**Thomas Berrigan Interview on Helen S. Meyner**

JOHN KINCAID (JK): Good morning. We're here with Tom Berrigan, a former staff member of Congresswoman Helen Meyner. Today is Friday, October 19, 2018, and it's 10:40 in the morning. We're here to discuss the background of Helen Meyner. Also present is Edwin C. Landis, a long-time law partner of Robert B. Meyner. Judy Berrigan is here, Tom's wife, also Diane Shaw, who is the director of the special collections and archives of the college library. I'm John Kincaid the Robert B. and Helen S. Meyner professor of government and public service and director of the Meyner Center for the Study of State and Local Government. Thank you very much for coming, Tom. We appreciate your willingness to do this. Maybe we could start with you giving us a brief bio of yourself, an overview as to who you are before we get into Helen Meyner per se.

TB: Well, without getting into my age, which will probably make it clear... As a matter of fact, there's a funny anecdote behind that. My father got out of the United States Army in December of 1945. He got home on Christmas day 1945. I was born in September 25, 1946 (laughter). I've had fun with that. My father didn't enjoy me kidding him about that.

TB: I was born and raised in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. I attended private schools, Catholic schools, there until my senior year. Then I graduated from Williamsport High School. I worked for a couple of years. I was diffident about going to college. There were nine children in the family. My father really didn't have the resources, nor did anybody, but I managed after two years to scrape enough together and get a grant. I attended Lycoming College for three years. I transferred in my senior year to Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. One of the reasons it was Drew is that Lycoming College had a history as a Methodist-related school, and Drew University did as well. Drew University still has a fine program for people who are going on for their doctorate of divinity degree, really outstanding. But I went there because the professor at Lycoming College had gone there, and they had a great program in state and local government and a UN program. I got to go there, and then I decided since I didn't know what I wanted to do, I stayed around and got a master's, which I found out a lot of people who get graduate degrees do, because they really don't know what they want to do after they graduate from college. At the same time, I had been a radio reporter in my hometown. I got a job as a radio reporter while I was going to school at Drew at WMTR in Morristown, New Jersey. I covered local meetings, local government. From there, after I had graduated, an editor at the *Daily Record* – a small circulation daily newspaper in Morris County, about 55,000 circulation – hired me as a reporter. I really enjoyed that and got to know a lot of people and began covering political events so that in 1974, a friend of mine called me. He said, "Hey, how would you like to be a PR pro?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The Meyner campaign is looking for a press secretary, a PR person."

TB: The first contact who introduced me to Helen Meyner was a fellow by the name of Stephen Richter, who I had gotten to know through his work in the Democratic Party. I covered a couple of meetings that involved him. He was a very young chairman of Morris County Young Democrats. He was also the youngest county Democratic chair for a while. He introduced me to Helen at the Meyners' home – I think it's 16 Lovers Lane in Princeton, New Jersey – at a little reception one day. I was just so taken with her charm, her grace, and the people who hung with her too. It wasn't a crowd I was used to. Covering politics in New Jersey always meant something that was tough, seedy. She was everything they were not, and I enjoyed her, and I

met Bob Meyner. Of course, I had known who he was. I was fairly literate in national politics, and I had seen the name. I knew who he was. He didn't need any introduction, but Helen and I talked, and that was it. I joined the campaign as press secretary in May of 1974 right in the midst of a primary and worked really doggedly to make sure things went well. There were three opponents, I believe. She prevailed and then we went on to the general election. I went to Washington, DC, with her and stayed there through her two terms.

TB: After that, I continued, through Helen's contacts as a matter of fact, with Governor Byrne who was, at that time, the head of something called the Coalition of Northeastern Governors. I got a job with the Coalition of Northeastern Governors doing presswork. That lasted briefly until I got a call from an acquaintance who worked for Senator Jim Sasser of Tennessee and asked, "Would you like to join his committee staff?" So, I went over to his office and was interviewed. The senator interviewed me, too, and I ended up staying there for six years, and I really enjoyed it. It was fun working on both the House side and the Senate side. It was probably the most interesting time of my life, given my age, given my interests, to be doing what you used to read about, to be involved in that. I remember the first time I was along – for a small-plane flight back from New Jersey – with the speaker of the House, then Tip O'Neill. What a moment that was for me having read about this fellow and then hearing some of his stories and trying to match him with old Irish stories. He was so charming, and I got to meet a few people like that, all because of Helen. She first introduced me to Tip O'Neill one night and, I was really impressed. It was after the election of '74. He walked in, and there she was, "Oh, Tip, dearie," you know how she would be very gracious with everybody. "Oh, Helen," and I thought he was going to eat her. His massive arms grabbed her. "I want you to meet my press assistant Tom Berrigan." "Tommy, hi." Remarkable memory he had. I saw him once six months after that dinner and, you know, "Hi, Tommy, how are you doing?" I was just stunned. So, I was doing that.

TB: After working in the Senate, it really was, if not actually, a job that was 24/7 because you thought about your work all the time. You were ready in a moment's notice to go to a reception, to go – in my case, go to Tennessee for a weekend. Senator Sasser, I will say this, if I had dropped over from exhaustion, he would have dropped over right beside me. He pushed himself, and he was just indefatigable. But it wears on you. By that time, I had two children, and I really wanted to spend time with them, so that became my focus. I got a job at the trade association that lasted for 15 years. Then my wife, at that time, got a great job offer in California; so I went to California and fooled around in different things. I thought, "Well, I might as well put myself to good use" and tried to be an actor for six years. I've got some credits if you're that interested in which I'll tell you, "Oh, look over there. There I am." (laughter). "It was me. It really was." (laughter). If you bent over to get a handful of popcorn, you did not see me in the scene, but I enjoyed that. Then life changed and I came back to Pennsylvania about 10 years ago. At that time, I had a strange compulsion. I decided to call up this girl I used to date in high school, and 46 years later, I found her, and we got together and married, and so... We settled in Central Pennsylvania. We both know the area, and for us, it's really located in a good area. We're a day trip from Washington, from Philadelphia, from New York, and from Easton, so that's me in a nutshell. Believe me, I can go on and on and on (laughter), but I'm sure you don't want that. Can I jump ahead to one thing?

JK: Sure.

TB: I noticed when I was reading the other interviews, I saw this befuddlement over this one letter that Helen wrote in early 1975 when she was organizing a luncheon for the women members to meet Rosalynn Carter. The story behind that—as her press secretary, I was always figuring out any way to get her attention, and I came up with this idea of inviting Rosalynn Carter to have lunch at the Capitol with the other members of Congress. Helen liked the idea right away. That was really dumb on my part because it introduced me to the fact that Helen was a brutal proofreader. "Well, dearie, go –" and she called everybody "dearie." I think you know that by now.

JK: Yeah.

TB: "See, dearie, why don't you draft something on this? Make it really nice." Over the years, I was a go-to person for special letters that were mushy, medium mushy, and really mushy (laughter) for her close friends. I think Ed, you know her personality well, that's the way she was. She never wanted to offend somebody and say no, but you would say something to the… Speaker John McCormack of the House of Representatives never had a bad word to say about anybody, but if he really disliked somebody, he would say something like, "I hold the gentleman in minimal high regard" (laughter). And so, Helen was that way with a gentle signature. "So, okay, let's figure out a date and a time that we can invite Mrs. Carter, and we'll have to write a letter to the other women members of Congress." I think there were 17 besides Helen, at that time, 18 altogether. So, I did a cut, took it into her office, went back to my desk, and thought that was it. Buzz, a ring, the intercom, "Could you come in here, dearie?" and so I went through about seven takes and did not get down exactly what she wanted. She was a master and a very nice editor, very nice, printed everything really nicely, but I couldn't get it down. She just said, "We don't want to say that, we don't want to say that." I went back to my desk one time, screamed "Aagh," and threw the letter down. A fellow to my left, Tim Lovain, who was one of the most intellectually gifted people I've ever known, with a really wicked sense of humor, too, he said, "What's the trouble, Tom?" I explained the situation, "I don't know. I can't get this one blank thing down. I'm going crazy." He was sitting there, "My, god," he said, "Why don't we do it the way she would really like it? Hi, girls, this is Helen here. Guess who's coming to lunch? Rosalyn Carter. We can talk about all those things that you want to talk about, how to get wine stains out of tablecloths, what color of drapes..." I began to laugh and said, "All right, let's give it a try." So, I wrote it, typed it up, and ripped it out and walked in and gave it to her as a joke. By the time I got back to my desk, my intercom phone rang. She was on the other line laughing. She said, "I love it" (laughter). So, it was a joke, and she used it –

DS: And she used it. It's one of my favorite letters in the collection. It's wonderful.

TB: It was –

DS: It's wonderful.

TB: So, the inspiration was Tim Lovain, and I wrote it. I was at a wit's end, I didn't know what to do, and she loved it. I remember Pat Schroeder (D-CO) called and just was hysterical; she loved it. The only tension was with Congresswoman Margaret Heckler. She was a Republican and later ambassador to Ireland under Ronald Reagan. She was offended because she was the chairman of the Congressional Women's Caucus and felt it should've come from that entity, and that it should have come from her. That was as Helen told me. I don't think there's any

correspondence to that effect. But they all loved it, and it came off. I remember it was my first exposure to Secret Service people. We walked over to the Capitol, counted the steps from where Mrs. Carter would enter and how far she would walk down the hall to go into the door. And so, it really worked well to the point that she came, and I was the person who closed the door, and I couldn't get into the lunch. That was my idea.

DS: Yeah.

TB: But that's how that letter came about.

DS: Do you know if Rosalynn Carter ever saw that letter?

TB: I do not know for sure, no.

DS: Yeah, okay, I'm just curious.

TB: Because every – there's so much stuff that's done at the staff level. Maybe somebody from the staff did.

DS: Did you have comments back about how the lunch went? Did Helen talk about it?

TB: She was always too gracious not to be nice. If she didn't like something, it would be a comment about their style or what she didn't say. She would never affront somebody directly. She was very quiet, very reserved, and very nice. I think Rosalynn struck Helen as more intelligent than she was made out to be as a spouse. It's pretty clear, especially in the years following the presidency. We've both been to the Carter Presidential Library, me twice, looking at the papers. She was a driving force, I would say, in the cerebrum of Jimmy Carter. She was half his brain. She was not to be taken lightly. I think if a few of us here are old enough to remember that the reception she got was . . . they weren't – the Washington establishment, news media, mostly male at that time, didn't take her as seriously as they have other people since then. Helen thought she was surprised – See, I read it as she was surprised about how bright she was and was really, and certainly didn't talk about how to remove wine stains –

DS: Stains from the carpet.

TB: – from tablecloths (laughter).

DS: Well, I'm so happy to have that additional historical note on that great letter. Thank you.

JK: Well, what did Helen say was the key goal of that luncheon?

TB: Well, for me, it was to get attention. It worked.

JK: I got it.

TB: But for her, it was also, I think, to have herself positioned as somebody who's a serious person about different issues. Because Helen had just got appointed to the – at that time, it was called the International Relations Committee of – the House equivalent, formerly, of the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee. They changed the name subsequent to that, but I think that's why she found Rosalynn Carter really interesting. Because she brought up a couple of things about the US role in the world, and Rosalynn Carter was not one of those people who said, "We'll take that into account." Well, she knew. She was able to discuss any issue substantively. I think she was, also, willing to take – to be sort of an advocate for women, not necessarily in, I would call, the marquee issues, but across the board – little things that meant something to women. Remember, she was – and I think that the... From what Helen said, the other women were and a little bit – they felt fortified by the fact that the First Lady wasn't just a lady who showed up at social functions. They felt that she was a woman of substance, and Helen liked that. She was at the White House on other occasions where she met – saw Rosalynn Carter, but they were big social occasions, so there was never more than a brief window to say hello or something like that. So, it turned out to be and established her as a spokesperson for women's issues, and that's something she, I don't think, thought about really, but it also – it gave the congressional women something to bond over.

DS: Yeah.

JK: Oh, good. Yeah.

DS: Thanks to you for having the idea. Right? Yeah.

TB: Oh, yeah. Well, it started out as a joke.

DS: Which was great.

JK: Right (laughter). Well, can we take you back to your first campaign with her? What are some of your recollections of that campaign and her election and then getting set up in Washington?

TB: Remember, she was a candidate in '72, and then, given the nature of the district, a lot of the Democrats in the state considered it a throwaway, a heavily Republican district. The only person who could staunch the flow of a high Republican margin would be somebody who had a name, and Helen certainly had a name. So, when she ran the first time, they were grateful to have anybody run who could, at least, prevent a few people from voting for Nixon versus George McGovern. McGovern's numbers were really awful in New Jersey. Seventy-four came around. She really didn't want to run. You might know something, Ed, about the decision-making process. A lot of people prevailed upon her, "You've got to do it. This is – yeah, we really..." I think people had read enough of the political science text to realize you can't leave any seat vacant. You can't let somebody run in the door. It just hurts the rest of the ticket, above and below. You want Democrats to turn out and vote Democratic; they're not going to do that if nobody's on the ballot. So, the surprise was that they didn't expect anybody to seriously oppose her in the primary. From what I gathered among the people I spoke to when I joined the campaign, they were really concerned about Joe O'Dougherty or Dougherty as I used to call him. He was very charming. He was Irish and a U.S. citizen, very charming, and a very compelling speaker off the top of his head. He was a great, extra brilliant speaker [but had withdrawn from the 1972 race because he did not satisfy the U.S. Constitution's seven-year citizenship rule]. Anyhow, none of the opponents really had the standing, the equity, or the ability to raise money,

which is sometimes more important than one's religion. She won the primary easily. It didn't seem like it to me at the time. That was my first campaign.

TB: It's also when I got to know the fact that she really didn't like to be bothered by too many briefings or something that was too intense for a while. It was kind of disappointing to me, but I realized that's who she was. She preferred a conversation above all things. I could submit memos, but when she would appear at the headquarters in between stops, she would say, "Well, what's this about?" She would say, "Tom, can you just go over this?" Well, later on Tim Lovain, who was the chief person on issues who had an encyclopedic mind and – I would say what's the term – an eidetic memory? He could read volumes of stuff and... He was great because he knew everything from the U.S. economy to foreign affairs. He was later her foreign affairs assistant. He would show up, and they would talk a great deal. She eschewed paperwork, however, if it was something that she was interested in – and she really took foreign relations seriously. I found that a little bit off-putting, but she was a real trooper and a natural before a microphone. She had a style unlike anything I had ever seen. From what little experience I had before a TV camera by that time, she had immediate eye contact. She could look into the center of the screen, be so intense, and it was believable. It was credible. Some people have difficulty coaching their bosses to do that; she needed none. I remember she had been a host of a public television station show at the time, and she – so she needed no coaching. We did a PSA – not really a PSA, but each candidate was allowed over New Jersey public broadcasting to make a statement. I wrote her something, she looked it over, made a few changes, and in one take nailed it. She had that ability. And then another time, I didn't realize I was supposed to write a 90-second script for something. I thought they were going to interview her. She did the 90 seconds solo, and it was great. If you're in the business, that's gold. That really impressed me. I never had to worry about, "Would she look well, would she go?" If anything, sometimes, is that her intense look, which was the way she would do it, and the TV smile. She told me about that, you know? (laughter) She would be at it so intensely, "Mrs. Meyner?" and then she would look up (laughter). She knew how, she did well on stage, she did well in front of it, and that was – that's a lot when you're a press secretary. She had the talking points down, and she also – she tried to stay informed. A follow up to something else I read in the transcripts, I, too, did heavy-duty sitting in the back of her little Chevrolet Vega, with Bob McClure driving, reading the front page of the *New York Times*. Oh, going up like that and bouncing my head off the ceiling, and I can't read, I get carsick. So, there it was. Every time, it was the trio with Bob driving. Bob was 22 at the time and drove like a 22-year-old.

DS: Uh-oh. Uh-oh.

TB: Helen was listening intently, and she would be writing notes too while I read the news, "The United Nations today..." (laughter). She stayed informed that way, not as deeply as I would have liked, but she had a good broad stroke, and she could handle just about anything. What got me is that she was truly gracious to the people who defeated her, to the people who lost. Again, the eye contact that she had really served her well when she would walk up to somebody and, "I'm really sorry Joe, I didn't... I thought you had it." People really, really felt that. I believe it was authentic. It was also during the campaign that I realized the breadth of her interests. I really don't know how well she appreciated Jane Austen even though she was supposedly writing a book because I've actually seen four hours of *Pride & Prejudice*, and I can see why she liked it. Now, my wife loves Jane Austen, so I've gotten to know that. She would do things. I can give you many examples of this. We were driving from somewhere in Hopewell back to her house or

to a function – because remember, I was looking at my watch and worried that we won't make it – driving, screeching along there... It was somewhere in Hopewell, (inaudible) that we... There's a gentleman outside of this beautiful house with this white, picket fence, painted some kind of a lavender with all kinds of white gingerbread. It was a postcard house, "Oh, what a beautiful house – stop the car." "But we're really in a hurry." No, she wanted to go over and see it, and she talked to the guy, "Oh, I love your house, what..." So, they started talking, "What color do you call it?" He said, "Well, they call it plum at the..." She was talking about the color. I'm going crazy, "We've got to make it to an event." She was genuinely interested in that, and that felt – she didn't mention once that she was running for Congress, that she was Helen Meyner. She just wanted to stop and talk to that fellow about his beautiful house. When I thought about doing this, that's a quality that I didn't appreciate as much as I did, well I grew to appreciate it. Somebody would – I forget who it was at that time, one of the people in Lambertville. She was pregnant at the time and went to the hospital to deliver the baby. It wasn't ready. I forget what the whole context was. But she was so concerned, "I wonder how So-and-So's baby is? Oh, dear." We finally found out, "Oh, I'm so glad." To intersect the path of a campaign with those touches of humanity, every time I would get frustrated, would roll my eyes, there would be something like that. She would do the same thing with me, "How...? Well, you'll have to go see Dr. So-and-So. I don't like that cough, Tom." She would do things like that and it was... I had no problem with saying, "Okay." Not as much substance as I would like, but she had that standout quality and that empathy of the... I think the word for it would probably be – it's an overused one. My Spanish is not that good but it's good enough to know what the intonations mean. She was very *sympatica*.

DS: Oh, yes.

TB: I can't find the right expression in English to convey that, but that was a treat when no matter what happened, that was wonderful. Later on, I saw other facets, but that was the campaign year. I was set, I was comfortable, and I probably got angrier at the opponent than she did. I found that's common among congressional staffs. The staff takes something really, really, really to heart. We did not like Millicent Fenwick for instance. I saw Millicent have an exchange with a young African-American reporter, a woman, and say something that just made me blanch, but she – Helen did not know that. There was no reason for her to have that affect her relationship. She genuinely liked Millicent Fenwick. I remember, she told me one time they were riding back to the district together because they were – where Helen was staying, it was close enough for Millicent to drop her off or vice versa – they were reciting poetry to one another. As a lover of poetry – I get especially hooked up in the romantics – I just was blown away by that. The fact that you have these two women who are professionals, members of Congress going, "Well, I don't know. I thought [Robert] Herrick was such and such. Do you remember 'O, Gather Me the Rose' by (inaudible) [William Ernest Henley]? Well, yeah, 'She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless...'" she knew this one by heart. I remember it, so I could raise that. "She walks in beauty, like..." Byron, you know. "She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies; And all that's best of dark and bright..." I found myself reciting that with her, whoa, you know? (laughter) I can't imagine anybody doing that today. So, it was easy to feel real good about her by the time the general election was approaching in September of 1974.

DS: Tom, you've painted a wonderful portrait of Helen. But when you started, you said she had a style like no one else's, and I'm assuming that what you've just described to us is that style?

TB: Yeah.

DS: Or did that mean something else?

TB: I think accentuated too. She was a large woman. I like to think that we were closer than most people. She admitted to me a 193 pounds once. She was five feet, nine inches, and I can remember she was... We would talk about weight. I was overweight, and that's a subject you never talk about. I feel uncomfortable even mentioning this. But you have the fact that she would – in heels, she approached six feet tall with this gracious presence, being the large woman that she was, you noticed her. So, you noticed her laughter more so than other people. It was loud, and she was obvious. So, once you add these other qualities to it, the ability to look at somebody – usually, when she was speaking with another woman, she was looking down at her. And having somebody that tall give you the eyes, it was the type of an angle a cameraman would love because it really conveyed... She could very easily have looked above the heads, but she would look at people in the eyes and that person felt at that moment like she – Helen Meyner owned her or vice versa. So, she had these qualities of being obvious, being large, being sweeping, and it was... As I said, I don't know. I got to meet most of the other women members at that time – there's some really funny stuff there – but I don't think the qualities she had were present in anybody else. Gave her a degree of uniqueness I didn't find in other women members of Congress.

DS: Yeah.

JK: So, what were the major issues she ran on in '74?

TB: Lots of boilerplate Democratic issues, such as more aid for education. The Vietnam War really wasn't an issue anymore, right, in 1974? Criticizing Gerald Ford – this was 1974, being horrified at his pardon of Richard Nixon. I think what we saw from other polls at the time, that pardon, as well as a local scandal, tipped it for her. She hammered that all the time. Locally, there was, yeah, the Democratic issues, strengthen Social Security. If you got down the talking points of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee at the time, we followed them, but they were big, they were short, and she could nail them just... And in campaign outings, people really don't offer... (laughs) I'm sorry. I just... After a 15-hour campaign day once, we were in Kinnelon, New Jersey. I was exhausted, no patience for anybody, and she was a candidate. She had been at it longer than I did it. She started before I did because she came from Princeton to Morris County. I was in a raw mood, and she was being gracious. Some fellow came up to her and said – he was really upset. He said, "This IRA really has me pissed off!" And she looked at him and she said, "Oh, the IRA, they're very violent" (laughter). He looked at her quizzically, and he said, "The Individual Retirement Account caps!" (laughter) I was next to her, and I actually coughed, "Individual (coughs) retirement (coughs) account (coughs). "Oh, the IRAs, yes. We have to lift that cap" (laughter). So, usually, you didn't dig very deep in an issue (laughter.) That was the same night that somebody approached her and said, "These days guys, only God can save us! Only the Lord can save us!" I stepped in front of her and gave him a brochure. I said, "That's fine, but he's not running this year. Now vote for Helen" (laughter). We didn't really have to worry about issues it was – the pardon of Nixon by Gerry Ford opened up more funding.

JK: I see.

TB: The other issue was the incumbent, Joseph J. Maraziti. Turns out, he had his paramour on the congressional payroll in a job that didn't require any reports, and she didn't show up. Somehow, the *New York Daily News* found out about that, and they made it a page-three story headline. After that appeared, it was – most people can see that did it, you know?

JK: Yeah.

TB: I called up a friend at the *Daily News* and let him know about that. So, the substantive issues that might have taken fore were – didn't... Oh, yeah, one other thing, the local issue was that the Delaware River at Tocks Island was going to be dammed in Warren County. Organized labor loved it, especially International Operating Engineers, and our labor coordinator for the campaign was an IOE member and official. Helen finessed that by saying that she really – "We should have clean water, but all we need power." She said she would grit her teeth because she didn't... She really thought it would be okay. Even some people who were really responsible – there was at that time Maurice K. Goddard, who was a cabinet official in Pennsylvania under six different governors and an environmentalist, too. He thought the dam was good thing too. She thought she was in good company, but every time we went there, people would ask her about it, and she would try to give an answer that was noncommittal. It was an uncomfortable issue to discuss because of how she felt. We were moved off the hook, to some extent, after the 1976 election of Congressman Peter H. Kostmayer [of Bucks County, Pennsylvania] who got enough support together to deauthorize the dam. At that point, Helen ... She had always, in her heart, wanted a clean river, but because of her obligation to organized labor and really how – part of how she felt, and Bob Meyner felt that way, too, be a source of electric power, so... But after Peter Kostmayer lined up some Democrats on the Pennsylvania side of the river, she became an enthusiastic backer. I think we all know that's what happens in politics.

DS: An enthusiastic backer of deauthorization?

TB: Yes.

DS: Yes, yes, yes.

TB: But the other issues, as I said, were pretty much boilerplate.

JK: So then, you went to Washington with her?

TB: Yes.

JK: Can you tell us about how she went about getting settled in in Washington, and what your experiences were, and why she wanted to be on the International Relations Committee?

TB: As far as I can remember, that was really her interest. She really wanted to do that because she was a well-traveled person. She thought that America's profile in the world had been really damaged by the war in Vietnam, and that I think because of her work. She worked with people who were hurting, people who were certainly not... I can't see her really hanging around with the type of people she would do on these missions for – that she went on. Something must've

happened to her that – plus her family tradition. She felt it was noble to work to help the maligned and the malnourished of the world. She really believed that. It was authentic; so I never thought she would try for anything else. That was a goner. So when we got there, she immediately... Because she knew how to deal with people, there was never any question, I think, that she would be denied that. See, they had a lot of seats to fill in. I think there were 291 Democrats elected to the House in 1974, so there was a lot to go around, and that's really all she wanted. She took some other stuff, but that's really what she wanted, and she enjoyed it. Once again, she really liked the meetings with people. I'm not saying she liked to go to receptions or the parties. That was part of the job. She really enjoyed buttonholing somebody and talking to them.

TB: I remember one morning – this was early on. This was before there was a Bangladesh, the what-to-do with East and West Pakistan. She was really concerned about that because she feared a bloodbath if order was not restored in what became Bangladesh. I think she had met some of the people involved, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister of Bangladesh after independence. She actually knew some of these people. At a reception one night, she buttonholed Henry Kissinger, and she brought up the issue, "We really have to do something about that." She really expressed horror. He said, "What can they do for us?" and she was really that mad. She said something really nasty. She did the how cruel, how insensitive. True, Bangladesh was not a popular thing to bring up, but she was really concerned about that. She had enough people in, I would say, the establishment, the infrastructure of her life who she could call on to ask for inside information. There was always somebody like Cleveland Fuller who used to be a U.S. diplomat in the Middle East. There was someone who always stopped by, and they would have dinner. She could summon up her own little cadre of experts who would really tell her what it was like. I don't know how well she was in doing nuts-and-bolts stuff, but she always made all her hearings. She didn't not show up, and that was it. She was skillful enough to handle other issues. I think a lot of them, a lot of people walked out of her office thinking that she heard them. Well, she heard them, but she didn't necessarily agree with them. A little known sign of that grace and charm, I remember there was a huge AFL-CIO gathering in Washington, DC, so a lot of labor leaders from New Jersey came into the office, and sometimes I was detailed to meet some of them. For some odd reason, she thought that I could talk Jersey-ese. You know it's – which is not proper English, but there were a crew of them. I remember one was Vito Villani, who was a postal worker.. He came in with a bunch of groups, and she walked out very uncaring, "How are you, you bastards," or something like that. I was shocked. She knew how to play the role. Obviously, Bob Meyner gave her some advice on how to deal with some people, but that she was ...

DS: Yeah.

TB: The other way, she could drop the mask too. The issue of abortion, abortion rights, sort of, tortured her. She genuinely believed that every woman should have the choice to do with her body what she wanted to do. However, it was the most magnificent rant I've ever seen, and I say that in an appreciative sense. It was right around the anniversary of the *Roe* v. *Wade* decision, remember that really legitimized abortion. On the anniversary, a group of antiabortion activists scheduled to meet with her. They all jammed into the office. I was standing in there with her. It was hot and sweaty, and I heard their arguments' rote. I knew them point by point. My function was simply to get them out of the room one time or just to say, "I can give you a statement." One of the guys in particular started really yelling at her and called her a murderer, and she went,

"Wait a minute, how dare –" Slammed her hand on the desk, "How dare you have the nerve to call me that. I know every bit about what it takes to have a baby, only I couldn't. I tried everything, every device, every method, and I lost two children. Don't you tell me..." and she went. I wanted to cry. It was so powerful. The room turned quiet, a few people started chanting, and "Okay, let's get out of here. That's it." "Thank you for coming."

DS: Wow.

TB: I didn't think any person should've been subjected to the type of question, but she blew me away with her answer. I had never seen that in her before. I think that it would've done a lot of people in that district well to see her in that moment because I don't know of any woman who did try what she did. She tried all kinds of devices and only really did she talk. She told me one day how she lost little Bobby. I said, "Who is little Bobby?" "The child that was born who died." She went through a lot, so... That was how she dealt with that one issue. She had some people who always came first, and that's where I got dragged into the mushy, mid-mushy, and super mushy letters. If she wanted something, and really, the substance wasn't that important, just making sure that somebody was treated with dignity and respect and flattery in the letter. I remember somebody... She knew so many people from her varied careers. One time, I just got a call, "Tom, dear, can you take so-and-so?" It was the actress, Lee Remick, her mother. She was was an architectural historian, and so Lee Remick's mother took me on a tour of the Capitol. I was supposed to take her – explaining, "The capitols here are based on these..." She knew everything. "Oh, really?" (laughter) But she knew somebody like that who... As I said, it was – they were not necessarily constituents, but they were part of her larger constituency, which was not necessarily in New Jersey. I mean how many people could call up Stewart Mott at the time? His father was the largest shareholder in General Motors and had a huge fortune. She had a little campaign event at his penthouse in Manhattan. We didn't publicize that one (laughter). But she had friends like that across the board. Who was the...? Peter? Oh, the guy who edited *The Paris Review*? George Plimpton! Anyhow, literary types, actresses. I remember Bob McClure one time said, "Well, there really is an Estée Lauder," who wrote a campaign check (laughter). She knew people like that.

JK: Wow. Well, what role did her husband play in all this, on the campaign and her service in Congress? Was he an advisor of any sort, or did she want to be her own person?

TB: She spoke to him a lot. I think his opinion was first among equals, no question about that. But from what I saw, she had a mind. I remember one time in the '74 campaign, it was one of those nights when the questions got rough, and she got roughed up and... She handled it well, and she said, "So, there I am, I'm in tears. I get home, I opened the door, and Bob Meyner said, 'Women's lib, women's lib, women..." (laughter) So, more than anything, I believe from what I saw that the effect he had, he was a stabilizer. She could always count on him to set her right. He had dealt with so many people in his political life that he could set her right. My reference is to those days when I really was Catholic. I'm not a dues-paying member anymore. There was something almost religious about it. He would let her know it. He was the man with the values, and... This is a digression. When I was a reporter at the *Daily Record* in Morristown, this other reporter and I got on the trail of something; there was a lot of little-league corruption. I say little league, it wasn't in the millions, it was in the hundreds of thousands. That brought us into a private meeting one time with this massive police detective for the New Jersey State Police, Jack Liddy. He's about six-five and lantern jawed. He looked like he spat nails for breakfast. When

he was a young state trooper, he was one of those who had been rotated into the job of driving the governor around to different events, and Bob Meyner did that. So, he was regaling me with stories. He said, "Well, Bob Meyner, one thing is that he is honest." This is a state cop and intelligence cop telling me this. He said, "He wouldn't – I remember that one night we drove from Hudson County," and he said of Frank Hague who's the successor, (John V.) Kenny?

JK: Kenny, yeah.

TB: He said, "When will that son of a bitch realize I'm the governor of New Jersey not him?" To me, at that time, I didn't know Helen. I didn't know. I just said, "Wow" that he – if this cop who I trusted implicitly and who had a pretty good record of putting people away, he said that with unvarnished truth, "He's honest." Whoa, that was – that was another reason by the way when I got to work in New Jersey always wondering what there is. Somewhere around the same time, a friend of mine who was a professional pollster – he's gone now, dead 10 years – he did work for the New Jersey Democratic Committee. That time, the state chair who was also in the legislature... I'm trying not to mention some names now because they might still be around. My friend, Donald had an appointment with the executive director of the committee, this fellow, and another fellow, and so it came to a point where, "Okay, we've got to move forward with this." But one of the people, the executive director, said, "We've got to know, are these articles –?" In the *Trenton Times,* there was an article about this guy's conflict of interest in this real estate deal that really didn't look good. He said, "Tell me, is there anything, anything to this, anything that could hurt the party at this?" He looked around (inaudible) and he said, "Not that one." In other words... (laughter)

JUDY BERRIGAN (JB): Maybe another.

DS: Right.

TB: That says it. With Bob Meyner, pardon my digression, I knew going in, this guy was clean. That's all you needed to know. It still happens. People – where there's money – where there's fast money, there's crooked money, where there's crooked money, there's crooked people, and there's – there was a lot of that in New Jersey. It still happens all over this country, but it's not often that you can get a guy who does intelligence and undercover say of a politician, "He's honest." That was... That's where he went, and they would go through... That's another thing. He had a pretty good eye for seeing what kind of money was not legitimate. He didn't want any of the reports to go out that so-and-so contributed in the campaign. It happens, but he would... I know more than a few people got their checks back because of Bob Meyner looking over the reports.

DS: Tom, what would you say were Helen's major achievements during her congressional career?

TB: Legislatively, she mostly went along with the Democratic agenda. I think that for women, this is... You said legislative achievements? No?

DS: Legislative or otherwise. It really would be –

TB: I think it was really the role that she – I didn't realize it myself until a few people told me of it. She really became a model for women in New Jersey, and elsewhere too. I know that for a fact because of the number of letters I was assigned to write a unique or a serious answer to – scholars, women professionals, women in high school, women in middle school. She really took that seriously. During this period, a couple of women I knew from my days at the newspaper came down. These were people who I think helped found the New Jersey chapter of NOW. Cindy Gordon and Linda Mercadante. They came to Washington – well at least Cindy did – with a group of Girl Scouts. They came in, and I was, of course, happy to see her. We hugged one another, and I wondered, "Cindy, what are you doing with the Girl Scouts?" She said, "Wherever I can, I try to present a positive role for the girls, and Helen is doing the same thing for them." So, Helen went and met with these girls. If you could see the little faces looking up at this. Remember, she was a big woman, and I don't use that in the pernicious sense, but wherever she went, you noticed her. So, here are these little girls who had this person, a very important person looking at them more than – Cindy told me this too. So, even though Cindy was at the level of... She was one of those people who didn't wear makeup to make a statement, and there were others like her who really looked up to Helen. There weren't that many women, and she was approachable. Millicent Fenwick, the other woman, was not. She simply was not. Helen liked the recognition that she got when she would appear at a high school event or appear at an event with students. She really liked that. She liked the fact that these girls anywhere from 12 when they're becoming aware of what government and politics are about and people in high school, but the college women too. They really liked being around her, and she enjoyed that. I would say that was her signature achievement, being a model, and also just doing... She knew how to trade with others, although there weren't that many opportunities to get what she wanted attached to a bill. I think Tim Lovain who handled international relations could probably speak better to that. But one of the problems was that because she had this graciousness, I've identified too, she would say, "Okay, if that's important to you," and then hold it into a bay and see. If she asked for something, genuinely asked for something on a vote or "We can't..." "Well, I really would appreciate it if you wouldn't do this," they would listen to her, and that was mostly over little things. At that time, you still had private relief bills where you could directly benefit an individual there. She didn't ask for many or – but then somebody asked, it meant something to somebody else, she would do what she could. She was, and I would say, probably the only person in the New Jersey delegation who professionalized, at that time, the acknowledged politicization of academy nominations. She did that one year, and she just got so sick of it – every contributor calling up and wanting his boy in West Point. So, she created – I forget who the contact was, but she had a couple of professionals, former military men, a couple of people show up, and they were the commission, and she would accept their advice. They reviewed all the applications.

DS: Wow.

TB: That was something nobody had done before.

DS: Smart.

TB: There were different things like that that she did. They weren't marquee items, but that's where she got the attention. I don't know what would have happened. It's stupid just to speculate because, I think, given after two terms, she had just begun to kind of... She was to really develop some roots. She was in line for several subcommittee chairmanships at that time.

That's where I think she could have done it. She never really had a chance to define, "Well, that's a Helen Meyner issue."

JK: Yeah. What about the Picatinny Arsenal? Can you fill us in on that story?

TB: That's probably the best piece of casework that ever happened for northwestern New Jersey. It is connected precisely to what I just said about her ability to get something. She – and I forget where the function was. If you look at the recommendations of different panels at the time, Picatinny, the ARRADCOM as it was formally known – Armament Research and Development Command--was gone. We were gonna lose it. There's no question about that. That's where she really turned on the charm with Tip O'Neill, and she went to everybody and lined them up. In fact, she went to one reception when Walter Mondale was vice president and... Was this in Philadelphia? I'm trying to remember because she walked up, and he said, "Oh, god, Congresswoman Picatinny" (laughter). She had it covered. I think we both shared with one another the fact that there's a strong streak of pacifism in us, and we were very compatible, but we used that invalid logic that, "Well, if you're going to build cannons, you might as well build them in our district, right?" (laughter) Once she got over that, she really lined up every bit along the way. It was a big favorite as far as the testing was in Maryland. What was the name of the base there? You really didn't have the real estate to continue to do armaments testing. The position of the army was, therefore, let's move it there. Her position, in northwestern Morris County, about one out of every three employees was connected to the presence of that facility. So, you had all of these people who couldn't – probably wouldn't agree on anything, nonetheless, come up with papers and with position papers that made it logical. So, she had the support of some really – you know, some of these people were close to Nobel laureate status and they... She made sure that they were – would testify against any decision to close down that facility, "Sure, we'll give it..." Aberdeen, Maryland. Aberdeen I think it was, the facility –

DS: Oh, the Aberdeen.

TB: Yeah.

DS: Aberdeen Proving Ground, yeah.

TB: I think what eventually happened was, oh, the actual, the logistics involved moving the testing to Aberdeen and keeping the brainpower and other activities there in – mostly in Rockaway Township, mostly northwestern Morris County. You had constituents. They're very well-educated and very bright people who also really helped out. I would say, I got to know some people that, if I had a question on something, I could call up and get a lecture from somebody who has a PhD in a subject who made – who just couldn't stand teaching. It was really a valuable group. I would say that was her moment. A lot of people were involved in that. I admit it, I was at the periphery of that one, but she and Bob Meyner played a key role in that because he knew how to log roll and – but she – oh, boy, she... When she started and told me that she had talked to Tip O'Neill about it, I said, "I finally thought we got it," because if you had Tip, and Tip O'Neill was that. If he gave his word, you had it. So, she was doing that stuff. How much of that could you quantify? I don't know, but I would say she – more than any other figure, if she wasn't the person she was, we would've lost. It would have been in Aberdeen, and we wouldn't be having this conversation.

JK: Mm-hmm.

DS: Tom, how hard did she take that loss in ‘76?

EDWIN C. LANDIS (EL): Seventy-eight.

DS: Eight.

JK: Seventy-eight.

DS: Thank you, in ‘78?

TB: Seventy-eight. It was hard. She had been trained her whole life to be gracious, so one could never know. I let rip a few tirades myself at the quality of the campaign and Jim Courter who ran against her and his staff. There’s always greater animus between staff members, I think, than the members. I had three or four conversations with her, “What are you going to do and –?” because she was – she got me a job when it was all over. I would rant, and she never criticized me for the tirade. “Oh, dearie, that said, he won.” I think nobody believes. I don’t think of anybody... What I learned from covering politics, every person believes he or she has a chance even if they’re behind by 30 points. I think she felt she was going to win. The polls were inconclusive, and it’s one of those things that could have gone either way. The margin was close enough. But I think that Bob Meyner from my brief discussions with him that night, most of the district returned to its identity, and we... It wasn’t that she lost this or that, oh, they started voting like they used to vote again. Helen didn’t have – she didn’t have a Picatinny to save, she didn’t have Tocks Island Dam to prevent, and she didn’t have some local issue that would’ve made them forget. The one thing that’s never... Her interest in foreign affairs really hurt her. I’m trying to say this correctly. She was the subject of, what I considered was, a well-executed hit job within the two weeks before the campaign. Barbara McConnell, you know that name? She had some wisdom that was, “Helen and I appreciate what you’re doing and – but you’ve got to remember that...” She – in January 1978, pardon me for this (inaudible).

DS: No.

TB: – discussion. She went to – I didn’t learn about it until everything had already been arranged. She, along with Representative Leo J. Ryan, who was a good friend of hers, and Paul Findley, went on a tour of the Middle East, which took them to meet Yasser Arafat among other people, and King Hussein, then King Hussein of Jordan. I was, “You’re right, you’re absolutely right, we’ve got to do at there,” but I started calling up some friends who were major contributors who were Jewish, and the reaction was horror. It was, “I never heard anything like this.” One friend, an attorney and a fundraiser, said people hung up the phone on him when he would make calls. And then there appeared this grainy photo of her shaking hands with Yasser Arafat. This was before he was considered not a terrorist anymore. It was distributed at synagogues and shuls throughout the state. Did that make a pivotal difference? Maybe not, but if that had not happened, I do believe that she would’ve eked out another term because not only was that constituency important in numbers, important in voter participation, and the influence was great. We didn’t have many core Democratic constituencies in the 13th congressional district. That was one of them. That was key. And when you have people from that constituency almost crying at the other end of the line having the phone slammed on them, that

was big trouble. I don't know how to quantify it. That really, really hurt. I think Helen realized that. She thought she was – people would turn out the way they did, and I expected it because I thought we would win. The numbers indicated that flip. Regardless of whether that episode with the meeting with Arafat or one other episode – I can't sum it up right now – it was deigned to happen at some point. If she had survived '78, in 1980 we would have been washed out to sea because of the Reagan landslide.

TB: So, the district returned to its voting pattern. I think we would have had a chance at one more, and she could have built some more status, become a subcommittee chairman, and had more things to dole out. I think it hurt because, again, she never criticized me when I would rip into some corner. She'd actually tell me stop when I said all these obscene things. So, yes, it hurt. We, others and staff, kept in touch, but it's almost as if afterwards she didn't want to talk about it anymore. You could talk about something else, children or where you're traveling or something like that, but she – that was it. That was her time, and I think part of her, the witty part of her – and that's a big part of her, too – would say, "The people have spoken, the bastards have –" Dick – who was a Tuck – Dick Tuck in California gave us that line. She knew how – she took it well, and she... That was a study in grace that is still a model for me. I don't know many people who are that way. Again, she was – she just – that – but that's the way she was. I think I saw a lot of it in... One time, she had a little party in the Capitol, and I saw them, the way her father was and the way her mother were. They were known affectionately as Bumpy and Bill. I could just see, oh, in the way that if you have children, see, well he speaks like you and he talks like you. She really was her mother incarnate as far as I'm concerned. She's the same class, the same – the bearing and also treating other people that way. My favorite conversation with her about me once we were – here we were talking over some passage of poetry. She said, "Oh, dearie," she said, "for someone with your background, you're so literate" and I went... (laughter) "Thank you I guess" (laughter). Oh, can I talk about her humor a little bit?

DS: Please, oh, please – this is great.

JK: Sure.

DS: – do.

TB: Because it –

DS: This is great.

TB: Okay. No, it's not R-rated. She loved a naughty joke. She never liked to tell them, but if she would... Frank Thompson in particular, well, he would get gross and he did –oh. How can I set this one up? She came back in, and it was early evening and the House was still in. She said, "Oh, that Tommy, he's so awful." "What do you mean?" She said, "He came over to Millicent and me –" Now, if you recall, Millicent Fenwick had had a double mastectomy and... "He came over to Millicent and me, and he said, 'Oh, Helen, boy, this joke is so funny you're going to laugh your tits right off."

JK: Oh, jeez.

TB: And he said, "Oh, Millicent, you already heard it."

JK: Oh, brother.

DS: Oh, no.

TB: She loved it, ha-ha, ha-ha, oh. One time I walked in, and boy, I think she laughed, too, when she (inaudible). A quality that she had – [Franny Goodwin?] was on the staff. Franny Goodwin knew Helen from Colorado College. She said, "Helen had grown up in such a proper environment" that she recalled every once in a while just doing something bold that would not be expected of someone from her station. Bold, either, say, the way she dressed, she said, "She would wear corduroys or slacks in the '40s to college." I think the biggest mistake I made for Helen, and I'm not far from – I'm not exaggerating, depart much. I think her birthdate was 1929. Anyhow, her official biography, I just copied what I was given, dressed it up a little, born in 1929. I remember Franny said, "Tom –" she had a really soft voice "– this isn't right." She said, "She went to me and she was born in 1928." "Oh, okay," so I changed it. And so I sent it in for approval to be our handout. I got a, "Well, Tom, what's this?" I said, "Oh, this biography." She said, "You changed the date." Well, it came through at that moment, "Well, Franny told me that you were born in 1928." "She did, did she?" (laughter) About 15 seconds later, she walked into our workroom. "So, you're the one who told him," she said to Franny (laughter). Oh, I was mortified, and Franny went (inaudible). "It's so funny" (laughter) I thought. Well, one time, I walked in, and that quality that Franny spoke of just shocking you with... She was seated at the desk, so I walked around, and I said, "Well, we got..." She said, "Tom, dearie, did you masturbate a lot as a child?" (laughter) I said, "Well, it depends on what you mean by a lot. Like I..." (laughter) She would do stuff like that, so it really would throw you off.

EL: Yeah.

DS: I could imagine so.

TB: Oh, Bob Meyner was down one time for it. They were going to some dinner. It was the early evening, and they just had a late session; so she was going straight from the office to the function with Bob Meyner. I walked in, and she was standing behind him and then she – with Bob Meyner and she turned around and went (inaudible) and went pulling up at her hose. I saw her derriere, and Bob Meyner said, "Dearie, [down?]!" She said, "Oh, it's nothing he hasn't seen before" (laughter). Those moments just reminded you of, boy, she could really pull the rug out from under you or whatever.

DS: Right, right.

TB: She did that, and as Franny said, intentionally. I could remember – I forget what it was... There were two professional women who worked in our office (inaudible), and occasionally, she would say something to them that indicated she still knew what was written on bathroom walls. She would just throw it at them, and we're all stunned (laughter). That was a pleasant feature, and she never stopped with that. Since I'm past that age now, I can realize why the members of Congress who were men and who liked her, really liked her. I don't think it's a stretch to say that Leo Ryan was absolutely fascinated with her. He was as close to loving somebody as I've seen. He would show up, and he's the one member of Congress I knew who I could call a friend. He would chat with me and... She had other male friends who just really liked her. He stood out

because he was on the same floor of the Cannon House Office Building, and so he'd walk around the corner.

DS: He died later, right? He didn't die –

TB: Jonestown.

DS: I know he died at Jonestown, but that was –

TB: Just, oh, that was a –

DS: – after she –

TB: – horrible election. Helen lost, Paul Findley lost, Leo Ryan got murdered in 1978 – those three who went out there in the Middle East. She remained friends with Paul Findley. I don't know how close but she knew him. She would do that, and I don't know how many people she affected that way, the male members Congress. The other thing – I can't say who's going to enjoy this the most. There are only about 18 members of Congress who were women. It was small enough that they had their own little lounge off the house floor. I have to tell on myself here; I enjoyed gossip. I really loved it, and, boy, she could dish it out. This is off the floor one day. She realized that in 1976 when Bill Bradley was running, I had known a little bit about Alex Menza and Richard Leone who they were going to run in the campaign. I said, "Helen, it's probably a good idea. You call them up and you say you're going to endorse Bill." "Oh, good idea" and she said "Eh-Eh." She said, "Alex Menza was real – he is very gracious, and Richard Leone was kind of, oh, cold." And then she said, "Oh, what I should do, I just realized, is I should tell the Dean, Peter Rodino, because he was..." So, next morning, she went over early and I – she wanted me to be with her. It was really great these things. So she pulled Rodino off the House floor and she sat down, "Who's he?" "Oh, he's with me. It's okay, Tom." "(Inaudible) so, I decided to endorse Bill Bradley, and I thought what did you know?" "Oh, no," he said, "Richard – "Hey, Richie –" Richard Leon, " – Richie is a nice boy. I told him Richie, 'You've got to change your name the way it's pronounced, call yourself Leone. You'll get a lot of Italian votes,' but Richie doesn't listen" (laughter). Oh, what a moment, what a precious moment I have and I... All those people who sat down with Helen, and she pulled... So in that same lounge further back – I don't know when this happened – she said, "Dearie, come on over with me," and I brought my little ancient version of a laptop, a word processor, that's all it was. She wanted to work on a statement for that day. I really felt awful and uncomfortable. In the reception area, there's a woman, every, little staff – no men were allowed whatsoever. But she talked to me about it, this nice little lounge, "All right, let's do this..." "I'm running them okay then I'll change this," and, "Oh, I've got to vote," and so she walked off the floor and in came Liz Holtzman, oh, and I was frozen. I said, "I'm with Helen Meyer." She scowled at him, and so she got up and left and then in came in Helen with Bella Abzug. So, Helen introduced me and and Bella said, "Hi, Tom." She kicked her shoes off. I said to Helen, "If you hear anything, Liz Holtzman came in. She saw me, she really didn't like it there," and so Helen, "Mm-hmm" and so she turned to Bella. She said, "Bella, why can't Liz get a guy?" (laughter) And Bella Abzug…I thought Bella Abzug would give – explain it. She said, "Ah, she's just uptight" (laughter). That was a private window I had at... That would have been –

DS: They let their hair down in that space, didn't they?

TB: And she did that with others and the staff. I really didn't tell anybody because it was kind of a privilege to see that and to see the way she could get her way, get her way.

DS: Yeah, yeah.

TB: Sorry to have digressed.

DS: You know, let me –

TB: Well, now –

DS: I'm just going to –

END OF First AUDIO FILE

**Berrigan II**

JK: We're back on. In terms of what we've covered, is there anything else that comes to your mind that we should enshrine for posterity?

TB: I'm glad you asked the question about what stood out as her accomplishments because I have a feeling that she had just started. And she would've been very comfortable if – you know, for instance if there had been some redistricting and could've been friendlier, she would have been quite an establishment herself. She knew all about protocol. When I talk about how she was – her family, remember, she also was, you know, a governor's wife for – when he was governor for about, a little more than four years when they got married. It was just before the second term. She knew the protocol going in, but then enhanced things. She knew what politicians liked to hear, and she did it well. It's a non sequitur because it didn't happen. I just wish we could've found the extra sliver that could've pushed us over in '78. I think that in some respects, there's greater staff level animus than others. Helen continued to remain friendly with others in Congress, but she really didn't... When we got back together again, we very rarely talked about what Congress did. I remember going to a couple of functions in New Jersey and another one. She came down. She had an appointment to Washington and about eight staff members or something like that had – we all had lunch together, and that really didn't come up. It was just a friendly, chatty get-together. We used to have those from time to time. Part of her graciousness came through. My son was born in February of 1978, February second. I didn't know about it, but she put in a little passage in the *Congressional Record*, "Welcoming the arrival of a little staff member." Earlier, she had a party at The Monocle restaurant in Capitol Hill, and it was memorable for only one thing, Hubert Humphrey stopped by to say hello to – was that? This was in the autumn because he didn't live too long after that. I think he died in January. I'm trying to get the dates down there.

JK: I don't recall. [Humphrey died January 13, 1978.]

TB: He was – it was... And because I was with her and so were others, this is not just about me. If you were with her and somebody like Eugene McCarthy stopped by or Alexander Trowbridge, secretary of – she should introduce you. She didn't just say, "This is a staff member." She

would introduce you, and she would remember to say, "Well, Tom is originally from Pennsylvania" or something like that or – to make a connection, and same with... I remember Tip O'Neill was really interesting. He liked her, and that was – the fact that he liked her meant that a lot of other people had to like her (laughter).

JK: Right.

TB: So, I saw evidence of that when he came to New Jersey in April of 1978 to speak for her at a campaign function for her. He didn't do that for everybody. He did it for a lot of people, but she could... I don't know how well she knew Tom Foley, but she also – in other words, she knew who to go to when she wanted to get something. I think we probably wished harder than she did.

JK: Do you know how she established the relationship with Tip O'Neill? I mean, how that got started?

TB: I don't know how that happened. I just remembered we went to a – it was a party at the old – that National Democratic Club in December of '74 after the election, but before she was sworn in. Tip O'Neill was there, and the first thing he said, "Helen," and it was – obviously, they knew one another. I don't know how. He said, "How about that boy of mine?" His son had just been elected lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, and he was all about his son. She immediately introduced me, "Hi (inaudible)," but they were chatting, and "Oh, you –?" He was headed out, that's right, and he said, "Come on, I'll give you a ride. "No, well I don't want to see – no." "Oh," he went. There was obviously something there. I didn't ask. But you wonder, Mo Udall, I – the first time I saw him with her, they were very friendly and very gushy. He came to speak for her too. So, she knew a lot of people I think because – probably because of when Bob Meyner was in politics plus her family line, the Stevenson name.

JK: Right yeah.

TB: Though still she knew a lot of people. I have a feeling that – who knows – somewhere in that network if we had a big graph like some kind of a genealogy line, we would find that the path of her father and her mother intersected with the paths of others. He, a former ambassador, president of a college, Wall Street lawyer, he... It wasn't Wall Street, but his path intersected with so many important people, so she knew these people, and I don't know how she got to know Tip O'Neill, but she was... Before Tip O'Neill became speaker, Carl Albert was the speaker, and somehow, she knew him too.

JK: Really?

TB: Yeah. I think part of it – just think of the dynamics. There were only 18 women members of the Congress. She stood out. He was probably shorter than me, so I can – he will walk over and... In other words, it's not the type of person that you could walk by and just nod at. You had to stop and acknowledge her. Maybe that dynamic played a greater role or maybe I'm exaggerating. I'm not sure whether it took a greater role or whether I'm exaggerating. It must have had something to do with it. Tip O'Neill was not a small man, but she seemed to look almost eye to eye with him just the... And that was something you noticed where he was and then you noticed her, and that would happen. A couple of times she would take the staff over to the Democratic Club and always someone – of course, they're all Democrats, somebody would

walk over to the table, somebody important, and we would look and wonder who that was. She seemed to know them all.

JK: Wow.

TB: And maybe that was – she was well practiced at it. I have to think about that. There are a whole lot of those little – funny, little anecdotes that occurred, and that was a sample of what I was treated to, not on a daily basis, but on a regular basis. She would say or do something or be funny about something. We were joking around in the office one day and we – just to break the tedium, we just put up – we taped up one of those little basketball nets with which you use a nerf ball. So, here we are in a congressional office, we're throwing this, we didn't realize that she was in her office. She came back, and we all opened our eyes. She is going to see us acting silly, and she said, "Here, let me try a shot."

JK: Yeah, that's nice. So, did she foster loyalty and appreciation among her staff?

TB: Yes. Yes. Whatever their frustrations there were, I could not not like her. I don't think others – some people and the congressional staffs, they're always, if you – (coughs) If we didn't like a stand, you walk outside and talk about it. You see people doing that all over the Capitol, and people, the little minions. I mean we would get over it because we liked the general dynamic. I told you that meeting she had with these antiabortion people.

JK: Right.

TB: That was riveting to me personally, and I thought, "I can't think of any other member of Congress who could claim to have felt what she felt," and very few women in general. But the fact that somebody pushed her enough to let loose said something about her character to me. That memory, something like that, that fortified me whenever I would get upset that she wasn't substantive enough or something like that.

JK: I don't mean to put you on the spot, but certainly you know, one underlying issue in her life, particularly later on, was the struggle with alcohol.

TB: Mm-hmm.

JK: What were the manifestations of that?

TB: Well, I could identify them more clearly now. You see, I'm a recovering alcoholic, and that gives me an important perspective. It's been years, but I can say that along with that, it really didn't faze me, I suppose, because I was well on my way to becoming full blown at some point in my life years later. Alcoholism is a progressive disease. When we would talk about it, it was absent the awareness we would have a generation later. I just wish that when she – I would see her, and obviously, she had a drink or two, but for me, it was always in context. She was at a reception or she was... I don't know if I ever saw her do so at her desk, but she lived in an apartment right across the street from the Cannon Building. It's no longer there. Again, Tip O'Neill, I think, arranged for her to get one of the few residential spaces there were in that building. She might have a little. I do know it was a problem that manifested itself when we went to a couple of debates and she would slur her words. I did nothing. My hope was that Bob

Meyner would do something. How did I handle it? Not very well. I would, obviously, be different today. Beginning about 15 years ago, I would handle it differently knowing a lot more about the disease now than I did then. Did that frame my reference? Well, yeah, I ignored it.

JK: That didn't affect her performance though.

TB: I don't think so, in the same way that people will have jobs where they do physical things; they were functionally alcoholic. I mean they're functional alcoholics; they can do their work. I think the most notable, blazing, worse-than-anyone-else alcoholic was Winston Churchill, starting off at nine o'clock in the morning and drinking himself to sleep every day. He functioned. In Helen, I never saw much evidence of it. Two or three times when she would speak loud or slur her words, and then there was another time, one of the gatherings – this was after she had left Congress, she came back for that luncheon with about eight of us, and that's when I saw something there. I had not seen that during the day, and I saw it during the day.

JK: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

TB: The –

JK: Did you stay in touch with her after – over the years until her death?

TB: No. After about the mid-'80s, I came here to find time. We might have exchanged notes or there was a function, but I didn't stay in contact with her. And I can't give you a good reason why.

JK: Well, time passes and –

TB: Yeah. You know I –

JK: – lives diverge.

TB: I kind of reformed myself a little by – just after she left, I started to work out more. I lost a lot of weight, and during the '80s, I ran 12 marathons, and stayed fit into the '90s. It also helped me push my own recognition with the issue of alcohol further back because I can't possibly be... Alcoholics are like addicts – we are addicts – are experts at pathological lying telling you just enough truth in order to think that I've convinced you of something, but knowing in my own constitution that I had – what I was. I think I convinced myself that I didn't have an issue because otherwise, I couldn't be this fit. I couldn't run all these races for a 20-year period. Now that I look back at the check, even if I had stopped and people do, it's a progressive disease. It gets worse, and when I saw her during that one gathering, it was pretty clear to me that – now it is – that it had gotten worse. I had never seen her like that in the middle of the day.

JK: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Judy, is there anything we overlooked in –

JB: No. We have everything.

JK: – talking to Tom?

JB: I was waiting for him to get to the Bella Abzug story, so, and Liz Holtzman (laughter).

TB: Yeah, I see Liz Holtzman. She's –

JB: You know, it sounded like –

TB: – still a contributor –

JB: – (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) that.

TB: – on some things and I cannot not forget that.

JB: Say it.

TB: How many people would think to ask that of any woman?

JK: Right.

TB: "Why can't she get a guy?" She said it against the person who was nationally recognized, at that time, Liz Holtzman and then Bella Abzug's response, "Ah, she's just uptight." Right. She –

JK: She's just a what?

JB: Just uptight.

TB: "Yeah, she's just –"

JK: Just uptight.

TB: I just thought Bella would say, "See, Helen, seriously."

JB: She didn't know how to wear a hat either. (laughter)

TB: Oh, she –? You know there –

JK: Wow.

TB: There are... She... I suppose I decided that was – I was... I never made the decision, but I had other things I was... I'm guilty of a lot of – with that well now I'm getting to my therapy. I'm guilty of a lot of selfishness in that period. I think because I was also neglecting family because I was running distance races all along and that would take me away. My daughter has talked about that issue with me. So what's she doing now? She's running the New York marathon in a couple of weeks.

JK: Oh, okay.

TB: She and her husband don't have any children. She can connect with me as to what's happening in the psyche and what happened in mine.

JK: Right.

TB: And I think – who knows whether at a subconscious level, I also recognized myself when I saw a behavior like that; so who am I to criticize somebody? I don't know how familiar you are with the subject or the reading. So much of what I read was so eye-opening to me, and also it enables me to have another filter when I look at my own history and the history of others who I have known. I didn't know. There's a lot of evidence that Pat Moynihan had a real problem. Who was the congressman from Missouri, Bolling? [Richard Bolling] He was very high up the leadership rank in the '60s, and he came out publicly. He never named other names, though, because he felt that that was something that you should do with on your own.

JK: Wow.

TB: Does that help?

JK: No, it does. Yes, thank you. Yeah. It puts it in another perspective. Well thank you very much, Tom.

TB: Okay.

JK: We appreciate that.