

Barbara Ackerman and Tim Van Hise Interview on Helen S. Meyner

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Interviewees: Barbara Ackerman and Tim Van Hise, former staff members for Helen S. Meyner, and Edwin C. Landis, Jr., former staff member for Robert B. Meyner and partner in Meyner and Landis LLP, Newark, New Jersey

Site of Interview: Archives Office, Skillman Library, Lafayette College, Easton, PA.

DIANE SHAW (DS): Okay. We are all miked and ready to go. So, if you guys would just talk in a normal voice but with some volume, the microphone should pick it up really easily. Today is January 29th, 2016. I'm Diane Shaw, the Special Collections head and college archivist. I'm here with my colleague, John Kincaid, director of the Meyner Center for the Study of State and Local Government. Today we are interviewing Barbara Ackerman and Tim Van Hise, both of whom worked with and for Helen Meyner. Our interview today is going to be about Helen Meyner and various aspects of her career and life. I'd like begin by asking Barbara to just clearly state the role that you had with Helen Meyner, what your title may have been and what you did. It might involve a little more description, and that's fine.

BARBARA ACKERMAN (BA): I met Helen Meyner as a youngster when I worked for Governor Meyner. I also worked for Joe McClain whose brother was part of Lafayette College at one time and when I worked for Helen -- I remember -- Joe McClain, who was Bob Meyner's campaign manager during his primary campaign. He had, coincidentally, been friends with [00:02:00] Governor Meyner, and he had asked him to go to Oberlin College, where Helen Meyner--she was Helen Stevenson then--actually met Bob Meyner. So that was a long, long time ago. Helen was a good friend. I remember at one time, while she was campaigning, she had come over to our house to visit my husband and I, and she had given me a copy of the *Jaws* book. Everybody remembers the *Jaws* book, and in it she had written, "With much love to Barbara and Randy - Helen and Bob Meyner." It just so happened that Peter Benchley lived across the street from me at that time, and I took the book over and had him autograph it. He said, "Second-handed from a brief neighbor - Peter Benchley" (laughter) so --

DS: That's a treasure.

BA: Yeah, absolutely.

DS: Did you have an official position with Helen when you worked for her during her term in Congress?

BA: Well, I was chairman of Meyner's group in Pennington, in Mercer County, actually, and -- I remember, there's a picture of me as a youngster -- with Governor Meyner. Tim looked at this picture the other day and reflected on some of the people who were in the picture at that time.

TIM VAN HISE (TVH): I knew a couple of them.

BA: Yeah?

DS: I might try to scan that before you get away today so we will have it on file with the interview. Great. Well, thank you, Barbara. Is there more you want to say at this point about your role with Helen? This will come back around, but –

BA: I'll tell you one thing. I remember campaigning with her at Western Electric in Mercer County one time, and Helen took a ring off her finger and handed it to me and said, "I want you to have this. It was my grandmother's." I was totally overwhelmed by her gesture. She was a great gal, and I loved her to death.

DS: Yes. And a very good friend, so, it sounds like. Tim, maybe you could tell us the role that you played with Helen, your position with her.

TVH: For almost all of her two terms in Congress, I was the New Jersey district director for her three offices. As you know, it was a sprawling congressional district. It had all or parts of five counties, all of three and parts of two. So, she had three offices. Someone was in each office as a case worker, and then I was overseeing that. I also spent weekends with her for four years because five days -- for most days I think it's fair to say five days in Washington. I'm not sure that's the norm anymore. Five days in Washington and then there's time to go to work back in the district, and those are the days we spent together. I started with her only four years out of here and fresh out of the Army. I actually was a campaign volunteer through the auspices of Barbara Ackerman. I volunteered in the campaign and then was hired later on the campaign and then was hired for her staff.

DS: Tim, what was your class at Lafayette?

TVH: Seventy.

DS: Seventy, okay.

JOHN KINCAID (JK): And what was the year you started with her?

TVH: Seventy-four.

JK: Seventy-four.

TVH: Barbara had her personal relationship with Helen of much longer standing than me. But you know, I spent weekends with that woman for four years, and you get to see somebody when you spend that much time with them, of course, and she had worked hard in Washington. She was not, despite suspicions to the contrary, interested in the social scene at all. She worked. And then she'd come back to Jersey, and everybody

wants a piece of their congressman or woman, and she was attentive to the needs and the interests of the people back in her district. So, every weekend, virtually every weekend, not always two days, but sometimes two days, we'd be out and about seeing the people she had known when she was just Helen and then the people she came to know when she was representing them in Washington. So that was the nature of my contact.

DS: Thank you.

JK: So, you were based in New Jersey then.

TVH: I was, but for the –

JK: Not working with her in Washington.

TVH: But for the first five months when I was in Washington with her, I was in New Jersey. I think it was May that I came back and moved to Dover. (laughter) Right? When somebody said Dover, I thought it was Delaware, but no, it was -- why I'd come to know in the campaign, of course, but that's where I was.

DS: Yeah. So, you're saying that you spent the first five months that she was in Congress in DC with her, kind of working the ropes and -- what did you, yeah, that's an interesting - - I'd be curious to hear how her initial months played out.

TVH: I was fortunate. I was in on the interview process with her for hiring staff. She hired a veteran Capitol Hill person to be her chief of staff, Susan Perry? I'm sure her name is in your materials. An experienced Capitol Hill secretary and then all the rest of us that worked in her campaign, virtually all the rest of us. I put together -- (laughs) I did, I wrote -- the congressional district's response to the Army plan to eradicate Picatinny Arsenal, which was the number-one employer in the 13th Congressional district. So, everybody lined up behind Helen, and we had done a lot of work, talked to a lot of people, put together a lot of material as to why that shouldn't be, and I remember a weekend putting it all together. That was probably in April and May, and that's pretty much the end of my Washington (inaudible).

JK: What was it that attracted you to her? What actually brought the two of you together? You wanted to campaign for her or she for you or?

TVH: I was interested in politics. I didn't know Helen Meyner from anyone else. I was interested in politics; somehow, I got to have a conversation with Barbara about my interest, and she suggested that there might be a way for me to work for Helen Meyner's campaign. And despite my having mentioned that I just got out of the Army, that was probably not my orientation. I was probably more liberal and interested in things and what a great opportunity it was; what a wonderful person to run into.

DS: You mean Helen or Barbara or both?

TVH: Both of course, but I meant Helen in that statement because you could be interested in politics and end up with opportunities to work for all sorts of people and I had a woman that mattered in 1974; she was different. And not a woman who was interested in the next career step or higher up the political ladder or impressing people or getting national media attention, none of those things. Just a good-hearted soul and a hardworking, dedicated person. She was genuine. I was lucky.

DS: But I think before we leave the idea of Helen being a woman, I think that there were very few women at that point in Congress. Do you remember how many there were? It was quite small.

TVH: It was quite small, but in New Jersey, of course, there was Millicent Fenwick.

BA: There was Millicent, yes.

TVH: And her orientation -- a, she was Republican to Helen's being a Democrat, but her orientation was not like Helen's. And --

DS: And how do you mean that?

TVH: Well, the media attention went, of course, to the pipe-smoking grandmother who had had a fashion magazine career, I believe, in New York.

BA: And she also, there was a cartoon about her. Don't you remember? Millicent Fenwick?

TVH: Lots of them.

BA: Lots of them. Yeah.

DS: She was a character, yeah

TVH: She was a character and able to be portrayed with a high level of attention. Helen was none of those things. Helen was much more focused on her work. She went, for instance, I'll try and make this one a quick one, she asked for the foreign affairs committee, in the House, knowing that back in the 13th Congressional district, that wasn't going to impress a lot of people.

But she thought that's where she could contribute. She had had a bit of a wider orientation because her father had been U.S. ambassador to the Philippines. As she explained it to me, a wonderful series of opportunities to meet interesting people from all over the world when she was, I don't know if she was a child, but she was not yet an adult, when her father was president of Oberlin and all these people came not just to the college, but to Sunday dinner at the Stevenson house. And then her time with the Red Cross in the war. So that's where she thought she could contribute and make an honest impact, and consequences be damned. She wouldn't have said it that way, but --

DS: Do you remember her other committee assignments? What were her other committee assignments?

TVH: She had the Committee on Aging, I think. And she was serious about that. I remember helping to put on a forum back in New Jersey; we had it in Hackettstown, somewhere near St. Mary's College, to learn about issues facing seniors. Kind of her one-woman congressional committee where people were invited to come in and just say things that she thought she should know in order to work better.

JK: Could both of you say something about what motivated her to run for Congress?

BA: I'm not certain. I don't know whether she was influenced by her husband, who had maybe had problems not being in the limelight anymore and you know, I think that that was -- he was the campaign manager for her when she ran for Congress. So, he was involved in all of the -- various meetings that we would have. I remember with great fondness, Tim talked about when they lived on Alden Avenue, going over there and playing tennis with Helen and Bob, when, you know, and he cooking breakfast for us. (laughter) So that was quite, quite a thrill.

TVH: My take on that's probably a little different than Barbara's. I think Bob Meyner's involvement was primarily in the '74 campaign, '72 campaign, the unsuccessful campaign.

BA: No, he was -- this is a picture, Tim.

TVH: Of '70?

BA: Four.

TVH: Seventy-four? Okay.

BA: Mm-hmm.

TVH: Well, when I was around in '74, I wasn't probably around as much as Barbara was. He was not so prominent; the governor was not so prominent. And I had the sense of, from Helen over the years, well, initially, she may have been resistant to run for Congress because she thought they were coming to her because of her name. And you know, she didn't need that. She never traded on that. She was her own person, quite capable, and although she was interested in helping, she never put herself out there; she never campaigned to be a candidate, I don't believe. I think she would, was willing to help the party, but not, not anxious to be the candidate. Do you remember that?

BA: Well, I remember the first campaign when she ran and was not successful. When Joe Maraziti was the [Republican] congressman (1973-1975), and I worked for the New Jersey Senate at that time. And he evidently--I don't know whether or not I should say

it or not--but he put his girlfriend on the campaign and -- this is when Helen had -- when she had lost to Maraziti at that time, '72.

TVH: That's '72.

BA: And then what she tried to do was talk to Bill Bradley about becoming the congressman. She had gotten these pins made, "Madly for Bradley," and -- had taken them up and had lunch with him in New York. I think that's when he was playing for the Knicks and he had a great interest in politics, and that's when Jimmy [Dugan?] had called him and they were re-districting New Jersey. He said, "Bill, I'm sorry, you moved into the wrong town." And I remember with great affection, taking the kids to Washington when Jimmy Carter was inaugurated and I remember going earlier, when Helen was elected the first time in '74, with [Bev Welliver] and Jane Rodgers and somebody else, I don't remember who that other person was. And we went up with the guy who used to be the landscape guy at Morven. I can't remember what his name was. But --

TVH: That's how, as I recall, that's how Helen became the candidate in '74, because everyone expected Bill Bradley to be, everyone, everyone expected Bill Bradley to be the candidate. And when he was not, the party was in need of --

BA: A candidate

TVH: -- someone and hey, Bradley was a very big name. We can't find some local councilman no one's ever heard of. And that was the party's attitude, I think. You know, as it turns out, she agreed, but I don't think she was interested in the short term --

BA: Well, I would think that after losing her first race, she may have been hard to persuade to jump in again.

TVH: I think that's fair. I think she had done it. It hadn't worked.

BA: Then they had done that.

TVH: And Barbara and I were talking recently when we were together. Helen used to say to us, separately but consistently, "You know, I don't need this. You know, this isn't necessary for me," and I have no doubt she was being honest. It was hard. It was difficult.

DS: But then she was elected, and she seemed to find that she had a taste for the work. Would you say, is that a fair statement? Or?

BA: Yeah, I think that's a fair statement. I think she enjoyed being the congresswoman. And she did a great job.

DS: Before we -- Barbara didn't get to weigh in on the question of her as a woman holding office at a time when few women did. Did she talk with you about that at all?

BA: No, but I've got to tell you another story. This is a funny one. [Frank J.] Pat Dodd became president of the New Jersey Senate some years ago and the thing of it is, is that one of the suggestions I had given to him, a committee assignment, and I said, one of the things that I would do is, there were three women who were elected: [Eileen Allman], Wynona --

TVH: Lipman.

BA: Lipman. And somebody, oh, Anne Martindell. And I said, "What I would suggest you do is create a Women's Room in the New Jersey Senate." He took my advice and I put up, on the second floor they had the Men's Room, so I put a W-O in front of that and tacked it up and years later they created a women's room in the United States Senate and I said, "You all are a Renaissance Man because we did it a long time before," (laughter) now think about that.

TVH: It was, as Diane said, still a rarity to have women in elected offices.

BA: Tell me about it.

TVH: It's hard for us to recall that, but it was in the early stages.

BA: Funny.

JK: Now did she in any way particularly champion women's issues? And was she an ERA supporter?

TVH: Oh of course, she was a supporter. But no, that was not a centerpiece of who she was. I think she believed that consistent with my understanding of how she was brought up. Your accomplishments will speak for themselves, and she was quite capable and quite confident. I don't think she ever wore it on her sleeve.

DS: She does have a letter in the collection that I'm quite fond of where she's writing to Rosalynn Carter about a meeting that she set up with her fellow congresswomen, to meet with Rosalynn. And she's writing to them and she's saying, of course, we can talk with her about, you know, what casserole we should make for dinner and you know, how to clean house and very, very tongue in cheek and very, very clever and I'm happy that we have that letter. Students have used that letter for presentations.

TVH: Her sense of humor was never far from the front. She relied on that a lot.

DS: Well, let's ask about some of the big issues that faced her. Picatinny obviously, and I'd like to know more about that and then of course, there was Tocks Island, both major, major things affecting her district. You want to talk about Picatinny first?

TVH: Yeah, Picatinny may be easier for me to recall. Speaking selfishly. There was Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland and Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois, and the Department of Defense, that aspect of the department that was concerned with armaments, had decided that everything could be consolidated elsewhere, not in New Jersey. I don't remember which of the other they picked. And it employed more than 5,000 people, I believe, in the 13th Congressional district, so that was capital bad news. So, as I said, the entire congressional district tried to help. Helen was still then just a first-term congresswoman, and so people like [Harrison] Pete Williams -- I'm not sure how much Senator [Clifford] Case was ever involved in anything -- but Senator Williams was involved, and the congressmen who had been there longer, Jim Howard, Bob Roe, Frank Thompson were also helping as they could with whoever they knew in the Department of Defense. And it turned out, the short version of this story is that turned out pretty well for us. But she kept that issue in the forefront. And -- was -- different people would give you different perceptions of this, and was at least to some extent, responsible for her reelection, I'm sure, because the people saw that she was not just a big name who was going to go to Washington and be a big name. That's what I recall of Picatinny.

DS: And you recall, that it was a pretty, it was hard-fought decision or?

TVH: Well, sure, because Maryland and Illinois had their congressional delegations marshaling their resources as well, saying, gee, the Army studied this. This is their recommendation. Who is New Jersey to say that they know better? Yeah, that was, it was tough, and I don't know all that she did. I do know that she was as wholesome and as honest as I'm portraying, but I also know that she would capitalize on the connections, the personal connections that she knew would help and, and she was able to get fairly close with Tip O'Neill (D-MA), which for a freshman congressman was pretty remarkable.

BA: I remember Tip O'Neill. The mayor of his town was named Barbara Ackerman. (laughter) I remember going to a dinner, and he was there, and he kept waving to me the whole time. Oh my God, it was the funniest thing. But that's true. He was -- he must have been very fond of her.

TVH: He took a special shine to her. Her personal charm. Whatever other reason, I don't know.

BA: It could very well be. But I remember that with, you know, you just reminded me of it, Tim. That is funny.

TVH: I had the opportunity to meet him one time. I forget the setting, Washington, of course, but -- I can't remember where and I said that I worked for Helen Meyner and he lit up. "Oh," he said, "We love Helen," I mean he probably would recognize the name, but I'm not sure you'd get that reaction to all the names of the freshman members of Congress, but he knew who Helen was.

JK: Really?

DS: Good for her.

BA: Maybe it's because she was related to Adlai Stevenson.

TVH: Could have been.

DS: Was he from Illinois?

BA: Yeah.

TVH: Yeah

DS: Tip was, wasn't he? Yeah, maybe that –

TVH: No, Tip was from Boston. Adlai Stevenson was Illinois. Cousin Adlai. Tocks Island –

DS: I was just going to ask.

TVH: -- was a conundrum. Because Charlie [Marciani], who was New Jersey AFL-CIO president, wanted that project for the thousands of jobs. That was a massive project. But Helen's instincts were not that way because it was going to dam up and eradicate thousands of acres of beautiful New Jersey 13th Congressional district; that's parenthetical, just thousands of acres of New Jersey farmland, almost wilderness. I think she spent two terms tiptoeing around that one. That was tough. And I think Marciani knew that she wasn't going to be where he wanted her to be on that issue. But I didn't have any -- I was on both –

DS: You didn't work with that.

TVH: -- with Helen and Marciani.

JK: Did she come out clearly for or against it, or?

TVH: Everyone knew she was against it. I think she did not come out with a clarion call of opposition, for the obvious reasons. She wasn't going to help facilitate it. And it died of its own weight, I guess, that terrible saga that we've all heard about of the, the taking of the lands and then there being no purpose. That was a tough one.

JK: Well, did she speak to you, Barbara, about that?

BA: No. I think the relationship that I had with Helen was not policy issues, basically. I can –

TVH: She needed, she needed her personal connections that she could just relax with them and talk to them.

BA: And I remember, you know, playing tennis with the Meyners, and my husband was a good tennis player, and that's the kind of relationship that I had -- not necessarily policy issues.

DS: Tim, what were some of the other issues that came up during her two terms that were particularly either contentious or things that you felt she felt very proud of having done? The big issues.

TVH: Her primary devotion in Washington was the foreign affairs committee. I really didn't have any role in that. I know that was her focus. She would speak of it to me when she was home and we were spending all these hours in my car. Story about that in a moment, but not because she and I had give and take on it; I just listened. It was not my area. I know that's how she spent a majority of her workload during the week. And she was conscious of the fact that when she came back to the VFW dinner on a Saturday night in the wilds of Warren County, that they didn't want to hear about her foreign affairs committee work. So, there was that dichotomy. She thought she could contribute, but she knew that that wasn't going to be a big sale back home. She's not responsible -- and I talked about the hours in my car -- Helen's personal charm was unpredictable. And she could not, she tells the story that her husband never could read in the car. Do I have that right? I know she couldn't -- so all these hours were, you know, I'm driving, she could be catching up on the notes that I had written for her during the week about the people she was going to see and the issues that are on their mind in the local area where we were going. She couldn't read in the car. So, she says, "I got an idea. Oh, Dearie," (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Oh, Dearie.

BA: Oh, Dearie, that was --

TVH: (laughs) Everything's "Oh, Dearie," --

BA: -- her expression all the time.

TVH: She says, "I'll drive and you read." So, I'm 24, 25, happy to have this job. Okay. Well, Helen's strength --

BA: Was not driving.

TVH: Was not driving. And so, I'd be trying to read to her and I was looking up and -- we did that once in a while. Not regularly.

JK: Your car survived it?

TVH: Oh, yeah. No, no actual problems.

BA: You know, what I remember about her specifically was she always wrote handwritten notes all the time, which I think are just priceless. I mean, here's for example, one that she had written to me, Memory Book, "For your Memory Book, Love Helen," which I think is just a wonderful thing.

DS: And she has that distinctive handwriting, very recognizable.

TVH: So, I got away from what you asked and I knew I had. Since I was not a contributor to her work on the foreign affairs committee, I was not personally involved with these things, but I know she sponsored a major amendment to some bill -- Agency for Development? It was IAD, International Agency?

BA: USAID.

TVH: AID. I believe it failed on a tie vote in the House: 215 to 215. I remember her disappointment at that because that was something she thought she had worked on; it stemmed from her committee work. She had obviously a good bit of support, just --

BA: Yeah, not quite enough.

TVH: One vote short of what she needed. So, I know that was important to her, but I'm not a good source for that.

JK: Well, when she was campaigning for office, did she emphasize particular issues?

TVH: They were local in nature. And, you know, I'm embarrassed; I can't recall 40 years later what they were. There was a portion of, a large portion of Morris County and a small portion of Mercer County; they really didn't have much to do with each other and not much to do with the other three major counties, Sussex, Warren, and Hunterdon areas. She was attentive to constituent services, which you know, that's never changed. I gather that contemporaneous members of Congress emphasized that as well. She had a pretty dedicated casework staff. And that's what the New Jersey offices were for, for people to work locally so they wouldn't have to deal with Washington. She would have office hours in those offices and meet people on Saturdays and, you know, they tended to get into the weeds. Helen wouldn't know exactly how to deal with it, but there was always a caseworker there who was tasked to follow up, and Helen would make sure that they did. I don't remember her campaigning on a large -- national matters in the district.

DS: The Vietnam War, of course, was coming to an end about that time. I know she was against it. How did that play out in the campaign and in her visits within the district?

TVH: I don't remember that having a real -- I was in, it was May '75, wouldn't it have been? When the last helicopter left the embassy roof?

JK: Yeah, '75, right.

TVH: I was in Washington. That may have been the weekend I was putting together that Picatinny report. I'm in her Washington office, Capitol Hill. I recall it being a weekend, but who knows? Watching it on television. But I don't remember that was an issue, and if it had been, I'm not sure that -- that would have been one she emphasized because Helen's natural inclinations within the Democratic Party were not consistent with the demographics of the 13th Congressional district. Well, 13th Congressional district -- maybe other portions of New Jersey, but not the 13th. Largely rural. There was not a lot of antiwar dissent; so, she would certainly not have made that a paramount issue. But I think it was, as you said, coming to an end anyway and everybody knew it.

BA: Right, it was, truly.

JK: Was she a supporter of Jimmy Carter?

TVH: Oh, yes.

JK: And from the beginning?

TVH: Yep. The campaign had Rosalynn Carter come to Phillipsburg. What was the old Moose Hall, Ed? Was it the Moose Hall?

ED LANDIS (EL): Elks.

TVH: Elks Hall. Rosalynn Carter came and spoke on behalf of Helen and, of course, to be part of the campaign. No, she was a big Carter supporter, and if you knew her, you could see how that would mesh because they both believed in the better angels of our nature, and that's a difficult notion to sell to the masses.

DS: And probably Jimmy Carter as governor of Georgia would have known Bob Meyner, right? Through the governor's association. I'm guessing.

TVH: Well, they probably were at different times. I think Meyner was off the stage by the time Carter was governor.

BA: It was '60.

JK: Why did she support Carter?

TVH: I think his human rights emphasis -- his international perspective. You know, the same thing that got him into trouble over time was those human rights treatments in country a and b and c are not acceptable to us and so we can't have relationships with these countries. I mean, look at his boycott of the Olympics because of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. I think there was that wavelength meshing because her perspective was similar, very much so.

JK: Did they develop any kind of relationship, and did she visit with them in the White House? And you mentioned that letter, Rosalynn, I mean, or did she have a personal relationship with Rosalynn Carter?

TVH: I don't recall one and, you know, the President of the United States probably appreciated the support of a freshman Democratic congresswoman from New Jersey, but I don't think there's any special relationship. I remember waiting for her in the diplomatic reception room of the White House, though. I was her driver. She was upstairs with a large number of members of Congress. No, I don't think there was a special -- No, but she would be in favor of Jimmy Carter's view on the international stage of most any issue I can think of.

JK: She served two terms so -- did she have no desire to serve a third term?

TVH: Oh no, she ran and lost. That's when Jim Courter surprised Bill Schluter in the [1978 Republican] primary. Everybody thought Bill Schluter would win the primary. He didn't.

JK: Yeah, I'd forgotten about that.

TVH: Bill Schluter came to Dover one day. He's a Pennington boy.

BA: Yeah. He lived on [Mint?] Street.

TVH: He came all the way up to Dover one day, wanted to have lunch, so I thought, oh, this is nice. This is after he lost the primary. So, he took me across the street. We had one slice of pizza and a Coke. He said, "You know, anything I can do to help," because he didn't care for Jim Courter.

JK: And what would you say accounted for that loss?

BA: I think it was basically a Republican district.

TVH: Well, you mean the primary loss or Helen's loss?

JK: Helen's loss

TVH: Oh, yeah. Oh, Barbara's right. She was elected -- it was anomalous, almost, well, '74 was the Watergate fallout, of course. Seventy-six I'd like to think --

BA: It was Maraziti, had the girlfriend on the payroll.

TVH: Oh, that, too.

BA: Yeah. And that really upset a lot of people.

TVH: But the Congress was -- the proportion of Democrats was vastly increased in '74 nationwide. And in '76, I'd like to think that the diligence she had displayed for constituent services played a role. People saw she was genuine. But as Barbara said, that was a Republican district. She knew she was fortunate to have been elected.

DS: How did she take the loss?

BA: Seventy-six?

DS: Uh-huh.

TVH: No, '78, '78 is when it was.

BA: No, '78.

DS: Seventy-eight, that's right.

BA: I think probably she was downtrodden about it. You know.

TVH: I yield. I was pretty much out of it by then. I had started law school and had a minor role in that campaign. I don't remember her saying much that was insightful. I think she always knew that she was fortunate to have been given that office for two terms.

BA: I think you're right.

TVH: And she wasn't one to wallow. She would be the first to tell you what a fortunate life she had. She had a very rich life; opportunities to do all sorts of things.

DS: She had a lot of interests (inaudible), too. Barbara, what did she decide to do right after that? After her congressional career, what was, what drew her?

BA: You could tell, well, I remember, she wasn't a well person. I remember going to visit her one time. This was after Governor Meyner had passed away, and I think that the caretakers who took care of her -- were people who had taken care of her parents and took care of Governor Meyner and then she as well. So -- I'm not sure just exactly, you know, what had happened.

TVH: I'm sad to say that after that we never had much contact. A little bit. We'd get Christmas cards and personal notes to my wife. She was always very good at that personal note thing. But I really don't know. I don't know how that wore on her.

BA: Well, let's see. She was out in '79. Her term finished in January of '79, but then Bob didn't pass away until the early '90s. Isn't that right? So, there was another decade, right, of time.

EL: If you don't mind, my getting involved.

BA: No. This is Ed Landis joining the conversation here.

EL: I don't know how much of this we've covered when we did my interview, but I'm certainly aware in picking up where Tim left off. My sense was that she felt that it wasn't the worst thing in the world to lose. I think the separation wore on both of them, and I think she, to some extent, appreciated the fact that she could even, she had a made a lot of new contacts. She had always had contacts in Washington, and she could pursue those part-time instead of spending all her time with politics because, as Tim pointed out, Congress at this point had become where, unless you had a perfectly safe district, you had to be focused on your re-election every weekend, and if you were diligent, you had to be in Washington during the week. So, I think that separation wore on them, and it was interesting because you talked about Bob Meyner; he had a stroke in '86 Part of the reason they had so much damage from the stroke was that he had it on a Sunday after playing tennis Sunday morning, and Helen was in Washington because she was serving on a committee that was meeting in Washington. She was gone for the weekend; so he wasn't discovered until she came back. As a result, he had more stroke damage than he probably would have, and I think that made her feel guilty, and as Barbara was suggesting, from '86 down, her health suffered terribly. She had gained a lot of weight over those years, and when he was in the hospital, all those years when she was spending, you know, 16, 18, 20 hours a day at his bedside, she then lost all that weight, but she didn't lose it in a healthy way. Alcohol had some effect, also. And as Barbara said, near the end of her life -- I think Barbara and I have talked about this before. I forget, when I went to visit her in Captiva [Florida] and -- as I was leaving, the nurse that was taking care of her, she had around-the-clock care, came out to say goodbye and say, "Oh, it was so nice of you to be here. I've never heard her speak so clearly" because seeing me brought back, you know --

BA: Memories.

EL: You know, took her out of her -- problems of aging, whether that would, I mean, Alzheimer's wasn't a name they had heard of at that point and exactly where her problems arose, you know, in terms of the source, I don't know. But when they had -- Barbara was her caretaker when she came up for Meyner's memorial service in 1990, which was held in the [Sts. Phillip and James] Catholic Church in Phillipsburg and where the main speaker was Governor [James] Florio, and Barbara was told that she had to be kept from alcohol. So, Barbara recruited me to come help because we had dinner and --

JK: Maggie told us the story.

EL: And then -- she was pretty good. I thought at that point. Yep. She was still pretty good. I can't remember the year that I saw her in Captiva, but it was probably at least five years later because I, she had, I don't know, it may have been three, I don't know, but she had kind of became secluded because of that, of spending a lot of time with Captiva. Her nieces, the twins tried to help her.

BA: Her sister's daughters.

DS: Her sister's daughters, right.

EL: She had stayed active, but at a level that she controlled. I think her problem with being in Congress was that she didn't feel she had any real control over her life. That she was, you know, and she was, as Tim said, she was much too serious, and good a person to be a congresswoman in name only. She was going to do the job, if she was there. I'm sorry to interrupt, but –

DS: No, we're glad.

TVH: No, that last comment of Ed's is noteworthy. If she was going to do the job, which is another way of saying what I was referring to about the 13th Congressional district perhaps not being aligned with Helen Meyner's natural political philosophy. And it was going to be, I'm going to do the job and if, if this isn't the way they want it, then they'll find one they want.

EL: I mean, history will tell the story, but my recollection of what happened was that this, the 13th district, originally started with a huge chunk of Bergen County and wrapped around and ended just south of Phillipsburg somewhere. So [William Beck] Widnall held that seat for ages [1950-1974] and when Widnall, I forget whether he died or retired – [Resigned from Congress on December 31, 1974]

DS: What was his first name?

EL: Bill Widnall, W-I-D-N-A-L-L. He had held that for a long time, and it was very Republican. My recollection is that in '70, I think, the Republicans controlled the redistricting and -- that -- they had pushed it south, all the way to Mercer County, as Barbara had pointed out, thinking that they could still control it even though they would, in other words, they wanted -- obviously redistricting every 10 years is to get your party to have the most seats from your state. That's what it's all about. I think they felt that they could still control it. But on the other hand, by taking in a number of Democrats, they made it possible for a Democrat to win, and I think that's how Helen won in the first place because it was turned over the Maraziti, who, as Barbara pointed out, made a mess of it and –

BA: Mm-hmm. He was the state senator, previous year.

EL: As a result, she got in and got reelected, and I think part of the reason that she lost that primary was because Bill Schluter was a serious pol and Jim Courter was a newbie. I think that primary was so active and excited so much activity that they probably got a better Republican turnout in '78 than they would have otherwise. But the other thing I would endorse is Tim's idea about -- Helen was an internationalist, and I think Helen, because Nixon and Kissinger had opened China, found it a lot more exciting to be a congresswoman in '74 than she, or '72 when she first ran. Then she would have six or

eight years earlier when we were still treating China as though, you know, they were our forever enemy. So -- I'm sorry interrupt, but --

DS: No, no, no. Good observations. I appreciate them.

EL: I've tried to avoid talking about the things I talked about when my interview was done.

DS: That's great. Thank you. Well, I'd like to know a little bit more about the personal life of the Meyners. I know they had a good marriage. You all were able to sort of watch them, Barbara, you especially, to watch them together. How would you characterize their relationship?

BA: I think that it was a good relationship. You know, I spent a lot of time with them playing tennis, and that was always delightful. So.

DS: Were they both involved with dogs and showing dogs?

BA: Can I tell that story?

TVH: Yeah, you can tell the story.

BA: I remember campaigning with Helen one time at Western Electric and we had lunch. We sat at a big square table. She was at one end and I was at the other, and we were the only women there. And she said, "Can I take that dinner home that I didn't finish, bring the luncheon home that I didn't finish? I'd like to give it to Olaf." So, I brought it home. The thing of it is, is that since then, I've taken a lot of luncheons or dinners home, but I came home and I said, "Jeez, I'm just amazed," I said, "Helen Meyner asked to take that home and give it to the dog." Olaf was the dog's name.

TVH: [Origin ELKO?]

BA: And Randy said she probably fed it to Bob Meyner. (laughter) So that was --

TVH: Because Bob would have gotten dinner that night only if he cooked it, most likely. He and my wife used to sit and chat about quick things you could do for dinner.

DS: That's an important conversation.

TVH: Helen could be a character. Absolutely. But I think the dog was clearly her idea. Bob Meyner being an almost lifelong bachelor, I don't think had any connection to dogs, none that I can recall. But the --

DS: There's wonderful photos in the collection of Helen, with showing the dogs and getting dog awards.

BA: Olaf.

- EL:** That reminds me of my favorite food story. It's told better by our former associate and his wife. This is Don Kessler, who grew up in Essex County as a staunch Democrat who married Betsy -- your assemblyman's daughter lived out near you and north end of Ewing Township --
- BA:** The [Wydell?] Wydell?
- EL:** Yes, [00:55:00] Betsy Wydell. But John -- I forget whether they had been married at that time or while they were dating, but we had our annual firm Christmas dinner at Windows on the World. Probably the only time I was in that building all those years, but in any event, Don was sitting next to Helen and Bob was sitting on the other side of Helen and Betsy was sitting on the other side of Don, and Betsy's a tiny little thing. Well, Karl Wydell was not a big man, and her mother was smaller. So, Betsy's this tiny little girl and Don, who later became huge, was still a 170-pounder. But this was during Helen's years of getting bigger and bigger. And you remember that, when she was eating (laughs) like there's no tomorrow. Well, Don's sitting there and Helen looks over and sees that Betsy hasn't touched her filet mignon. So, Helen looks over and looks around Don and says, "Oh, Betsy, are you going to eat that?" and Betsy said, "No, no, I'm not hungry." Helen reached over, passed Don, stabbed it and took it and put it on her plate. (laughter) Barbara has to remember those days because I mean, I met her in 1956 when she was as thin as a rail. I first saw her in a bathing suit at Long Beach Island.
- DS:** Yeah, that was quite the wedding -- quite the New Jersey celebrity wedding.
- EL:** Not Long Beach Island. Island Beach. At the governor's place on Island Beach. But she was funny. Did I, I told you the story about how she came to my house and that's in here. That's in, yeah.
- DS:** I think so, right.
- JK:** Well, how did she enjoy being First Lady of New Jersey?
- BA:** Well, I suspect -- I wasn't too familiar with her at that time. I worked then for Joe McClain, who graduated from your good school (laughter), and he was a classmate I think of Bob Meyner's.
- EL:** It was in school or with Bob Meyner. I forget whether he was a classmate or not. He may have been a year or two ahead or a year or two behind, but -- and Bill was younger (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) and the engineering --
- BA:** And his brother, yeah.
- DS:** Barbara, have we gotten to your, most of your stories? I want to make sure that we don't forget one of them. You prepared a nice list there of things.

BA: Oh, the only other thing I was going to say was Helen, at one time, was chairman of the Rhodes Scholarship Committee. This was when my daughter –

EL: From New Jersey, probably.

BA: Yeah. For New Jersey. And my daughter was one of the candidates. Unfortunately, she didn't make it, but -- Helen was the chairman of the committee.

EL: The Rhodes Scholarship Committee in New Jersey, as long as I can remember, has always been around Princeton University. Princeton University I think had some kind of leverage.

BA: A connection with it.

EL: John may know more than I do about it. That's my recollection. Because I remember when my oldest brother was a candidate. He spent a few days in Princeton as a result.

BA: He would have been a great Rhodes Scholar.

EL: Well, I don't know how close he came to it.

DS: Well, one of the things I'd like to do, partly because we have Tim as a Lafayette alumnus, I'd like to know what happened with you after you left Helen's, working for Helen, went onto law school and then where did your career take you, Tim?

TVH: I did four years. I did a night program because I had to work and I already had a kid. I was an assistant prosecutor for 32 years, just retired last month. So –

DS: Congratulations.

TVH: Thank you. I'm glad this is an audio and not a video because when I retired I decided for the winter it didn't matter if I cut my hair or shaved, (laughter) so -- a trial attorney for 32 years, so -- it was rich work. I enjoyed it. Very rewarding.

DS: Where were you based?

TVH: I worked 31 years in Somerset County, a couple of years in Hunterdon County before that. But thank you for being my straight woman with that question. I think back largely to why I was able to enjoy it and why it was good work and it was because of a solid Lafayette foundation. There's no doubt in my mind. And I'm out and proud to say that. I was very fortunate.

DS: Were you a government and law major?

TVH: I was not. When I first came here, I thought I could be an engineer. But after two semesters, I learned I wasn't smart enough to be an engineer. There was a brief visit with summer school one summer and three more years I was an economics major.

JK: So, what did you major in?

TVH: Economics.

JK: Economics?

TVH: That was Morrison Handsaker. And Alfred Pierce.

DS: Yes. Recognize those names. Well, are we leaving anything unsaid or unasked at this point?

JK: Not that I can think of, you know.

BA: I have all these goodies for you.

TVH: Well, thank you. I'm grateful for the archive.

DS: We are delighted to have that, Barbara. Thank you so much. We will add them to the collection. Both Tim and Barbara were here when the Meyner Center was announced. Right? You were both in attendance. John, I'm sorry that you weren't, but of course, you were -- that was what brought you to us. But it was such a nice event. Wasn't it? It really was. Various people spoke, and we had an exhibition from the collection. It was just really a wonderful celebration of both Meyners and their legacy. We are so fortunate we both are beneficiaries. I should tell you both, and I think I'd probably find it, it's on the tape -- we had students -- every semester now we work with history to a History 206, the History Methods class and almost -- one of the collections that we offer to them to work with is the Meyner papers, and we almost always have students using the Meyner papers for their projects. This last semester we had a student who took the *Wednesdays in Mississippi* Project that I don't know if you all know this, but in the, during the Civil Rights Movement in the early '60s, there was a program and it was run by sort of the National Jewish Women's Group, who -- so northern Jewish and black women and white women would go South and meet with their counterparts in the South. But it was sort of done as a top-secret kind of thing because it would have excited negative attention in the South, had they known that these women were coming down. Helen and Priscilla went on maybe at least one, maybe more, of those trips, and Helen wrote about it, actually would talk about it. She had speeches on her time in going to Mississippi and meeting with southern women and talking about the Civil Rights Movement. Her speeches are in the collection and so the students use this. There's to be a documentary on *Wednesdays in Mississippi* at some point, and they have used the collection here. But it's something I was hoping to do some kind of exhibition on, but unfortunately because it was so secret, there are almost no photographs of these, you know, there are no photographs that document it.

EL: Did you know of this?

TVH: I'd never heard of it. She never spoke of it to me.

BA: Yeah, yeah. It's a really interesting sort of little known aspect of the Civil Rights Movement that I think is quite interesting. Yes.

TVH: Do you have Helen Meyner's papers from a to z?

DS: We do. I think such that they exist, they exist with us.

TVH: Do you have the research that she had done on Katherine Mansfield?

DS: I would need to double-check. I knew she was doing that, so I think that we do have certainly some things, whether we have the -- I think we do.

TVH: She really hoped to write a book on her.

DS: Yes, yes I know she did.

TVH: And she had done a lot of work, she explained to me.

DS: And she probably talked to you about that, too, Barbara, right? Her interest in Katherine Mansfield, the writer, yeah.

EL: Well, she also had an interest in Georgia O'Keefe.

DS: Did she? Well, that I didn't know.

EL: And there was somebody else. You know, when Tim said she had a lot of ideas and she did have, there ought to be her research somewhere. It may have been Priscilla {Hunt} kept it or her nieces kept it.

DS: I think we have what there was.

EL: I remember her going out to the Southwest from time to time to work on that. I'm trying to think who would be aware of it more than I am.

TVH: She could have, if the circumstances hadn't been different.

EL: And who were her friends in the arts? In the plastic and visual arts? She did have friends.

BA: I can't recall.

EL: The sculptors and -- artists. Of painters. But -- she had a lot of interests. And she had pursued interests, I think, more than she pursued relationships for many, many years. I forget how old she was when she married, when she met Bob Meyner and I guess it must have been 1965.

DS: No, no, '56.

EL: Fifty-five, '55, because I met her in '56 and that was when --

DS: And they married in '57, I think.

EL: Yeah, I don't know whether they were formally engaged, but it was at a time that the relationship had become public knowledge. And so --

DS: She died fairly young. She was in her sixties when she passed away.

EL: I'm trying to think how old she was, but then I would guess in her early thirties. She was in Korea -- when she was in Korea --

DS: She was in Korea from '51 to '53.

EL: So she graduated from college about 1950, maybe.

DS: I think so. We have all this next door. We can hop over there and -- oh, wait. We have this nice write-up from the Meyner Center right here. Helen Meyner's dates --

BA: She persuaded my --

DS: Nineteen-twenty-eight to 1997.

BA: Twenty-eight? Okay.

DS: Thirty-eight, '48, '50, so she was not quite 30, she was in her late twenties or mid-twenties when she met Bob.

TVH: She had an influence on my oldest daughter who wanted to go to Colorado College. Helen encouraged her.

EL: No doubt.

DS: I always liked that Helen said she chose Colorado College because the rest of the family had all gone to Smith. And she didn't want to do that. So -- I don't know if that's the only reason, but so she said.

TVH: She had spent her, the end of her -- teen years, I guess, at Oberlin. Because her dad went there in '46 -- '45, '46?

DS: Well, it's all right here. It's all right here.

TVH: So I think her dad picked Oberlin.

DS: Graduated from Colorado College with a BA in history in 1950. From '50 to '52, I was wrong, '50 to '52 she was in Korea and Japan. Then, of course, she had that stint with Trans World Airlines as Mary Gordon (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

TVH: She liked to speak of that.

DS: That's well documented in the collection as well, in a number of interesting ways, and I had gotten an inquiry from, actually it's a graduate student at Emory enquiring about -- the research he was doing was on the -- the phenomenon that women and children in the '50s were not flying commercially and the airlines were trying to get them to fly. So, he was really interested in that and that's exactly what Helen Meyner was doing. That's obviously what she was hired for, to promote flying. I mean she, of course, went around and ostensibly showed women how to pack their suitcases without getting wrinkles and things like that. But it was obviously to promote being on the airplane, but I didn't really realize that women and children weren't doing much flying.

TVH: She was always polite, and she was very well bred, but my take on her attitude toward that was, "Oh, Dearie, we'll not talk of that."

EL: Well, she was 20 years younger than Bob Meyner?

BA: Yeah.

EL: And she was only 27 when she met Lil and me. Okay. I thought she was older. She was mature.

BA: Nineteen-twenty-eight to 1997?

DS: It looks like she was 69.

BA: Yeah, that's what I've got.

DS: Yeah, she died, which is young.

EL: What year? I'm sorry.

DS: Ninety-seven. Then, of course, there was the service here for her on campus, which you probably came to. You both did, yeah.

TVH: Steve Wylie spoke, Brendan Byrne spoke. And one of her nieces, so maybe they spoke in tandem.

DS: Well, you know, she's just a wonderful person, and those letters from Korea could not be richer. We have digitized them all. We just have not yet made them available on the web, which is our intention. I'm just sort of waiting for the next stage of that to happen with our digital scholarship department. But you know, the wonderful thing is that Priscilla transferred copyrights to Lafayette College for that material; so, there are no strings attached, and we can publish that stuff any time we want to. We need to because it's just rich; it really is. Those letters are marvelous. She's honest, she's frank, she's sassy, she's just -- you couldn't have a better correspondent. The other thing that makes, I think, the letters interesting, too, and again, we're trying to figure out how digitally to handle this, but you know, the family would type up her letters and send them around to family members. But there were parts of the letters that didn't get put into the round-robin letter. Sometimes Helen will say, don't put that in the family letter. So of course, that part is the really interesting part (laughter) of the letter and you know, want to be able to highlight that part when we -- so we're doing both -- we're going to -- we're figuring that out, so.

EL: Is [Peeky?] still living?

DS: Yes.

EL: Yes?

DS: Yes.

EL: I'm sorry. Who?

DS: Peeky, Priscilla. Yeah, the name's in the family.

EL: Yeah, I'd forgotten --

DS: Bumpy and Bill.

TVH: I didn't even know who Priscilla was because (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

EL: I hadn't heard that in a long time.

DS: [Daney?] -- she was Daney. Daney and Peeky and Bumpy, her mom. I guess her father was just Bill.

EL: He was always Bill.

DS: Quite a family. And quite a good, yeah.

TVH: Yeah, quite a family of achievement.

DS: Yeah, quite so. Quite so. Well, any final words? Before we --

JK: We thank you for coming and sharing your thoughts and memories with us.

TVH: Happy to do so (inaudible).

BA: Thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE