CHICAGO WOMEN'S HISTORY CENTER

Oral History Interview with Wilma Stevens

President of Chicago NOW Chapter (1975) and Illinois NOW (1976-77)
Founding member of Women Employed

Conducted on April 28, 2013

Interviewer: Catherine Mouton
A Columbia College Chicago Student
In Dr. Erin McCarthy's Oral History Methods Class

For Chicago Women's History Center's
Documenting Women's Activism and Leadership in the Chicago Area
1945-2000 Project

C.M.: I will say that we are here with **Wilma Stevens**. I am **Catherine Mouton**. And this is an interview being conducted for the Chicago Area Women's History Council on April 28th, 2013 in Logan Square, Chicago, Illinois. And Wilma was an activist for the Chicago Women's Movement beginning with her move to Chicago in 1972 and is still very active within the Chicago community. We're going to go ahead and review some biographical information. What year were you born again Wilma?

W.S.: 1948.

C.M.: And where were you born?

W.S.: I was born in Frederick, Maryland.

C.M.: And where did you grow up?

W.S.: I grew up in Myersville, Maryland which is about three miles from the Appalachian Trail in Western Maryland.

C.M.: And your father's place of birth?

W.S.: Is New Market, Maryland.

C.M.: And where was your mother's place of birth?

W.S.: Clarksville, Arkansas.

C.M.: Wilma, tell me again, how did you get your name?

W.S.: I have my parent's middle names. My mother's middle name—actually it's not her middle name. Her first name was Wilma. Her middle name was Evelyn. She never used Wilma, so I got Wilma because her father was William. My father's middle name was Theodore because his father was Theodore so my middle name is Theodora.

C.M.: Describe again your favorite childhood memory.

W.S.: My favorite childhood memory is playing wagon train with my neighbor kids. I was hoping to come up with another one—We would go all over the neighborhood and pretend we were parts of wagon trains. Westerns were very big on TV when we were little kids, so we played that a lot. I also have memories of making my own dolls out of weird little things. I made an entire set of dolls out of safety pins, which were very strange. But I spent a lot of time playing by myself as well as the other kids, so I liked to create little things like that.

C.M.: So creating art and creativity were very present when you were younger and that was because your father and your mother were artists?

W.S.: Right.

C.M.: Tell me tell me your father's occupation.

W.S.: My father's occupation was an engineering technician. He was basically an engineering draftsman for medical laboratories. But his real calling was as an artist, a graphic artist. He did a lot of silk screen printing, he did ceramics, and did some very inventive woodcarving plus he made furniture and he built our house. Actually he and my mother built the house. So, he always had something to do. I think that was really good role model for me so that there was always— There was work and then there was one's creative life and that they were both important.

C.M.: And your mother's occupation?

W.S.: My mother was a bookkeeper and a homemaker. And when she retired she became a quilter and a weaver. And, in fact, I have the loom that my father made for my mother thirty years ago. One of these days I'm going to be a weaver, too.

C.M.: But you already weave now.

W.S.: I do some. But when I retire I'm actually going to do—I'm actually going to spend more time weaving.

C.M.: That's wonderful. Describe your family home for me.

W.S.: My family home—Well, I'll start with the building. My parents did build it. They bought this land in this very tiny town that's basically one street long with two little streets sticking out from it; and at the end of one of these side streets was this wonderful plot of land that had two maple trees on it. It had been part of an old farm and when they bought the land the owner took them around and took them right to that spot and says, "This is where you want to build your house." So they built the house there themselves. They did it on the weekends and the evenings and it took them several years, but they got the house put together and it still—not just standing—but square. They did an extremely good job of it. So we grew up in this house and we could look out the front door and see hills and trees and cows and we could look out the back and we could see hills and trees and cows. It was really beautiful rolling country and this little street here was overlooking a great deal of it. At night you could walk outside and see the Milky Way. The air was beautifully clear and the water was clean and it was a great spot to be.

C.M.: And where did you attend your grammar school?

W.S.: My grammar school was right across the street and had started out as a four-room school house and then they finally built an addition onto it when I was about in the third grade. It was great because before then the classes didn't all have their own room and we finally—this sounds terribly rustic—each had class had their own classroom and that was very nice. And the library and some other things, so that was a great addition.

C.M.: And who was your favorite teacher?

W.S.: My favorite teacher in—was it was definitely my favorite teacher in high school—was my Latin teacher. She also taught world history. But she was just a very smart, funny lady and I really liked her.

C.M.: And she's who you most looked up to in high school?

W.S.: I think so, yes. Absolutely.

C.M.: And what dreams or goals did you have as a teenager?

W.S.: Well I started out wanting to be a Latin teacher. And actually at one point I also wanted to teach sign language. We had a friend who taught at the Maryland School of the Deaf and I was thinking about that for a while, but I really wanted to be an artist and I had my father as a role model and I just wanted to do creative work for a living and I think that that finally gelled when I was about fifteen, when I was really more ready—had a more direct goal by that point.

C.M.: And becoming an art teacher for you was not something you particularly wanted—

W.S.: I thought it was probably the best way to become an artist and certainly most of the artists who earned a living as artists were art teachers. But it was such a small town, I didn't see people making a living painting or sculpting or even going to art shows and selling things. It just wasn't anything that I had seen. So that was just a lack of experience. I didn't really know what was out there.

C.M.: What was your first job?

W.S.: My first job was babysitting. It was all right. I don't think I was particularly good at it. [Laughter] Nobody got hurt under my watch. But, no, I really wasn't that crazy about it, but I did that and I did a little tutoring when I was in college. But mostly it was babysitting and taking care of things. There really weren't any places to go. There was no way to get to jobs. I didn't have a car. We didn't think about that sort of thing.

C.M.: Tell me more about that. Why do you think you weren't a good babysitter?

W.S.: I didn't have much patience. A lot of things come out of babies that I just didn't want to deal with. I did have fun one summer taking care of a two-year-old, but the two-year-old was a little more lively and just more interaction than babies. I was always short, too, and sometimes I was trying to take care of kids who were taller than I was and they simply weren't going to listen to me. It just wasn't a great favorite. It wasn't what I wanted to do.

C.M.: When did you first become aware of sexuality?

W.S.: At different times. I mean. it's a discovery for everybody, I guess. My mother had a baby when I was eight so I understood where babies came from more or less. I hit puberty when I was ten and that was a big shock. But it was a way for my mother to explain more of the facts of life to me. Had my first boyfriend when I was six and got my first kiss when I was six. I'm not sure if that's really being aware of your sexuality, but it was certainly, you know, something on the path. I don't know

that I ever really got great information. You'll get a little bit here, a little bit there. I don't think my mother's instruction was really that complete as far as some parts of sexuality are concerned. I think she did her best, but I think she wasn't really that comfortable with explaining a lot of detail.

C.M.: So you were never really taught about sex in a very direct way?

W.S.: Not really, no.

C.M.: Who taught you about menstruation?

W.S.: That was my mother. That she was very good at, but that's because I started when I was ten and it was a shock. I had no idea what was going on. So she explained all of that to me. There were some little booklets one could get and actually I think at school there was some health instruction, but all that was to come later and I was only ten. No one was going to give that kind of instruction at school at that point. So my mother did see my through that particular thing.

C.M.: I'm sorry, was your sister—How many siblings?

W.S.: I had three siblings, two brothers and one sister.

C.M.: Okay.

W.S.: And my older brother died about twelve years ago. I still have a younger sister and a younger brother.

C.M.: Younger sister and younger brother. And your brother who passed, I'm very sorry. Was he older or—

W.S.: He was older. He was two years older.

C.M.: Two years older.

W.S.: He was the first and I was two years after him and my sister was three years later and then my younger brother was five years later after her. He was the baby my mother had when I was eight.

C.M.: Okay. So you were the first female to also go through menstruation.

W.S.: I was.

C.M.: Was your sister also early?

W.S.: No, she wasn't as early as I was. I'm not exactly sure when, but I think hers was a little bit later.

C.M.: Okay. What was your first experience with sexism?

W.S.: Sexism. Oh, yes. I think the first real experience was when I was in the sixth grade and our teacher, who was also the principal of the school, decided that the young women could not play baseball during recess. And the only explanation we got was that it was not "ladylike". This was the first time someone told me I couldn't do something because it was not "ladylike." It was really unfortunate because we had all this energy, a bunch of eleven year olds had energy, and before he had made this decision, the boys played baseball on one diamond and the girls would play baseball on another diamond. So it's not like we were playing baseball with the boys, but we were playing in skirts. Young women were not allowed to wear slacks to school in those days. Anything we did that was active we had skirts on. So I don't know that playing baseball was anything worse than anything else we were doing, he had the idea that what we were going to do during recess was stand around and cheer on the boys. I think, in retrospect, it's a terrible thing to do to young women. Both to not give them something active to do and to make it clear that their role was simply to stand there and watch boys do something important or just do something. Unfortunately that man passed away before I could go back there as an adult and tell him what a really stupid thing he had done. And I'm hoping that he didn't do that to any other class because I just felt that it was just such a bad message to give to a bunch of young women. You're eleven-years-olds and you're, you know, just getting into puberty, you're confused enough as it is and what an awful message. So that was the first.

C.M.: Well hopefully that message changed with Title IX.

W.S.: I hope so. Yes.

C.M.: Why did you choose to attend the Maryland Institute School of Art?

W.S.: Well I liked the school. I wanted to go to art school and my father had been to the same school. I went down and looked at the school and was very excited about it. I was very excited about the idea of living in the city. I wanted to be in Baltimore. That was mostly my choice, was that I knew something about the school because he had been there. Of course, he was there in 1936 to '38 so it wasn't exactly the same place but I was excited both for the fact that it had a connection with him and that it was a good art school, and that's what I wanted to do.

C.M.: How did you parents feel about you attending college. Your mother's father was against it. I think this was in the previous—

W.S.: Yes. My folks were thrilled. Because my mother's father was against it, she was very determined that both my sister and I go to school. My sister and I were better students than my brothers, my sister being the better student between the two of us. But they were very, very supportive of the fact that I wanted to have a career in art. My father was really thrilled, especially. I couldn't have had more supportive parents. I think that was very, very important to me that they were excited about the possibilities of me going as a much as I was.

C.M.: I was going to ask you what made you choose a degree in graphic design, but it is because of the influence from your father and just something that was very natural for you?

W.S.: Well that's part of it. I think it was several things. I never was a painter or a sculptor. I think I really did want to find a way to earn a living. Although, I don't know I was that—When I first went to art school that I was really thinking, "I got to come out of here with a job," because that's just not

it. But I liked the problem-solving aspect of graphic design. It's like any other kind of design work, you have a problem, you want to put forth a certain kind of message and you want to be effective or clever, or just lovely and the fact that there were a lot of ways to do it. Originally I thought I was going to go into advertising because I thought that what graphic design was. I was very happy to find that there were many other areas besides advertising, because advertising would just not have been a good fit for me. But originally, I was going to be an art teacher and I already decided by the time I went to the Maryland Institute that I did not want to be an art teacher. And graphic design just appealed to me on a lot of different levels. My father's experience was a help but I think it was just a really good fit for me.

C.M.: Yes. Were there any artists or was there any art specifically within the graphic design realm or any other artists that were influential to you?

W.S.: Well, there were—We could see people's work. I can't think of any one that stands out as a particular influence for me at this point. I just don't think of anyone particular there that I could that I would point to.

C.M.: Were there any authors that you liked to read in college or any books that really stood out for you?

W.S.: Okay. Let me think. [Laughter] Mostly what I remember were my college English classes. The Maryland Institute at that point had an extremely basic degree program. I mean, it was really focused on art classes, but you had enough English and History that you get your degree.

And I had a wonderful English teacher my freshman year who introduced me to T.S. Eliot and I remember reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" which was wonderful and quite a number of others. But mostly we studied that year was poetry and that's one of the few that stand out; some E.E. Cummings and as far as other authors, we spent most of our time reading art history, so yeah. There weren't a lot at that point. We were introduced to a lot of Shakespeare which was great. I took a good Shakespeare class and there were opportunities to go to Shakespeare plays.

C.M.: In Baltimore?

W.S.: In Baltimore. They make some very good student deals so we really got some great opportunities. So that's where I really got my love of Shakespeare, was in college.

C.M.: That's wonderful. Any musicians or bands that were really—Was music a big part or?

W.S.: Oh, sure. We had a lot of rock musicians coming through. The only one I remember though, which I know nothing about this group other than the fact we got to hear them, was the *Fugs* and I only remember that because there was some program and I ended up—one of them came and sat next to me and I was next to one of the *Fugs*. I wouldn't recognize them if I tripped over them in an alley. But it was rock and roll time. Most of the music we listened to was some form of rock and roll. But the Baltimore Symphony offered greatly discounted tickets to students for The Maryland Institute, so that was my introduction—not my introduction to symphony music, I had heard some in high school once a year or something. But had wonderful opportunities to go over to the

symphony hall and hear some wonderful opera singers and some wonderful soloists that I really treasure a lot of those memories too.

C.M.: Where did you live in college? Who did you live with?

W.S.: I had two roommates. Well the first year I lived there I lived in a home for girls. I think it really was called "a home for girls," I don't think it was "young women." It was a residence for students for the Maryland Institute and the Peabody Conservatory, so it was musicians and artists. And the musicians made a great deal of noise and the artists stunk up the place with oil paint and everything else. Se we weren't exactly the most congenial group, but they were nice enough. But we were greatly outnumbered by the musicians. It was a safe place in the city for an introduction to living in the city. The Maryland Institute did not have dormitories; it didn't really have a campus. It was just several buildings in the middle of the city and most students had apartments around there. So after that first year I found roommates and we lived in one apartment in my sophomore year and then we moved to another apartment where I was for my junior and senior years.

C.M.: What did you do after graduation?

W.S.: I looked for jobs around home, because I didn't have any money to move anywhere. I found one job for the Washington County Educational System that had a TV teaching set up and I think I was there for a month before I got another job working for the library system doing displays. It was fine. I got to do some creative things, but it was really not what I wanted to do. I was very fortunate to have done some work in college, and maybe this answers your other questions about books, I had done a series of illustrations for **Loren Eiseley's** "The Immense Journey," so yes, I guess there's an author that did impress me. And one of my instructors remembered those pieces and met up with an art director from World Book for World Book Publishing. At that point it was Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, but they made World Book Encyclopedia and they made a science yearbook and a current affairs yearbook, and they were looking for someone to work on the science yearbook, and just luck that my teacher talked to this art director and said he knew of someone who would be interested. My instructor got in touch with me and then I got in touch with the people from Field Enterprises and they weren't able to hire me right away or even bring me out for an interview, but eventually I got out there for an interview and got hired. That's how I ended up coming out to Chicago.

C.M.: What did you in Kentucky shortly before moving to Chicago?

W.S.: I worked for the Army Materiel Command.

C.M.: What year was that?

W.S.: That would've been 1971. I had taken the civil service test because I wanted to work at the U.S. Parks Service Graphics Division which had a beautiful new building. They had just opened up in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. And I had interviewed there and really wanted to work there. And in preparation for that I had to take a civil service test. So the Park Service were hiring people who had a lot more experience than I had, certainly, but I had taken the civil service test and I was offered a job working in Ft Knox, Kentucky for the Army Materiel Command. They had a magazine telling people how to take care of their radios and their tanks and helicopters and anything else. I didn't necessarily want to work for the Army. I wasn't that political, but I really wanted a job and I

really needed to—It's not that I needed to move out of the house, I just—It was time to grow up and move on. So I was offered a job and it just seemed like a chance to go do something and so I moved to Radcliffe, Kentucky and took this job at Ft. Knox. It was a very interesting life experience. [Laughter] Not a great job, but as far as moving out of the house, moving somewhere where I knew absolutely no one and learning to survive, and I was very shy and having to get to know people, having to move out of myself a little bit, was a very invaluable life experience.

C.M.: And then shortly after that you went from Kentucky—

W.S. and C.M.: —to Chicago.

C.M.: And that was in 1972?

W.S.: Right.

C.M.: And you moved there because the job opportunity is what originally what brought you to Chicago?

W.S.: Yes. Yes.

C.M.: Alright. And was there ever a time—and I think this was in college with your college boyfriend—where you almost married? Or, why didn't you?

W.S.: Why didn't I marry my college boyfriend? He had real control issues. I had a friendship with this young man and he seemed to have a good sense of humor and he was a nice enough guy, but when we started dating it was pretty clear he had some serious control issues. I think there were several things. First of all, he made it very clear that his work was important and my work was less important. He would get irritated at me if I didn't stop what I was doing in the middle of class and come over and schmooze with him a little bit because girlfriends were supposed to do that; whereas, I was working on my own work and I was focused. He certainly wasn't coming over and interrupting his work to talk to me, but he felt that I should interrupt my work to go talk to him. I remember visiting his house, he lived with his parents, he had this studio in the basement. It was very nice. I remember looking around the studio and I picked up, I think was a bottle of ink, I looked at it and I put it back down and I didn't put it back down in exactly the same spot he had had it and he reached right over—he glared at me—then reached right over and moved it back about a half an inch or an inch. And I realized that he had some real problems and that this was not going to be my life partner. That didn't really go anywhere. I think I broke up with him not too long after that. But he really had some other control issues. He had a very, very strict idea of what he thought girlfriends were supposed to do. And I wasn't living up to my role there and I just decided it wasn't worth living up to it so that was the end of that.

C.M.: Who else did you fall in love with?

W.S.: Let me see. I dated a number of people. The last person with whom I was serious with was a gentleman that I worked with who had been recently divorced. And I realized after dating him for a while that he had too many issues from the divorce. He wasn't quite over the divorce yet. It might've worked out in another time but that was definitely, it was the wrong time. He just

wasn't—It wasn't like he wasn't ready to commit, I think he was just a little lost, and it was not going to be a good time. But he liked opera and I liked opera. We had a lot in common, but it just was the wrong time I think.

C.M.: You told me in our first meeting, and it's stuck with me, "The women's movement meant everything to me."

W.S.: Yes. (Laughter)

C.M.: I like that. Could you describe that feeling to me again?

W.S.: Oh, yes. The first time I went to—Well, actually when I found out about the Chicago chapter of the National Organization for Women was the day I started working at Field Enterprises. I met Mary-Ann Lupa, who was the President of the Chapter at that time. She had been hired about two weeks before I had. And actually, I booted her out of my office, so to speak, she had been working in the office I was to have and had to move somewhere else. But we did get to talking and I went with her to a meeting. Let's see, I came in February, I think I went to my first meeting of Chicago NOW in March and then I joined in April.

C.M.: March.

W.S.: And what struck me was just the intelligence and professionalism and wonderful talent of this group of women who just all impressed me so much; bowled me over quite a bit, actually. When you don't see a lot of women in leadership in your job or in other parts of your life and then walk into a room and just see all these women getting all this work done and speaking so forcefully about issues and so passionately about issues and trying to do something about those issues, that's why I say it happened to me because that really bowled me over. I was completely enchanted with the possibilities.

C.M.: What were the issues that, from your first few experiences with NOW, that really resonated with you? Or things that they were bringing up in the meetings?

W.S.: Mostly employment. There was the Equal Rights Amendment had just been passed in Congress. So that whole campaign was just beginning. I don't remember if it was passed in March or February, but it was right then. It was that year.

C.M.: Yes, it was 1972.

W.S.: Yes, 1972. So that was an immediate issue. Also, everyone was very excited and very up about the possibility. I don't think anyone knew how incredibly difficult the fight was going to be. But right at that moment we were very, very excited. There were some health issues. For me, it was mostly the employment possibilities. I remember there were some women who had come to the meeting to talk about not being able to get alimony—not alimony—but child support. There were a number of women who were having a great deal of trouble getting child support and they were trying to get the courts to be more active with giving child support. Now that wasn't an issue that hit me, but the idea that someone, that the group could do something about something like that was very, very appealing.

C.M.: How did the participation with the movement impact your transition into Chicago?

W.S.: Oh, it was wonderful. It was like finding a family in a lot of ways. Because I knew no one. It was a wonderful way to meet people and to meet people that believe in things that I believed in, even if I didn't quite know how to express them. I realize that these were things I believed in. And, as I said, smart people, educated women—One of the things I found most appealing about NOW was that there were a lot of women that were terribly underused in their jobs and were taking advantage of these opportunities to learn new skills that, for many of them, were able to use on their jobs. That was true for me, too. My job included making presentations and I learned a great deal about standing up in front of groups by participating in NOW and that was very, very valuable for me. Just even getting the confidence to stand up and talk in front of a group or hearing your voice over a microphone which can be very startling the first time you do that and then getting used to that, getting to enjoy, not say enjoy the power of it, but getting comfortable to be able to do that. Especially if you're shy, like I was. It was wonderful. It was a great training.

C.M.: Well, so you joined NOW in April of 1972 and within a year you were elected Vice President.

W.S.: That's true.

C.M.: That was quite a change.

W.S.: It was quite a change. Partly because I was willing to do it, but also because I was encouraged to do so by some very strong ladies that I appreciated and that I respected and I was glad that they saw the possibilities in me.

C.M.: What was the election process like? What was it within the organization? Was the Vice President elected every year or?

W.S.: They tried to keep a group of officers for two years. The idea I think, as is in many cases, is that the Vice President would eventually be the President. Let me see now. I joined in '72—I actually—Yeah, I was elected in '73 and I served two years as Vice President and then got elected President in '75. So yeah, that was pretty quick. It was really a year and a half because I joined in April and got elected in September so that was really a year and a half. But at that point I really feel like I had grown tremendously just as a person and experiencing these different areas and even being willing to take on something like this. It's not something I would have ever dreamed of doing when I was first walked into that meeting room.

C.M.: Was there any relationship with the Chicago NOW organization and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union?

W.S.: No. We knew of each other but it was a different focus.

C.M.: Yeah, okay. What was Women Employed?

W.S.: Women Employed was a group started by a couple of women working out of the University of Chicago, I think, who wanted to put together an organization that focused strictly on

employment issues for women. That started in '73 and a lot of us from NOW, and I think from other areas, were really supportive of them in getting started. Because we had people who were used to doing speaking in front of crowds or handing out leaflets or picketing or whatever was needed. And we also just had a group of women who were willing to work on the issue and support the issue. So we really did try to work with them to help support them to get that effort of the ground, and it's hitting it's fortieth? Yeah, it's fortieth anniversary this year.

C.M.: So describe your role in how Women Employed was able to grow.

W.S.: I actually ended up speaking at a couple of the public meetings. They were looking for people who actually worked in the Loop and I was standing there when someone pointed at me and said, "Don't you work in the Loop? Why don't you do this?" [Laughter] "Well, okay." So I ended being a spokesperson for at least one or two of the meetings. And, in fact, the first meeting that we had with the Chicago Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I was one of the spokespeople with another lady and we did our little tag team and exacted a promise from this gentleman to have a public meeting. I remember he signed something and tucked it under his pile of papers and my job was to reach over and pull it out which I did. [Laughter] That was fun. Then later when we had the public meeting I had a role in speaking. I wasn't as interested in keeping going with Women Employed even though I certainly supported them for years and would still go to a lot of their events. I really enjoyed my role in NOW and felt that that's where I wanted to be.

C.M.: Right. And at one point in 1973 you said World Book, your employer, had at some point four women from NOW and one from Women Employed all working for them.

W.S.: Well they had—you have the wrong amount here—

C.M.: Oh, sorry.

W.S.: —It had the President of the Chicago chapter of NOW, the Vice President of the Chicago chapter of NOW, that was me, the former President of the Chicago chapter of NOW, and the chair of Women Employed all working there at the same time.

C.M.: How did that impact your work environment?

W.S.: Well it made them very nervous I think. It's hard to say in some ways because this was a group of very educated people and even though everyone that was in a position of authority was male, they knew that they had to support this movement. I don't think it made them comfortable, but I think they knew they had to tough it out. They knew that this was not something that was going to go away and they had four very good workers here. They certainly weren't going to get rid of us. But I think it made them nervous. And yet, there were some changes that happened. I know that in our area the senior art director started having meetings with representatives of the department to talk about issues and things that needed to get done. I don't think he would have ever done that if there hadn't been an atmosphere of change in the department. He certainly didn't like it, but he tried. [Laughter]

C.M.: Describe to me again the story of having to tell an art director, I don't know if this was the same art director—

W.S.: Same one.

C.M.: —Same art director to take down a poster and you were elected.

W.S.: I was elected. He thought he was very funny and he put up a poster in his office. It was a fairly common anti-women's movement poster, depending on how you looked at it. I mean, yeah I guess you could've looked at it and could've been like, "Yeah, that's really funny" and then let it go, but it was a statue of a young woman in a mini skirt—not a statue, a painting of a young woman in a mini skirt—standing at a urinal with two others guys on either side of her. Actually, it wasn't a painting, it was a photograph, but I had seen it in a number of places. Well, he put this up in his office and the women in the office were all offended and not just ones who were overt feminists or would have even classified themselves as feminist, they just found it offensive. And as part of the art department representatives to this group, I got elected with going into his office and telling him that we, the women, were offended and ask him to take it down. Well, he had a king sized fit. Ripped it off the wall, walked into my office and tried to stuff it into my trash can and I wouldn't let him put it in there. I don't know what happened to it, but he was very, very angry because he thought he was being funny. He thought we just felt we didn't have any sense of humor and he—I think he disbanded those meetings soon after that. It was too bad, because it was nice having the discussions, but as long as he wasn't challenged. I don't think it ever really sunk into him what was offensive about the poster. But the women could have all told him it was.

C.M.: How did that make you feel to be put, or elected, to sort of operate within that dynamic or to have to be the front runner to deal with it?

W.S.: Well, I think I felt pretty proud that people had faith in me that I would do it, and that I could do it, so even though it made me very nervous, because this guy was, he was my boss's boss. So that part made me very nervous, but I felt that I had a lot of support. At that point, I don't think it ever occurred to me that he might fire me. I don't think that anyone could say, "Could put that down," as a firing offense. I knew that he had quite a temper and there would be some display of that. I managed to weather it. I was proud to be asked, even if it made me very nervous.

C.M.: And back to NOW, could you describe to me the Ad Shamrock Committee and the St. Patrick's Day of 1973? Were you a part of that?

W.S.: The St. Patrick's Day—Yes, the Chicago Irish Feminists for the Equal Rights Amendment was actually the brainchild of a wonderfully creative lady named **Casey Kelly**, who was also the author of a great deal of the "Feminist Follies." She was just a wonderful playwright, she could write songs. She is extremely creative and Irish. She came up with the idea of us marching in the St. Patrick's Day parade as the Chicago Irish Feminists and she put together a banner and got the permit because you have to have the permit. Actually, she even did some research to find out that Richard Daley, this is the father, Richard I, his mother had been a suffragette and had marched in suffragette marches. So we had several signs referring to the mayor and his mother being a suffragette and had our banner, and got our, "ERA YES" signs and for several years marched in the parade and we had a wonderful time. Casey's really one of those wonderful women that has always amazed me with the range of her creativity and the fact that she was able to use it for the women's movement is wonderful. I mean, I don't know that she would have had a chance to do put together plays—I mean, she written plays

and musicals since then—but, certainly we were her testing ground for a lot of material. It was just a great opportunity for her to get to do her own creativity, too.

C.M.: When was the Feminist Follies? Do you remember what year that started?

W.S.: No. I'm trying to think. We had—

C.M.: Should we get a Post-it? [Laughter]

W.S.: Well, no. I wish I did. What is this? Is there a year on this thing? I think this was—Okay, so this was '73, '74. Probably 1975. Every year we celebrated August 26th, because that's the anniversary of the date that women got the right to vote. So August 26th was our big fundraiser and a big event. I think that would've been '75. And it was a lot of fun. Just some fun skits, some songs, got together a little chorus. We just had so much fun doing so much of this work.

C.M.: Where were they held?

W.S.: That first one was in a church. I think the next two were actually at Sauers Restaurant which is on the south side. I don't think Sauers is there anymore. Wonderful old German restaurant. But it had a little stage and so we would have the event there. It was just it was just a lot of fun. It was just a group of ladies having a really good time. And men, too. We had some wonderful men who were members of the chapter and very, very good sports with a lot of creative material that covered the church, the ERA, the legislature, the governor, the mayor, just anything going on in your life; general attitudes about women. There was a lot of material out there and we had a lot of fun with it.

C.M.: Why do you think those [Feminist Follies] were important too as opposed to just rallies, and so on?

W.S.: Well for one thing they helped us raise some money, which was always important. But I think it's also important to always have a good time. I think that we were a lot of clever people and we needed to laugh at ourselves and sometimes the situations you're in, sometimes you can't believe that what people say or what people's attitudes are. You find it a bit unbelievable. So sometimes it helps to just make fun it or just to point out the absurdity of it. A lot of the times you make some of your better points and get your message across a lot more directly if you're singing it or making a joke out of it. Sometimes it just really points out the absurdity of some of the arguments that were against some of the issues we were trying to promote.

C.M.: How many years did the Chicago NOW Chapter do that?

W.S.: At least three. It might've been four. Right now it's all starting to blend together. Yeah.

C.M.: Describe to me the campaign against Sears which I think the focus really began in 1974. Tell me about that and the discredit card.

W.S.: We were looking at the problem of discrimination in hiring and employment for women in retail in general. And the reason that NOW focused on Sears is that it was a national company and that the problems, the discrimination we were finding was national as well. It was not so much

hiring, although there were other issues like credit. Credit was a big one. But the hiring issues were often as simple as having buyers' assistants and assistant buyers, and one would be male and one would be female, and whatever was the male category was paid higher. They were doing basically the same work, but they got away with paying the women less because they said it was a different title but it's the same job. I know Sears wasn't the only one doing it, but still they were a national company and there were NOW chapters nationwide. So it made sense to go after one of the biggest offenders when you could point out that the problem was really nationwide. There were two specific demonstrations that I remember especially because I got to do some things for them. One was the Christmas time rally that dealt with credit where we put together the discredit card and we were giving to a Mr. Lou Hall who I think was the regional credit manager and just because women were having trouble getting credit in their own name at Sears. And on a December Saturday we had one of our members dressed up as Ebenezer Scrooge, another one dressed up as Ms. Claus and the Chapter presented this discredit card which I had put together to Mr. Hall who of course wasn't there so Ebenezer Scrooge was there to accept it on his behalf. And we had a great time with that and I think got some very good attention because we had a lot of Christmas shoppers around, especially going into Sears. And this was when the Sears was down on State Street. It's in a different building now. This one was further south in the Loop. But it was a very, very busy Saturday in December and that was fun. And I think we got a lot of good attention. I mean, we did several other actions having to deal with the credit issue but that was the most fun. The other action that we did that I was really involved in making the props for was the annual meeting of stockholders, which was at Prudential Plaza. I think that was in 1975 and we had been leaked the hiring statistics for Sears. I had a committee, but this was my design. I built a seven-foot model of the Sears tower, painted it black, and we painted the statistics in white on each side of the tower, put it on a little red wagon because I don't think we had anything else to carry it in and we picketed the front of the Prudential building and go some wonderful press. In fact we were on the national news the next morning. We were just thrilled. And yeah, we were singing and going around and going around in circles and we were very, very pleased with the press. We were very, very pleased with the kind of attention we did and we were very pleased with the support from people who were just walking by on the street. So that's a great memory.

C.M.: I can't remember if these photos were— [shows Wilma copied photos of events just recalled] But there's Ms. Claus.

W.S.: Oh, yes.

C.M.: And this is **Eleanor Protas**?

W.S.: Oh, yes. Yes. We did have the bank action. That was August 26th. I think that was the one where we went into the bank and we were trying to open up accounts, and then somehow—Well, that one was a little confusing but then somewhere it was announced that they weren't giving credit to women in their own name and so we all just said, "No we won't have it," and we stomped out and had a rally outside. I think the discredit card was a little more direct of an action.

C.M.: Well later in 1977 there was the, more of a national women's meeting in Houston, for the Houston women's conference. How did you feel Chicago—Where was your participation in that, if any? And how do think Chicago was impacted by that.

W.S.: I didn't get to go to it. I don't remember why I wasn't. I think there was something at work that I couldn't go. It's funny at that time you know there's reasons you can't do things, and then later on you remember the thing but not what kept you from going, so I don't remember what. I think the Chicago chapter of NOW had a good representation. I think there was also good representation from other NOW chapters of Illinois. I don't know what impact it had. I think just the fact that it was pretty amazing. I am sorry I didn't get to go. I think it would have been wonderful.

C.M.: Well that was also—So in 1977, the same year of the conference, is when you became the Illinois NOW chapter President.

W.S.: Right. I'm trying to remember when that happened. I think that was actually from 1976 to 1977. It was just one year. 1976 was when we had the big rally in Illinois.

C.M.: Springfield.

W.S.: The rally for Equal Rights in May of 1976, and that took a lot of our effort that year was getting ready for that. We organized a lot of buses going down to Springfield and that was a wonderful experience, just getting off that bus and getting into this huge sea of people just headed for the Capitol was very moving and very, very exciting.

C.M.: And by then had there been a lot more NOW chapters opening up in various—

W.S.: There had been chapters opening up in Illinois I think the late '60s.

C.M.: Okay.

W.S.: There were a number of them in the suburbs. There were a lot down state. And the state organization would meet once a month just to check in and see what was going on, whatever everyone was doing, and to try to organize an effort like this, this rally. This also had a lot of national NOW involvement. There were a train of people came from the East Coast and I remember standing in the train station with a couple of other people down on the platform back when you could just stand on the platform and wait for people. And in comes this train with "ERA YES" across the front of the train that was pretty amazing. I don't know how they managed that but it was pretty amazing. People started pouring off the train and then a lot of the effort that was made was getting them housed and then getting them bused down to Springfield. That was thrilling. That was I think the first time there had been a national rally of this sort aimed for the Equal Rights Amendment that had people coming from all over the country.

C.M.: And so you were not only organizing a lot of this with them, but also creating some of the graphics for—

W.S.: I did not get to create this.

C.M.: Oh, okay.

W.S.: No. We had someone else did this. I love this, though. Actually there's a great poster that goes with that, too. But no we had found a lot of young artists who were ready to start designing things and—I can't remember her name—but no we had a lot of assistance from a lot of people. And people really worked very, very hard putting that together. But that was really more of a national and state effort, that was a group whose only focus was working to get the ERA passed. So we were just a part of that.

C.M.: What were some of the differences between, especially having spent almost equal time then, with the Chicago NOW chapter and the Illinois chapter? What were some of the differences between the two?

W.S.: I loved Chicago NOW. Chicago NOW was my home and there was some friction between the Chicago chapter and the State organization. I think that is not unusual for organizations in general. Especially if you're looking at down state, up state kind of thing. We were the oldest chapter in the state. We had the greatest number of members. We had the greatest number of resources. You have people, you're going to have the money to do things. And, I think there was some friction. In a way I'm somewhat amazed I got elected, but I don't think that anyone else ran just because I was from Chicago and I think that at some point there was some distrust of Chicago hogging all the glory or making all the decisions, or whatever. There were a lot of talented women out there who were doing some very good things. It took a while to get comfortable working together. I actually had a very good group of officers from downstate and from the suburbs, but after a year it was clear to me that this was not probably the best place for me to be. So I only served a year and then I went back to working in the Chicago chapter.

C.M.: What were some of the negative aspects of the women's movement conventions or organizing?

W.S.: Negative aspects. Well, there unfortunately were some. I think that what we experienced, especially with trying to get the ERA passed in Illinois, and I think other states that had problems getting the ERA passed, is that women from other states where it had been easy had no concept of what we were up against politically and I think that in general there is a prejudice that's got the East coast and the West coast as being more advanced, or more, politically astute and that the rest of us in the middle are just not quite caught up to them which I think that is terribly untrue. I think our chapter was very politically sophisticated. And I don't mean electoral politics, I mean just understanding the workings of the organization and what that meant. But the fact that we could not get the ERA passed was a big frustration for everyone. And at some point, when you can't get your enemies out there to move, sometimes you go start blaming each other. And I think that there was a lot of blame and it wasn't just for Illinois, it wasn't just for us. It was for I think any state that found themselves in that position. But what had happened was that the ERA passed quickly in states that were more liberal. And by the time some of the more conservative states got around to dealing with it there was a great deal more of opposition that had risen. I mean we had very, very strong opposition from Phyllis Schlafly and her group down in Alton. They were very, very well financed. There was a great deal of opposition from the Mormon Church. There were a lot of places, again all very well financed. We found ourselves up against more formidable enemies. We came extremely close to passing the ERA in Illinois many times but never with quite enough. Sometimes it was somebody who was really pro the bill, got in a snit that day and their feelings got hurt over something else. A lot of it was just politics. And we often fell victim to that. A lot of that came

together in the conventions with—We were trying to elect officers for national conventions. And the first couple of conventions I went to were very polite. They were early. We got to a convention in Philadelphia and that really was—I was going to say it fell apart—but I think that there was just a great deal of opposition to any of our candidates, to any of our issues. To a certain extent the Sears campaign was hurt by that because a lot of politics got in the way. There were people who wanted these offices because they could see the national implication of it. They wanted a national role maybe as a stepping stone to something else, maybe they just wanted to run NOW. But it got really nasty, much more than I thought it would have. And a lot of it was just because of the frustration of things just not getting done and not being able to move along which was very, very sad I think. But especially for someone who was still very new to all of this it was very discouraging, and I was going to say frightening, but if you really love your organization and you want it to keep going that kind of thing can be frightening. Especially when you don't understand the level of anger that's coming out. So that was a big disappointment. Eventually things settled down and the rally for instance, the rally for Equal Rights in Illinois really did help to focus people's attention back to where it needed to be which was let's get back to the issue and not fuss at each other. And that did help. I think that really helped to move the organization ahead. But you know that kind of opposition came and went and that kind of animosity came and went. It is a big shame because it got in the way of getting work done.

C.M.: Do you feel that there could have been anything done differently by certain organizations, perhaps by organizations that were really well known nationally. Or do you feel that because there were so many avenues that it conflicted with a greater cause?

W.S.: I'm sorry. I'm not sure what you mean?

C.M.: Well the organizations—More in reference to the ERA, do you feel like because of other organizations maybe trying to work with each other, do you feel like things could have been done differently that would have made the ERA successful?

W.S.: I keep thinking that if it would have just passed faster perhaps it would've worked. Because I think that's really what happened with a lot of the states, the East coast states. I mean after a while there were some moves to undo the ERA in those states.

C.M.: To undo the ratification?

W.S.: Yes, to de-ratify and that's because in those states the opposition had finally gotten itself together and there were definitely moves to do that. And I think that was pretty educational to those folks who thought it was an easy thing. We all thought it was a no brainer. How could anyone fight this? I think that's one thing, is people might be more cynical and more aware of the possibility of someone not seeing it as obvious as you do. I really think it was a surprise to us. The amount of opposition was a real shock. Usually for some really stupid reasons but those stupid reasons really seemed to resonate with an awful lot of Conservatives and as I said they had an awful lot of money. Certainly the Conservatives, the Anti's, had a lot more money than we did. So I don't know what would have made it easier. I just know that there were some missed chances where we came within just a couple of votes. Somebody didn't show up that day or they were mad about something else or—and you think that there's going to be plenty of time. That's seven years to ratify, "Surely we're

going to get it done in seven years." Then we got an extension, "Surely we'll get it done with the extension." And it just got to be harder and harder.

C.M.: Did you participate in the women's—Sorry, the 1978 ERA Extension March that was in Chicago?

W.S.: I went to the one in Chicago. I didn't get to the one in D.C. There was one in D.C.

C.M.: Tell me about your involvement with the Loop Center YWCA.

W.S.: I was on the board of the Y, this was after I left the position as the President of the State NOW organization. The Loop Center Y was very supportive to women's organizations in Chicago and really served as a home for a great number of organizations. Women Employed met there, Chicago NOW certainly met there, several rape crisis centers and other groups that just didn't have a home used it as our meeting place for years. And I got the opportunity to serve on the board and eventually got the opportunity to serve as the President of the board for about a year and a half. And very much enjoyed. It was a great group of people. Again, a very impressive group of ladies.

C.M.: So when did you leave the Chicago—I'm sorry—the Illinois Chapter? Because you did return to Chicago NOW in 1980?

W.S.: I think it was '81.

C.M.: '81.

W.S.: Memory is not what it is. [Laughter]

C.M.: The years don't even have to be accurate, I was just—

W.S.: Early '80s. early '80s. A friend of mine had become the President of the chapter and she asked me if I would consider coming back and serving on the board with her. So I was her Secretary. I just did it for a year, but it was a great year and I enjoyed working with her. And that was the end, the real end, of the ERA push. So I was glad to get back and do it.

C.M.: Yeah. And that was 1981 and the extension ended in 1982. How did you feel when it failed after the extension?

W.S.: So disappointed. It was so sad. On one hand you could see that some gains were being made without it and that a number of things that we'd been warned were going to happen if the ERA passed were happening anyway, there being more women in the military for instance and women—well I don't remember the biggest hassle. You could see the changes were coming and some of the changes we wanted. But still we were without that guarantee in the Constitution and I think we were all very, very disappointed. I think it was difficult to keep an involvement, for me, in the women's movement after that, in that particular kind of role, mostly out of exhaustion I think.

C.M.: It had been ten years.

W.S.: Yeah. So it's hard to keep up the momentum and keep going to meetings and to keep going towards a goal, and then to have it just end and not have success was very, very hard. I think on the NOW chapter and on women activists in the State in general.

C.M.: Why did you decide to remain living in Chicago?

W.S.: I had friends. Most of my really good close friends I have come to me through NOW or through work. And these folks are really part of my family. I love Chicago. I originally planned to work my West. I was going to spend a few more years in Chicago, then maybe Denver, then maybe San Francisco. I hit Chicago and found NOW and found all these wonderful people and I really loved my job and I settled in. I didn't want to go. So I'm very, very lucky to have found a place that has welcomed me so much and served me so well.

C.M.: How did you get involved with the Woman Made Gallery?

W.S.: I had heard about Woman Made—I had a friend who also served with me on the board of Chicago NOW back in the early '80s who was on the board of Woman Made and I was talking to her about it and she invited me to come and see it and see if I would like to join the board. And I love the gallery. I love the whole idea of it and the fact that it was there to support women artists and offer opportunities for women to exhibit art, offer these opportunities to women who might not have one otherwise or would have a difficult time to find a space. I just found it a really extremely positive place for women and something I wanted to be a part of so I joined the board.

C.M.: Wonderful. Why do you feel like—or how do you feel that women, particularly in the '70s during the movement, women in the arts impacted the movement? Perhaps I should rephrase that. [Laughter] I could already see that I was going— I kind of went backwards a little bit. How do you feel about the contribution of art to the women's movement like the graphic art that you did or the 7ft Sears tower? Do you feel that it helped impact it further?

W.S.: Oh, yes. I think so. I think that anytime you can make something visual and have an image that sticks to someone's mind, tied to an issue or with a particular point you're trying to make, I think it makes it a stronger point, it makes it more valuable. I think in general, not just the kind of thing we did but art done by the Women's Graphics Collective, of the Women's Liberation Union, gave women an expression that they hadn't had before. And that was extremely valuable to us and that was very welcome. It was something that we really needed.

C.M.: And the friend from the Woman Made Gallery, was that something you two thought about, too, in terms of how you approached the gallery? Do you feel that it was important for women to be better represented in the art world?

W.S.: Absolutely. As an artist and just as a supporter of the arts you want any artist to be able to show their work, be able to create and if you feel that women are not being given the same opportunities as men, or even in a city like this if it's difficult to find the avenues, hard to get started, a place that's going to give you not just an opportunity to show work, but help you put together your portfolio, help you to get critique of your work, help you become a better artist, help you become a professional artist which Woman Made does, I think is just invaluable.

C.M.: How do you think that we can further keep opportunities alive for women in the art world?

W.S.: The art world? Oh. [Laughter] More galleries like Woman Made would be nice. Supporting galleries like Woman Made. I think that there were several more galleries that were really more women's galleries. I think that one of them has since gone under, but I think that more of them should spring up and there should be more opportunities for people to show their work. And supporting them. I mean these galleries are all non-profit. They need money. It's sad, but that's what it all comes down to. That organizations like this needs support and it's one thing to go and look at the art work and admire it and be glad to have an opportunity to see it, but a lot of these groups just need financial support. And it's been a rough four or five years.

C.M.: Yes. Tell me more about the organization, the Veteran Feminists of America.

W.S.: The VFA was—geez, I don't know how long ago it started—but it was started by a number of women. I think that most of them had belonged to NOW nationally who realized that they needed to preserve their experiences. And in the women's movement in the late '60s and the '70s for posterity and to encourage other women to become involved in the movement and to keep the goals and the achievements of the women's movement alive and healthy. They've been working towards that for a number of years. The group itself is growing. They're getting more supporters and certainly have had the opportunity to get out and be public with their history.

W.S.: Oh. You are going to edit this aren't you? [Laughter]

C.M.: Well. That's okay. Hey, I forgot to record in the first twenty minutes.

W.S.: I'm sorry. I need some water. [Laughter]

C.M.: That's ok! Have some water. These allergies—

C.M.: Do you want to take a minute and think about anything that maybe during your years as an activist that we haven't talked about? Anything that I haven't touched upon?

W.S.: I don't think so.

C.M.: Silence is allowed. [Laughter]

W.S.: Silence is allowed. Okay, good.

C.M.: Yes. It might even help during transcription.

W.S.: I think I've said a lot. I think I keep using the word "fun" a lot. And I actually think that that that has been an important part of it for me is that the women's movement was been exciting and enjoyable and often frustrating and sometimes could be very, very discouraging, too. But, I feel that with all the trials and tribulations, wonderful things got accomplished and feeling that one was a small part of all of that is a wonderful feeling. You can't point to one thing and say, "This is because of me," but you feel that you, as a part of that group, that your work, that your effort lead to some wonderful accomplishments. And that's just a wonderful feeling.

C.M.: Yeah. So you're still very close friends with some of the friends you made during those years. Have they only just grown? Has there been some that just kind of have kind of faded away?

W.S.: Oh, sure. There are some people I would love to see again. I have no idea where they are. The ones of whom I was closest are still the ones to whom I am close. I mean a number of folks just, physically moved. I mean, I just don't see them. Maybe I will see them once or twice. I'm always happy to see them, but the closest friends are still the ones I rely on and the people I know I could call in a pinch and the ones who I have some of the best laughs with, and the best memories.

C.M.: Who are they?

W.S.: One of them is **Mary-Ann Lupa**, who was the—

C.M.: —who brought you in.

W.S.: Who brought me in. She is probably my dearest friend. **Betty Vidina** who was the membership chair of Chicago NOW back when I started and is another one of my other dearest friends. Those are two ladies. I don't see **Darlene Stille** who was the first chair for Women Employed a lot. She's retired and moved to Michigan. But every once in a while I get to hear from her.

C.M.: That's wonderful that Mary-Ann brought you in.

W.S.: Yes. She did.

C.M.: She was really the first person you met in Chicago.

W.S.: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, she's just really just a staunch friend and a sister. Really a sister for forty years!

C.M.: What would you say your current status as an activist is?

W.S.: Semi retired? Well, I'm more involved in trying to support women in the arts. So my current activity is as a board member for a women's non-profit dance group. And it's not quite the same as time spent at Woman Made was, but it's still supporting work of women and I'm happy to be involved and keeping that effort going.

C.M.: What do you feel was distinctive about the Chicago women's movement during the 1970s? Or not just the '70s, really through the '80s.

W.S.: I think that they were really focused, very smart, definitely action oriented. I mean there were some areas that were more involved in lifestyle changes and societal changes, but Chicago NOW was already interested in action orientation of setting a goal and getting things done and I think that's what appealed about them to me. It wasn't just talking about theory, there were plenty of places that did consciousness raising and book discussions and things like that. This was a group that was working on issues and very focused on issues and I think that it was just the right place for

me. I think they were very good at what they did. I think that was in some ways unusual to keep that focus.

C.M.: How do you think that your action transformed you as an individual?

W.S.: Oh, I grew up a lot. I think that it helped to make be more sure of myself. It lead me to try things that I never would have thought to try before. Things like standing in front a group and talking or handing out leaflets on the street or going to public meetings and holding a microphone or making a statement or making a speech or even asking a question. All of that I think helped me to grow a great deal as a person. Having responsibility for a committee, learning how to pull together a group of volunteers which was very different from working with people. Working with volunteers is a totally different dynamic because nobody is getting paid to be there, they're there because they care about what they're doing and because they feel like they're getting something accomplished and it's a totally different responsibility. And that, too, was wonderful, wonderful experience. It was really a big growth experience for me.

C.M.: How do you feel your activism transformed your immediate community, or society at large? Some of these questions might sound repetitive and if you do feel you've answered it, you're welcome to—

W.S.: My immediate community?

C.M.: Yeah.

W.S.: I'm not sure how to answer that. Got to figure out what part of my immediate community other than my group at work. I do feel that activism made me better at work. I think that it was also a wonderful experience for my mother who has told me she was very proud of what I did. It was very different from her experience of course but she had seen how hard her mother's life was and really felt that what I was doing was going to help people like her mother down the road. And to have her give me that kind of response was really wonderful and really valuable to me.

C.M.: How did your father and your siblings respond to your active work?

W.S.: My father, he was very proud of it. My older brother was a little bit more conservative. I think he had no clue really what I was actually doing. I mean he knew but it wasn't anything that he was—it wasn't that he was uncomfortable, I just don't think it touched his life that much. My younger sister was mostly supportive. And I don't know that my younger brother knew what I was doing. Part of it was because I was so far away from any of them. They were all on the East Coast and I was in Chicago. So they weren't there to be a part of what I was doing.

C.M.: I crack sometimes, sorry. [Laughter] What regrets do you have from that time period?

W.S.: Regrets? I think that there are things I wish I had gone to like International Women's Year and some other events I wish I had taken part in. I may have chosen not to go because of work or something else going on in my life and you think backwards and say, "I really wish I would have been a part of that particular thing," that I would've liked that energy. I would've liked to have that experience. I probably have some other personal regrets but those are probably the only ones for the

movement. I think that I stopped major involvement when I needed to, when I just couldn't keep up that energy. I don't know that I regret not keeping going with it, but I'm sure there was a lot I could've done that I didn't think about. I just know that a time came and I couldn't keep doing it.

C.M.: If you're comfortable, what were some of your personal regrets?

W.S.: I may regret—I shouldn't say may regret—there are times that I regret that I didn't have children. But I never met anyone that I wanted to have children with and I wasn't one of those folks brave enough to go out and find someone and just have a child of my own, or adopt. So that's, in hindsight, that's a regret at this point. But it's not one that is overwhelming, it's just every once in a while I think it would be nice to have had children. You can't do everything and I seemed to be having a good time while I was working, but just that you reach a point and you think, "Well, I missed that particular opportunity." That's the probably the biggest.

C.M.: How has your definition of feminism changed over the years?

W.S.: I'm trying to think if it has, and I'm sure it has. I think—

C.M.: Or did you ever have a definition?

W.S.: I think that when I first started working at NOW I thought you were a feminist if you agreed with all these positions and attitudes of the women's movement. I don't know if I believed that you have to believe in the whole package, but I think that's where I was is that if it was feminist—you were supposed to buy into it. I think that issues have changed and that women have changed and society has changed. Well for one thing that society has incorporated a lot of these attitudes, and so I think feminism nowadays is a belief that women can do anything, and should be able to do anything they choose to do if they have the talent, without restriction put on them by governments, by religions, or by society. I think that we've come so far in what we think is what is a woman's right and her due and there are things, the restrictions, the roadblocks, that women faced back when I was twenty would be a total shock to a young woman now who is twenty, who could not believe that those restrictions were ever there. So maybe I have to come up with a new definition of what feminism is and I think that feminism is just the belief that a woman can do whatever she wishes, if she's got the talent.

I think that that's a pretty good definition right there. We all are restricted by where we're born, what opportunities there are for us. Everyone, all people are restricted by the talents with which we're born, the opportunities that happen to us that are right there for us. But the ability to go out and make new opportunities, get the education we can afford. We may be restricted by money, but there's no one saying you can't go to this school, or that there are limited number of women that we're going to let into this class. Or simply that, "Girls don't do that." Well, because nowadays girls do a lot. And I think that if we take feminism as just a belief in our own possibilities then that's a good definition.

C.M.: What are the biggest challenges women are still facing today?

W.S.: A lot of the challenges I see facing women worldwide, not just in this country, and a lot of them are the religious restrictions of certain countries where you see women being kept from

education or having some freedom of movement. There are a lot of places where those things exist. In this country, I think it's more a question of whether there's a danger of backsliding, of losing some of the rights that we've won for ourselves and I think it's more a danger that people are vigilant, that we can lose these rights. I don't see any danger of any of that right now, except perhaps the legal abortion issue. But sometimes things—societies backpedal. I think we just have to be vigilant that if there is a right and a privilege that we value, that we need to make sure that we can hold on to it.

C.M.: What are, off the top of your head, some great feminist leaders and role model today? Do we have any?

W.S.: Currently? I'm trying to remember who's still alive. [Laughter] Oh, terrible! **Gloria Steinem** is the only one I can think of because she is so prolific and is still writing and is still speaking. That's probably the only one that comes to mind right at the moment, I'm sure there are many others.

C.M.: That's okay. The last question is, why did you agree to do this interview?

W.S.: I'm just very encouraged that you were willing to make this effort to find out about what happened and to record and keep these memories and to note that we went through the efforts we went through to try to make life better for young women or for women of any age. But that's very encouraging to me that someone cares enough to ask.

C.M.: That's good. Any final words or thoughts?

W.S.: No. But thank you.

C.M.: Thank you.

[*End of recording.*]