history teacher for a while.

**FS:** Secondary...

**TBW:** High school.

**FS:** Dick, our oldest son, taught at UTSA, in the history department, but that's in Austin, but he taught Latin American history. He is now an entrepreneur, of course, his language facility is exquisite, so

he's able to do business in Mexico with NAFTA. And, uh, it's a, uh, I mean he enjoyed teaching thoroughly, but he didn't enjoy the system.

**TBW:** No, and I can see why, how that could probably affect someone's opinion of the, the profession.

**RW:** May we use your telephone to call our next—we're interviewing a hundred and two year-old woman.

**FS:** Are you really? And who is that?