Pat Widmayer
INTERVIEWER: Liz Homer
DATE: November 11-12, 2004

[TAPE 1]

Interviewer: **We are recording now, and this is on November 10th, isn't it? Or is it the 11th?**

P. Widmayer: Today is the 11th. November 11th of 19… Not 19 anymore—2004. Today is November 11, 2004 and it's Veterans Day.

Interviewer: **That's right. I'm Liz Homer and I am recording with Pat Widmayer and we are in Glen Arbor, Michigan. This begins with the first set of questions and it has to do with your personal biography, your background in any way that may have led you into being a feminist activist.**

P. Widmayer: Oh, it's just a simple question.

Interviewer: **Well, I wanted the basics first, like when you were born and where.**

P. Widmayer: Not a problem. My full name is Patricia Ramsdell Widmayer and today, on November 11, 2004, I have the opportunity to reflect on some of where I've been over the last sixty-one years. I was born during World War II in Buffalo, New York. My parents were Michiganians, and so immediately after the war they returned from the work that my father was doing during World War II, and I spent my early years in Sebewaing, Michigan until I was seven, and then in Berkley, Michigan, which is in suburban Detroit. Sebewaing, by the way, for those of you who don't know, is in the thumb of Michigan. I spent all of my school years in Berkley, Michigan in suburban Detroit, and there were a couple of things even during my high school that started, interestingly enough, to make me a feminist. When I was a teenager, my parents bought the local Dairy Queen in order to put us through college—my father was a teacher, also—and during that period my father paid me less than he paid my brother when we worked at the Dairy Queen because he claimed that I couldn't lift some of the same things that my brother could lift. And I protested and proved to him that I could lift those cans. They were large cans that [held the liquid ice cream mixture] that you had to put into what was called a hopper in the top to go down through the freezer machine, and I proved to him that I could lift those cans. It didn't make any difference. I still made ten cents less an hour than my brother. And so that was the beginning of equal pay for equal work, and "Hey, we're going to talk about this later, but…" And in addition to that, my brother was allowed to take time off after school during certain seasons because he was

playing sports, but when I wanted to take certain seasons off to be able to go be in the school play, it was not the same. I needed to work at the Dairy Queen. And so that was what first started settling in my mind.

When I got to Michigan State as an undergraduate—and soon after that actually Larry and I married in between our sophomore and junior years in college—that winter I read Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. This man who had only been married to me something like six months when I read *The Feminine Mystique* said, "Uh, oh, my life is never going to be the same." But, fortunately for both of us in our relationship, it was more that was interesting for him and we carried on and really started having a dialogue about some of these issues that related to equal partnerships, and so on. We had also spoken about that before we were married when I said I <u>am</u> going to be employed for the rest of my life and I will probably be going to graduate school, which we did. Our daughter was born spring break of our junior year, and we kept going, although many people at that point put enormous pressure on me to quit when our daughter was born. So issue No. 2 became, "Why are you still going to school when you got married and you have a child." Well, because I'd just gone through fifteen years of elementary school, high school, and university. I had only one more year to go. We aren't stopping now. And so I continued on to get my bachelor's degree.

Interviewer: In?

P. Widmayer: I got my bachelor's degree in political science.

Interviewer: Aah.

P. Widmayer: I then went for a very brief time to New York with my husband and daughter because Larry got a job with IBM in Poughkeepsie, New York. I taught high school for a couple of years and then we decided to come back to graduate school. Larry wanting to get an MBA, we returned to Michigan State and I said, "You aren't going without me. I'm going to school, too." I then enrolled in a Ph.D. program and completed my Ph.D. at Michigan State in 1971, and a couple things happened…

Interviewer: What was it in?

P. Widmayer: My Ph.D. is in education research. But during those years when we were in graduate school, came some more incidents that moved me toward even more radical activities. One was that I had a problem pregnancy and I could not get an abortion until they finally were able to determine that the fetus was no longer viable, and the time period was interminable. As far as we were concerned—both me and Larry—this was something that, okay, this one is not something that was meant to be. We need to terminate this pregnancy and go on, and what it took us to finally get the surgery after they were able to

determine that the fetus was no longer viable was wrenching to me. It may have been only eight weeks, but to me it was forever, and to my husband, too. At that same time, as I was starting to move toward finishing my graduate work and writing my thesis, I went to see the placement bureau at Michigan State to start to talking about how I was going to start moving into a professional program, and the person who was in charge of the area in which I was to speak to them in higher education and in a College of Education, he gave me a whole lot of ideas for where my husband ought to find a job, and then he was quite confident that I would find a job wherever my husband went. I could not get him to address me and think about my credentials and where I could go.

It was after I finished my graduate work and still had my thesis to write that we moved back to Detroit—in 1969. So the problem pregnancy was the spring of 1969. That was when the placement activity started also. And as I was writing my thesis, I read an article—a little piece in the Detroit Free Press probably—and it said that a group of women called Michigan NOW was meeting at the Episcopal Church. I think it's called Christ Episcopal on Jefferson Avenue, and I was sure that there were casts of thousands that were waiting for me as I went downtown because I said, "I have to go do this." Well, I arrived at Christ Episcopal that fateful evening and there were ten women around a round table, far fewer than I expected, but the rest is history, because the women around that table included Patricia Hill Burnett, Marj Jackson Levin, Joan Israel, Gerry Barrons. Those are the ones who come to mind first. I don't know that Shirley Munson was there until a little later, but it was a cluster of extraordinarily well-connected and savvy women. And they said, "Come along with us," and we just started pulling things together to be able to make the arguments that we thought it was timely to make in terms of the women's movement. This was in Detroit at a time that people even said, "You know, you're going to be molested if you go to Christ Church Episcopal," and I just said, "Okay, so I'll lock my car doors," and off we went. It was about that same time, too, that my daughter, who by that time was nearly six, was given this wonderful book that helped to also shape what I wanted to be able to do about media and education and where was my niche in this whole thing going to be. [Displays book] If you can't read it, it's called *What Girls Can Be*. There was a companion publication which I can't find any longer that was *What Boys Can Be*. It was given as a birthday gift to my daughter, and it says: [Reads from book]

What Girls Can Be

I may grow up to be a nurse with white uniforms to wear.
If I can be a stewardess, then I'll fly everywhere.

If I'm a ballerina, I will dance and twirl around.
And if I can own a candy shop, it will be the best in town.

I may become a model, who wears lots of pretty clothes.

Or a big star in the movies, and on special TV shows.

If I become a secretary, I'll type without mistakes.
And if I am an artist, I'll paint trees and clouds and lakes.

I may become a teacher in a nursery school someday,
Or maybe a singer and make records people play.

I might design dresses in the very latest style.
It might be nice to be a bride who walks down the aisle.

I may even be a housewife, someday when I am grown.
And I'd love to be a mother with some children of my own.

It was difficult to even respond to this. None of these choices were wrong, but all of these choices were limiting and only a part of what our lives could be. I spent a lot of years after that raising a daughter and then a son who could understand that the end of the *What Boys Can Be* book, instead of a mother or a housewife, said "an astronaut" or "President of the United States."

So, much of my life then was shaped around the placement incident, reproductive rights, what was going on in terms of my children—my first was born in 1964, my daughter, and my son in 1971—what they could be, what their opportunities were, and what my opportunities were going to be as well. I finished my Ph.D. just when my second child was born in 1971, and worked during those years in the early seventies with Michigan NOW. We did things like give awards for the best ads and the worst ads—in other words, the sexist ads. We sat down at the bar at what was Schweitzer's Restaurant down on the riverfront. Women were not supposed to sit at bars. They were prohibited at Schweitzer's, and they respectfully asked me to leave the bar. I respectfully said, "I'm not leaving." They promised me a drink—they'll buy the drinks—if we would leave. I said, "No, I'm waiting for friends," and camped out for about half an hour. And things like that kept happening. We went to conference in Chicago in the spring of 1970, and I remember so vividly going to the German restaurant on Adams Street—I will remember the name in a minute [Berghoff's]—where women also were not allowed at the bar, and a whole group of us from the NOW conference went there to say, "I think we need to have a different era and a different time." Leaping way ahead, I now live in Chicago and, of course, they welcome all people's dollars, as they do also now at the DAC—the Detroit Athletic Club. We walked through the front door one day, much to the consternation of the membership and the administration of the Detroit Athletic Club, because [at that time] women were only permitted to enter through a side door. And we were allowed to come in the side door, just as at the Union League in Chicago, which ultimately I became a member of as one of the women who were some of the first members of the Union League Club of Chicago.

So it was an era in which you went to side doors, you had limits on what your employment was supposed to be, your education—you can imagine in 1971 the shock to some people that I had children and a Ph.D.—and other things, too. When I went to Winkelman's, which was long a women's wear store in Detroit, and asked to be able to apply for a credit card, they would not give me one without my husband's signature. The banks the same way—you had a very difficult time putting your name on a checking account and getting credit. So I spent those years working with some awareness things. We also had an action at Michigan Bell where we met with the president of Michigan Bell, and then we have a front page picture actually from the newspaper—the Detroit paper—at that time with Joan Israel, Harriet Alpern, Mary Jo Walsh, myself, and Pat McElligatt, after we'd met with the Michigan Bell people, because there were many crafts [many higher paid, skilled positions at that time were classified as "crafts"] in which women could not be employed or promoted and our argument was, if they can qualify they should be able to move. Michigan Bell started making substantial changes in their employment and promotion policy not too long after that.

So there were many of those things in Detroit in which I was involved. But the real story seemed to me to be that everything went to Lansing. We could do all we wanted to do in Detroit in terms of actions and activities and awareness and demonstrations and parties and all sorts of things that we tried to do in order to raise the public understanding of what the issues were about, but it was law that made the difference, and campaigns, and political people. I had the good fortune, therefore, that in the spring of 1973 I was hired by the Speaker of the Michigan House to be his specialist in women's rights and in education, combining my Ph.D. program and my activity at that time.

Interviewer: Had you moved to Lansing then?

P. Widmayer: Yes, I did—in the spring of 1973. I made the move, along with my family, in order to accept the position in the Speaker's Office.

Interviewer: Let's back up a little bit to that early role in NOW. What was your role in NOW at that time? Do you remember things you did? For instance, the newsletter—

P. Widmayer: Yes, for Michigan NOW… Then it was called Michigan NOW and not Detroit NOW although almost everyone was in the Detroit area. [They didn't rename it Detroit NOW until later.] I was the secretary and the newsletter editor, and I put out a newsletter called *As We See It Now* every month out of my home office in Huntington Woods where I lived, and I also did, along with Marj Jackson Levin, a weekly television show on Channel 56 called *A Woman's Place*, and those were my primary roles. And through my work with the newsletter, of course, I was dabbling in lots of everything. If you look at some

of those early newsletters, you'll see the awards that I mentioned earlier about the "pats" and the "pans" of the advertising, and so on. And we put together, Harriet Alpern and I, a slide show that we would take around to anybody who would look at it, "Look at this. Look at this. See the difference in how they're portraying women." The liquor ads were particularly grievous. Some of the others were really very smart in terms of some of the ads, then and now.

Interviewer: So you were doing a lot of awareness?

P. Widmayer: Yes. Absolutely. It was mostly awareness. We would have, for example, an annual gathering on August the 26th, which is the anniversary of women's suffrage and the right to vote, at Kennedy Square, and the press would invariably come because we had some star speaker. It was that sort of thing, reminding people of all of what had been done and yet had not yet been done in terms of all of the different aspects of our lives. And this, of course, was the era also before Roe v. Wade. Roe v. Wade came down in January of '73, and so before that we were struggling mightily on the whole issue of illegal abortions also.

Interviewer: So you joined NOW and you were instantly enmeshed, is that it?

P. Widmayer: Well there were only ten of us. There were ten of us around the table so whoever had the time and particular expertise would pick up different pieces of it. I think I became the secretary and newsletter editor because I owned an IBM Selectric. Back then an IBM Selectric was the most sophisticated print machine that you could buy, and the reason I happened to own that machine was that my husband was employed by IBM and I got a discount on it. And that's the machine on which I wrote my doctoral thesis. It may sound funny now that we're into such sophisticated computers and so on, but its great strength was that you could do a backup and it would correct for you, and so you could do a lot of things by backing up and making corrections rather than the more complicated sorts of things. So I became the newsletter editor and, with my Ph.D., I was writing away.

Interviewer: Great. It sounds like your family was very supportive of you?

P. Widmayer: Extremely supportive.

Interviewer: And your parents as well?

P. Widmayer: No. Well, my parents were accepting. My husband was extraordinarily supportive. He would come home a number of times and say, "You know, some of the other guys at work want to know where I found you because they want somebody who is more a partner than what they have." So it was a difficult time for many women because some of them who had grown up with the same kind of expectations of what you were going to do… My biggest

expectation from my parents and grandparents was that I was going to grow up to chair charity balls—that if I belonged to the League of Women Voters and helped with the Women's Board at the Detroit Institute of Arts with some of their fundraising, I would have reached the pinnacle of society and the contribution that they hoped I would make. So, it was accepting but not terribly supportive for my parents, but for my husband, and ultimately my daughter who was carrying on with me all of that time, it was very supportive. When you asked about my parents though, my mother offered a toast the day that I came home after I finished the defense of my doctoral thesis, and the toast she offered was "To Patti. May she now stay home."

Interviewer: So how did you counteract that?

P. Widmayer: You know, it was my mother. And, bless her heart, she meant well. She just grew up in a different era, and I came about that time to accept that what they were is what they were and they were my mom and dad, and I went on to become what she should have been.

Interviewer: Is that where the impetus for your feminist activities came, do you think?

P. Widmayer: Because of what my mother wasn't?

Interviewer: Well, it's a way to analyze this.

P. Widmayer: Yes. Yes, it was. When I did the eulogy for my mother at her funeral, I said, "We are—my brother and sister and I (and I particularly)—what she would have been if some other doors had opened for her and what she then taught us in some ways subliminally to be, but she couldn't bring herself to step outside the box." I said, "I have three degrees, my brother has two and my sister has two. That's a little bit more than she expected of us, but in many ways always encouraged us"—until we got to the Ph.D., as I just mentioned. There was never a question that we were going to college. There was never a question that we would think independently. It's just that there were limits to how far we were supposed to go. My mother had a junior college degree and my father a bachelor's degree from Wayne State and was a teacher, so I came from a family that had been educated. And my mother always reminded me that she read *Les Miserable* in French when she was in junior college. Never taught us how to read French or expected us to learn it. So there was something that happened in terms of the depression and the post-war era that cut off her dreams, and therefore, "To Patti. May she now stay home. [Okay, you've gone far enough now.]" [Laughter]

Interviewer: Now you were going to talk about moving to Lansing in 1973.

P. Widmayer: Yes, in the spring of 1973. I learned from a couple of women who were working in Lansing about an opening that the Speaker of the House, who was

then William Ryan, had and they actually told me about the job because, as I understand it later, they wanted to be able to prove that he wouldn't hire a woman. And much to their consternation and surprise, he hired me. And I moved to Lansing that spring as the education and women's rights specialist, and immediately jumped into all of what I wanted to be able to learn because, remember, I said during those years when I was active with NOW in Detroit, all roads seemed to lead to legislation and campaigns and political decision making. So I learned how to count to fifty-six and twenty, which is the majority in the House and in the Senate, and I learned how to run campaigns, and I also learned how to do fundraising. And I just got into it with both feet.

In the House I was immediately responsible for helping to run the women's credit legislation—remember, I couldn't get it in my own name. And we started running it under the auspices of the Michigan Consumers Council, which was the real catalyst for moving the credit legislation, and the Speaker said, "This is your responsibility." The head of the Michigan Consumers Council, who helped to run it, was Linda Joy. She was, I don't know, twenty-five years old then and the head of the Consumers Council because I think somebody thought she would just go to make nice over there. And she crafted the legislation and we started moving it through.

There are many others who were involved with it as well, and I'm not sure that I can name them all, but succeeding that came a fascinating campaign that we began to get the secretary of state to allow us to choose the name we wanted on our driver's licenses. We couldn't use our maiden name as our middle name on our driver's licenses, or choose another combination of our names. It had to be your birth certificate first name, your birth certificate middle name, and your now legal last name. And so we did this really creative thing by sending cards to the secretary of state. We'd send him our valentine's cards saying, "Give us our name." We'd send him Easter cards saying, "Give us our name." We'd send him postcards for the Fourth of July, "Please give us our name," and he finally gave up. He was a man of another era who just hadn't been pressed on this whole thing, and he finally said, "Alright, alright," because he had the power to change that.

The most powerful thing during that period that we enacted, and it was an incredible coalition, was the new rape legislation. I think the most significant of the early seventies was the new rape legislation, coming out of a task force in Ann Arbor, as I recall, led by a woman named Jan BenDor who had this concept of shifting the responsibility, because rape law and case law to that point had been—if you were considered to be even the slightest "bad girl," then you probably brought it on yourself. And the whole emphasis was switched in this legislation which led the country in terms of making it so that your past history was not what was on trial, but the violence of the act itself. The signature on the legislation was [Governor] William Milliken's, but the responsibility was an extraordinary coalition led by the women out of Ann

Arbor and sponsored by a very conservative man who was a state senator from western Michigan who believed that women should be protected. His name was Gary—oh, dear—he deserves credit for this and I can't think of his name. His staff person who he assigned to it was Carol Living. He led it in the Senate and we—Bill Ryan and some of the others—led it in the House. Bill Milliken was extraordinarily supportive out of, of course, the governor's office, with that exceptional woman Helen Milliken, the First Lady, standing behind him. And the coalition managed to pull that all the way through and to become law in Michigan and a model across the country.

So it was an extraordinary period. All the way back to before I went to Lansing, I had the privilege of sitting in the chambers at the Michigan Senate and Michigan House when they ratified the ERA in 1972. It was a very quick and easy thing in Michigan, and then when I was in Lansing on the staff, I was asked to staff the [discussion of the] attempt in the House to later rescind Michigan's ratification of the ERA [which we opposed]. [The sponsors of recission] didn't get to first base [in committee], fortunately, and it was a privilege to do the staff work for that. Representative Daisy Elliott was the person who carried the responsibility for making sure that the ERA ratification in Michigan was not rescinded.

There were all kinds of different pieces to what was going on during that period for which I was the staff person. I also was doing work at the same time. What moves me over into education are things like Title IX and the adoption of Title IX by the U.S. Congress, which then needed to come through in terms of other actions in Michigan as well.

Interviewer: Being a staff person, what did that mean?

P. Widmayer: The Speaker of the House was extraordinarily powerful in Lansing, and what he did to maintain his control was have all the staff central so that there was a staff of twenty or thirty of us who worked directly for the Speaker of the House, and we took assignments through him and his chief of staff to do things for members of the Michigan House. Each of them only had one staff person of their own, which was their administrative assistant or secretary, unless they chaired a committee. If they chaired a committee, then they might have one or two more staff persons, but the general work of the House of Representatives and the staff work was all done through the Speaker's staff. And by virtue of getting all of the assignments passed through there, the Speaker then controlled not only the agenda, but all of the information that went in and out. So when I tell you that I did the staff work for the House Committee regarding rescission of the ERA, that was because the request came from Representative Elliott to have someone work on it with her and I was assigned.

Interviewer: Were there other feminists that you were working with that were staff people?

P. Widmayer: Modestly? Not of the same magnitude that I was committed to it. They usually passed all of that to me. There were some women who were very bright and very well credentialed who came into the staff as time went on and carried that feminist ideal into their other staff work, but I was really the only one who did the core work.

Interviewer: So constantly, from 1973 on, you were pioneering these positions in the legislature.

P. Widmayer: I was pioneering. I was. I was carrying the principal responsibility. That's why I said to you, I learned to count to fifty-six and twenty [which constitutes a majority in the Michigan House and the Michigan Senate], and what it took in order to get the background information written, and take it through the committee or subcommittee to the main committee and then to the floor and pass it over, and make sure you had sponsors in both houses and that you could move it from one to the other, and who your counterpart staff person was going to be in the Senate to help move it along as well. It was an incredible learning experience, because at the same time I was usually assigned during election season to help candidates on behalf of the Democratic Party, which was an interesting second piece to it, but also learning how to organize campaigns and how that whole process worked.

And then—outside the office—I also started doing fundraising for women candidates as my outside-the-office contribution. So you'll see in my portfolio this quiche and wine party for a woman who was running for state representative or local circuit court or something like that. My house became the salon for supporting women and progressive male candidates to get their campaigns started because I sponsored their fundraising activity. My husband loved it all and my children did as well. They thought that this was all just so fabulous that all these interesting people were coming through our house, so that where you might expect that they said, "We've been neglected. You haven't paid attention to us," they instead really thrived on it. To this day my children will say to anyone who wants to ask, "I knew Millie Jeffrey," or "I met Helen Milliken," or "I met [on the Republican side] Elly Peterson." It is something that enriched them and they understood it at the time, so it was a wonderful experience.

After the NOW convention in 1975, if I may move to the next phase of what I did... The NOW convention in 1975 was so divisive. Karen DeCrow won as president of National NOW. It was at that point that I said I cannot be a NOW member any longer and decided that it was time to start putting together another strategy. I had the joy just not too long ago of meeting the woman again whom Karen DeCrow defeated. Her name is Mary Lynn Myers and she is from the Dakotas.

Interviewer: Why did you think it was so bad that Karen DeCrow had won?

P. Widmayer: She really was much more interested in continuing the demonstrations and the real face to face confrontations, whereas it was my view that it was time for us to figure out—as I demonstrated by my work—to figure out how to work within the system—that it was far more important. And that she was perhaps doing some significant awareness activities, but I don't even think that Betty Friedan and some of the others who had been the women who took us there—I don't think even they were prepared to follow Karen DeCrow as president. She was just too outspoken, too confrontational, to really help us continue to move forward. Mary Lynn lost and I remember writing a letter to her saying, "Now what do we do?" And she wrote back and said, "Find other ways. Don't give up, but find other ways." And I was able to tell her the other day I found other ways. From that point forward, my goal was to help to be, if not the strategist, one of the key strategists in Lansing—the insider who passed the word, helped to organize, helped to raise money, did all of what we needed to do from an inside perspective—to pull coalitions together, to do the strategy work. Whereas before I'd come in with the credit, the rape legislation, the ERA, reproductive rights, in a way that really was following along from my National Organization for Women past and moving that along, in 1975 I started moving into, as I said, candidates and other things.

We did two things in that period. I left the Speaker's office and took a position for two years as the district staff director for our congressman and, at the same time, started working with a group of women to pull together what ultimately became the Woman's Assembly, as well as supporting, in the 1976 Democratic Convention, a couple of women for state education posts for Michigan State and the State Board of Education. And again, started learning how the convention process worked. So it was a shift—I think a significant one—in terms of what I was thinking about. So I didn't so much continue to funnel things through Michigan NOW and that organization, but worked to build the broader coalition.

Interviewer: And the coalition you were working with was mainly Lansing based?

P. Widmayer: No, it was statewide. But I guess you're right to ask the question, Liz. The coalition of women that I was working with were those who had a Lansing connection. So, the lobbyist for the League of Women Voters, the legislative chair for AAUW [American Association of University Women], the person who had been sent by Common Cause to speak on behalf of women's rights as well as other issues. So the coalition was extraordinarily broad. The Women's Caucus within the Democratic Party, the Women's Caucus which was very alive and viable at that time within the Republican Party, all of the other women who were coming to the table from the many organizations. So that by the time that we did the first Women's Assembly, which was 1977, I think, and we did an evening for the ERA to start raising money for other states to ratify, we had

a huge coalition of twenty to thirty organizations that would sit down at the drop of a hat. If you said, "We need to be together. Come see us now. We're meeting at [some place at some time]," everyone would gather and say, "Okay, what's the issue here? What's the principle? How can we move forward?" I know I consider that my greatest contribution was during that period when I helped to build the coalitions. The pictures and the legislation earlier were wonderful, but the real stuff was moving a whole coalition of women and men's organizations. UAW [United Auto Workers], for example, was fabulous about coming forward. They understood that women were part of their constituency and they better stay with them. Pulling all that together in a broad range of activities from, as I said, an evening for the ERA, which in the fall of '78 raised $25,000.00, which was a huge amount of money back then. We charged $25.00 a person to come to Orchestra Hall and then that money was funneled out to other states to help ratify.

The Women's Assembly—a two and a half day gathering in Lansing. There were nearly a thousand women at the Lansing Convention Center who came to learn about how to do legislation, how to run candidates—all of those kinds of things—and we organized it.

Too, there was the Unity Caucus, which in 1975 pulled together all of those same organizations at what was called the International Women's Year State Conference. And there were some people who were going to try to move it off into a more conservative agenda because there were one hundred and twenty-five women running for the Michigan delegation to go to the International Women's Year Conference. We had to choose twenty, I think. So we all got together, and we were called the Unity Caucus because, when the eleventh hour came and it was time to cast ballots, one representative from every organization rushed into a back room. We created a slate, we printed it out, and we passed it out. And those women—like when you always do a slate like that—everyone was trusting enough of this because this was such a broad coalition. Go for it! And all of them just won by huge numbers and became the Michigan delegation.

So it was that kind of organizing, coalition building, passing information from the inside out. I actually was charged with, by the Speaker at the same time, writing a newsletter—quite controversial—called *Capital Woman.* Under the auspices of the Michigan House of Representatives, we were passing out printed materials about what was going on, because it was all quite a mystery—this was before computers really got into it—what was in what committee, who had introduced what legislation, what might move, what might not, where everything was. You had to have a Ouija Board and then you were probably not going to have any success. And we were given the prerogative. And I say that clearly because if the Speaker of the House had not said, "Do it," you would not have put it in print and put it out there. But *Capital Woman*—we circulated it for four or five years. After I left the Speaker's office someone

else picked it up.

Interviewer: Didn't Daisy Elliott have something to do with that?

P. Widmayer: You know, as a matter of fact, that may have been the case. The Speaker asked Daisy Elliott to be the sponsor because she was very supportive and it needed a sponsor within the House. The Speaker—although he was all-powerful—he never did anything in his name. He always delegated the front to others. So that's the mid-eighties, and what we did then to pull all of this together.

Interviewer: So you mentioned some of your allies during all of this. Do you want to expand on that a little bit?

P. Widmayer: Well, Liz. You know, you were there for most of this, and at that time, as I recall, you were running the PEER Project [Project on Equal Education Rights] which also was piloted in Michigan and taken out to the rest of the country in terms of equality and education and things like the Title IX and many others, and it was an extraordinary coalition. And you know, I'm going to cheat a little. [Refers to document] There were women from organizations like the AAUW, which was a woman by the name of… Her first name was Betty and she was from South Haven. And if somebody will help me someday with documenting the rest of this… Sue Reynolds from Common Cause. Church Women United—I can't remember who that would have been but please know they were clearly there. The Democratic State Central Committee was Mildred Jeffrey and Dorothy Haener, who were also the UAW. The Federation of Republican Women's Clubs, which Helen Milliken brought into the circle, along with some others including Lavonne Bliesner who was on her staff, and ultimately a young woman by the name of Melinda Remer became the successor to the Republican banner. And of course Elly Peterson was always in the background. She was then co-chair of ERAmerica—Elly Peterson, who had been National Republican Committeewoman and had run for the U.S. Senate in Michigan in 1964. The League of Women Voters—a woman by the name of Liz Kumer from Ann Arbor was a lobbyist for the League during that period and brought them to the table. The AFL-CIO was always represented by Ann Shafer from Battle Creek. The Democratic Women's Caucus was Sue Jones who worked at that time in the secretary of state's office. The Michigan Women's Commission was Margaret Cooke who was head of the Women's Commission during that period, and there was someone who was the chair of the Women's Commission as well who was deeply involved. The whole Women's Commission was very supportive and if they weren't, Bill Milliken would have fixed it. The Michigan Women's Political Caucus—Pat Curran was one of the early organizers of the Michigan Women's Political Caucus. I played a role in the Michigan Women's Political Caucus later. We helped to revive it so that Mildred Jeffrey could run as the National Women's Political Caucus chair and carried the Michigan banner. The Michigan Women's Studies Association was Gladys Beckwith from Michigan State. NOW was

Joan Israel and Harriet Alpern [and Marj Jackson Levin]. And Pat Burnett could always be counted upon to appear for a cameo role and help us in some important way to move things forward. Look here—the UAW, the State Central Republican Committee—these are all the coalition for ERAmerica which also was the coalition for the Women's Assembly. The Women Lawyers Association of Michigan—Barbara Robb, I believe. Would she have been one of them? Women for the Survival of Agriculture in Michigan and Zonta International? You know, I must confess that I can't put a face with all of these, but the breadth of this list is quite extraordinary, and then, as I said, was part of the Unity Caucus and was then part of the Women's Assembly.

[Short break, then interview resumes]

There's just one more seminal activity that I think is important to mention during this period that set the stage for a couple decades of extraordinary success for women in Michigan before an unfortunate gubernatorial election kind of put a damper on the whole thing, and that was the formation of the National Women's Education Fund. Out of Washington, a core of women in the early seventies formed the National Women's Education Fund and they started holding, in different regions of the country, campaign techniques workshops. I had the privilege of attending the one in March of 1974 that outlined in all of these pages… [Displays material] We spent four days learning all the aspects of the campaign. It was something that I mentioned earlier but I think is extremely critical. A whole team of women from Michigan was sent there and it was everything from the media to canvassing to how you do scheduling in advance, fundraising—all of the different pieces that most of us had not really thought about. We had not learned before how to run campaigns, and the expert list of people who were the resource for that is a who's who of the organizers of the sixties and the changes that were happening in politics at that time and helped to change some in significant directions in both political parties. This was a bipartisan thing that they then turned into a whole spectrum of activities that were offered across the country in the name of the National Women's Education Fund. And I became a national workshop trainer for the National Women's Education Fund and continued to do that right through to 1985, and applied a lot of this as we went along to helping women organize their campaigns. And if you look at my portfolio, you'll see the many women who I helped to advise in terms of fundraising or in terms of media or in terms of canvassing. And this, combined with my one term serving as the staff director for then-Congressman Bob Carr in mid-Michigan, just was an extraordinary thing to be able to add to what I'd learned in terms of strategy, and so on, and continued then from there through what I described in the late-eighties to then become a consultant to many, many women across the country, and to also then do the Women's Assemblies through Two, Three and Four, none of which were identical, but adjusted to the different realities, and it was 1977, 1979, 1982, and 1985. And we continued that same coalition and continued to organize around legislative strategy first and then running

campaigns and then the broader issues of our society in terms of women. So, this National Women's Education Fund I wanted to be sure to raise, and also continue to give due credit to a team of women and a governor, and his successor as well, who gave us incredible support and cover for much of what we did.

There's this invitation [that is illustrative of the bipartisan coalition which reads], "Please join with the National Women's Political Caucus and the Michigan Women's Political Caucus, and local chapters, to meet and honor the Honorable Martha Griffiths, Elly Peterson, and Mildred Jeffrey, Saturday, October 2nd, 1982, in Greektown at Trapper's Alley." This was just as Martha Griffiths, who had introduced the ERA legislation and was it's principal sponsor as the congresswoman from Michigan, was about to be elected Lieutenant Governor of Michigan in the fall of 1982. Elly Peterson, who I mentioned earlier, was the Republican National Committeewoman and 1964 candidate for Senate. And Mildred Jeffrey who stands above, or at least a companion to them, from the United Auto Workers, and all the other things that Millie did as chair of the National Women's Political Caucus, as one of the organizers of NOW, as the Women's Division head for the UAW, and so many other roles that she compulsively supported for a lifetime on behalf of women. And then, in addition to this, I am sure, although it doesn't say on here, that Governor William Milliken and First Lady Helen Milliken had to have been there, or at least to have sent large checks and told everybody else to be there, because their support was indispensable. And then when Jim Blanchard was elected governor, he continued the kind of support for equality for women that was so important to those two decades and the enormous success that Michigan women had, I think witnessed, of course, now by Jennifer Granholm who is now your governor.

Although I have now been in Illinois for nearly twenty years [Note: Patricia Widmayer left Michigan and her legacy with Michigan feminists,and moved to Chicago in 1985], it's enormously satisfying that Jennifer Granholm is now the governor and Debbie Stabenow, who was in the House all those years when I was active, and then moved to the state Senate—I am proud to say I did one of her fundraisers when she first ran for the state Senate—and that she's now the United States Senator. So, it's an extraordinary legacy and a foundation that we built during that era, even though there are some people who have spent a lot of years since then trying to knock it down.

Interviewer: **Thank you. Now the next set of questions are reflections on the second wave of feminism. What's your definition of feminism?**

P. Widmayer: Oh, how interesting. To me feminism is a very fundamental belief in equal opportunity for women and for men in all of the aspects of life that we are engaged in. My high school social studies teacher taught me the PERSIA outline: political, economic, religious, social, intellectual, and artistic. I can do

it! And I always think about that in terms of looking at all of the aspects of our lives and the fair and equal representation regardless of gender.

Interviewer: And has your definition changed much through the years?

P. Widmayer: No. It has not. It was fundamental to what I talked with you about in terms of my less-than-equal pay with my brother at the Dairy Queen, and the inability of the dean at Oakland University where I taught for a year to address me as anything other than Mrs. Widmayer. Refused to call me Dr. Widmayer. It extends to what my children have done in terms of their schooling over the years and the inability—well, they tried to put her on a flute because that was a girl's instrument when she was in middle school and I had to go in and say, "She wants to play the trumpet please." And for my son, to be able—although he grew to be six foot four—to help him overcome the expectation from everyone that if he was six foot four he had to be a basketball player. That was not Chris, neither in terms of his personality, nor his ability. He, too, wanted to play the trumpet and participate in the musicals and producing musicals and so on. So it's a matter, it's always been my sense, of each person being treated fairly regardless of gender.

Interviewer: Do you think the press accurately reflected what you were trying to do?

P. Widmayer: Interestingly enough they did. There were days when I was enormously frustrated because I would say they didn't quote me exactly the way I said what I said. But overall, as I go back and look at what I've kept in my files and what they had to say, for the most part the daily papers were very fair. I think that some of the other publications got into the "those are the bra-burning women" more as a cliché because they were doing cheap and dirty journalism, but then they did cheap and dirty journalism about everything and so you just needed to rise above it.

Interviewer: I agree. I felt that it was accurate. That's what was my response. Do you think it's accurate now?

P. Widmayer: Yes, overall. I'm saddened by some of what people don't know they could lose in terms of their rights that we struggled so hard to get through legislation and the courts and electing women and all of the rest. I think they're being rather cavalier, but then I think that the public right now is also being cavalier because they keep saying, "Well, no one discriminated against me," and the press is reflecting that in many ways. They just don't remember. And it worries me deeply how much they don't know about how it used to be, and I thought about it with my daughter having been raised through this, and carried the picket signs with me, and understood the whole thing. When I couldn't go to—it may have been five years ago or so—the demonstration in Washington in support of women's reproductive rights, she went and she brought back her poster for me and it said, "Mom fought hard and now it's my turn." And I just found that so

gratifying, and yet I think a lot of women don't know that now it's their turn. So the press is reflecting what they're thinking, which is what your basic question was.

Interviewer: Well, what do you think are the main achievements of the second wave of the feminist movement?

P. Widmayer: When the American team for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta came over the horizon [for the parade marking the opening ceremonies], and it was half women, I cried. I think our legacy is extraordinary. Those women who won gold this year at the [2004] Summer Olympics—they won in gymnastics, they won in soccer, they won in basketball. And it was a celebration in America for the women's teams who had done so extraordinarily well. And Title IX…

[End of tape]

INTERVIEW: Pat Widmayer
INTERVIEWER: Liz Homer
DATE: November 12, 2004

[TAPE 2]

Interviewer: This is Liz Homer and it's November 12th and we're resuming my interview with Pat Widmayer. And we were talking, Pat, about the definition of feminism and then—

P. Widmayer: Our legacy.

Interviewer: What do you think were the main achievements of the second wave of the feminist movement?

P. Widmayer: I think, as I began talking about Title IX as an example of our accomplishments, that when the American team came over the horizon in the Parade of Nations at the '96 Olympics in Atlanta, and you saw on television this team that was half women, it choked me up because we had spent more than a generation "in the fight," and there was one of the most vivid examples,

in my view, of what we had achieved—that we had made life different for women in this country. We had made it possible for them to choose lots of things that they couldn't choose easily before, whether it was being a superb athlete, or being a well-acclaimed artist, or being in Hollywood as the head of the studio rather than just the star, although "just the star"... In many cases there are some very capable women who have been stars and I don't want to diminish that, but there are women who are heads of studios and there are now a number of CEOs of the new software companies—the new wave of things that are happening. And on a more personal level, the opportunity for my own daughter to move easily within the publishing and advertising industry in order to achieve her dreams after she finished the university.

So it just is in surrounding all of them with many, many opportunities. Not to say that it's over, because there are still battered women, and there are still women who don't quite take to math or science the way we wish they might. There are women who still don't have the ladder all the way up in the company commensurate with their talents. But overall, so many more opportunities since the days when we came out of school, or I came out of school, and there were still Help Wanted-Women and Help Wanted-Men ads in the newspaper, and when someone thought that when I finished my Ph.D. it was time for me to stay home and be a full-time mom, which I think ought to be a choice but not the only option. So it's just surrounding everyone with opportunity.

Interviewer: **Now, what do you think you would consider the failures of the second wave of feminism?**

P. Widmayer: I think we're not connected in the same way we were two decades ago. We took our victories and moved on with our lives, took advantage of many of the opportunities for ourselves, and yet there's still work to be done. So I think our failure, if any, is one of constancy. We just ran out of steam – or switched strategies and priorities – without conveying the energy and urgency to the women behind us that we should have. I, for example, moved on after we finished Women's Assembly IV, which I considered an extraordinary accomplishment, and thought that there was a coalition being left in our wake that would continue what was happening in the women's movement.

(Note: Reflecting back, when State Representative Mary Brown pressured us to turn over the Women's Assembly to Laura Callow's leadership, I knew instinctively, although we agreed, that the move would mean the lose of creativity and vibrancy we'd had and the end of the Women's Assembly coalition.)

I moved on to what I thought was a more appropriate contribution for myself after 1985, which was that I joined EMILY's List. EMILY stands for "Early Money is Like Yeast: it rises." It is a donor network conceived by a group of progressive Democratic Washington women, lead by Ellen Malcolm, to

contribute to the campaigns of progressive Democratic women running for the U.S. House, the U.S. Senate, and governor. It's intended to assess campaigns for viability, so that you give large amounts of money to those candidates that have a viable chance of winning. And then with collective contributions from across the county—no contribution is supposed to be less than $100.00 and I think we're all moving toward $250.00 or $500.00 if the call goes out—and you know that you're not putting your money into campaigns with little change that they can be successful.

The EMILY's List team, for example, looks at the campaigns and assesses if there is a chance if, for example, they're not running against a well-entrenched incumbent who has huge money and numbers show that they just can't get there. It's been extraordinarily successful and that's how I moved to make my next contribution. I was speaking with someone the other day at EMILY's List. She clicked into the database while we were speaking, and she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, my gosh! Wow! Your number (mine) in our membership list is something like No. 10, and there are now more than 100,000 who belong to EMILY's List."

At the same time though, my point is that my daughter did the same thing (contributing substantially to EMILY's List), she wasn't carrying on with the activism. She's making those same contributions to Emily's List, which I think is enormously important and that's what I want to be doing, but where is the next wave of coalition builders?

Interviewer: **Do you think it's true that in a sense we laid a legal groundwork; that we got many changes in the laws that we needed and that the problems now are with enforcement? And also, I think that many women—and do you agree?—kind of felt like you seem to feel, that we've gone as far as we can go unless we can change the people in those positions.**

P. Widmayer: And I did that. That's exactly… Remember, in my earlier conversation I said from the beginning I started helping women to run, whether it was for Circuit Court or state representative. I was looking in my files and found the fundraising invitation for (Michigan's US Senator) Debbie Stabenow when she first ran for the state Senate—moving from the (state) House to the (state) Senate—and we put together some wonderful things. And yes, putting progressive women and progressive men into those slots was very important, but there are still today not the pressure groups and coalitions to keep the laws in place, so there's extraordinary potential today for those laws to be eroded, and that's what I'm worried about, despite the fact that we've made, I think, enormous strides. In this last election, for example, the candidates for EMILY's List—all of the incumbents were reelected and we elected five new women to the U.S. House—more than we had elected in any one electoral cycle since 1996. So it's good—not better, not best—and trying to continue to put the pressure on. By the same token though, one of the exciting things is women

don't hesitate to run for office anymore.

Interviewer: **A lot of women, when we've mentioned failures of the second wave of the feminist movement, have mentioned the Equal Rights Amendment and the fact that it didn't pass.**

P. Widmayer: You know, the interesting thing is that I live in Illinois now where the ERA was never ratified, and if Illinois had ratified it, as I recall, it would have gone over. We still lacked two states, and if Illinois had happened, I think there would have been one other state ratifying quickly. But the Illinois House and Senate, now Democratic, recently attempted to pass the ERA as a symbol, and Phyllis Schlafly has shown up again. (Note: Phyllis Schlafly was the ultra-conservative leader of the national Eagle Forum, decided to preserving "privileges" for American women.) I don't believe she still lives in Illinois. She's moved across the river to Missouri. But nonetheless, she has shown up again in Springfield (Illinois' capital) where she was so extraordinarily successful when she was an Illinois resident during those many years of the battle for the ERA. And she is arguing that we have accomplished so much that ERA is not needed anymore. So she's taken it right back at us, saying once upon a time it would do all these terrible things, and now we don't need it anymore. I find it valid in some ways frankly—although it pains me to agree with Phyllis Schlafly—that we have created enough laws and are using the equal protection provisions of the United States Constitution and other laws in ways that I think the courts have interpreted in order to be able to surround us with a considerable amount. Whether it's worth the battle and whether the ERA would have made a significant difference, I'm not certain, because there is so much in place for us now to be able to take case law and experience within the government.

Interviewer: **It seems like we always did argue that it was a matter of interpretation and the courts have backed off saying "Well, you have to pass the ERA or we won't interpret that you have equal rights," because we've sort of backed ourselves into saying that we don't have it because—**

P. Widmayer: Because they take our own argument about support of the ERA and turn it right around on us. Quite clever, don't you think, and so frustrating?

Interviewer: **Yes, and so it is a matter of evolution in the law.**

P. Widmayer: The only way we could, in the end result, have protected ourselves irrevocably would be to have passed the ERA, because laws can be changed and guidelines can be changed. I agree with that. But by the same token, case law comes close to having some of the same constancy, so I think we have a lot of tools that we have put into place in many, many areas. Although there is still such danger regarding reproductive rights and choice. Further, nothing is ever going to protect a woman against a violent man who's determined that he's going to do her harm. I just don't think any law… You know full well that protection

orders don't always work either, because that's all a matter of education, and getting to the day when no man treats a woman as a possession—that's a pipedream, but one that I think we have enough tools that I'm not sure the ERA would do more.

Interviewer: **What do you say to people who have characterized second-wave feminism as a bunch of bored housewives who had nothing else to do, and also they characterized it as racist and middle class, expressing middle-class concerns as opposed to ….**

P. Widmayer: Oh, heavens, heavens, heavens, heavens. We were middle-class women. We were the ones who had the flexibility and the drive and the education to be able to do it for everyone. To stereotype us because we were the ones who had the ability to move the second wave of feminism is a truly unfair criticism. I believe that, as a community, I and my sisters bent over backward to make sure that we included women of all walks of life and in all religions and all races in our conversation. In many ways, they then took that and reinterpreted in their own individual churches or small communities or families so that it kept going. Bored? Never. It was a matter of wanting opportunities for ourselves and our daughters, and when we saw that after the civil rights movement that denied women, it was then our compulsion—our duty—to move in and say, "not without us," and to make sure that the other half of the population was not forgotten, because I know full well from the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement—the Vietnam War—that women were not treated as equal partners in that struggle, and to take then and say, "Okay, now for the rest of us. We must make this a comprehensive revolution."

Interviewer: **So, when you talk about the future for the next generation of feminists and the issues that are coming to confront them, do you have ideas about what that might be?**

P. Widmayer: I think reproductive rights is the true battleground. What frightens me about reproductive rights and Roe v. Wade—the decision that gave us the right to choose whether to have an abortion or not and to make decisions about our bodies and birth control and other reproductive issues—they're chipping away at it. They're chipping away at it by opposing something called "partial-birth abortion," which is a medical procedure that most doctors say is seldom necessary and wrongly name, but they're putting that prohibition into law and they're taking advantage of some other sensational legal cases to argue that you ought to prosecute for the death of a fetus as well as the death of the mother and try to move that into conversations about choice as well. And given the President of the United States having just been reelected and his constituency ready to move in again to try to compromise on reproductive rights—that's the part that genuinely frightens me. Bush's constituency – you know, the ones that thinks that al Qaeda was hooked up with Saddam Hussein and that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq that were pointed at the United States and

were going to come flying -- are the same people who believe that their life circumstance is the only life circumstance, and that people should not, under any condition, have the right to an abortion, or have conversations about sex in the schools, and they're going to teach everybody. They're the ones, too, who write international family planning laws that say that in Africa all you can talk about is abstinence. It just worries me so much.

Interviewer: We have four years of it coming up. What advice would you give to future feminists?

P. Widmayer: Organize. Organize. Organize. The infrastructure that we created in the seventies and the early eighties, as I said, does not appear to be there in the same way. There are loyal—loyal and wonderful—institutional organizations that are carrying on the fight. I give credit, for example to the AAUW (the American Association of University Women), which is headed by a wonderful woman by the name of Jacqueline Woods, and they keep putting out lots of great information and organizing around equal opportunity in education. And there are other organizations like that. But the passion of what a coalition of women could do in Michigan in 1980, and the passion that created EMILY's List and creates this whole infrastructure across the country, is missing in many areas, because I don't think the women who would call themselves feminists today, if they will, understand what there is to lose. I just don't think they know. You know, you see a lot of women going out there and working on campaigns, but you just can't find the ones who can articulate the real danger because maybe we're not telling them enough—sharing enough about what we gained and what life was like. I have a really simple example that when I was an undergraduate at Michigan State in the early sixties, girls—and we were all called girls—could not wear slacks to class unless it was below zero. If anyone were to suggest that the young women of today, who are in all of our colleges and universities across the country at all levels, had to give up their blue jeans and go back to skirts unless it was below zero, then maybe… It's even the simple things that restricted us.

Interviewer: Well, if you take each issue—for instance choice—a lot of the issue has to do with taking what we have and stopping something. With equal pay, there has been so much research done, but yet it doesn't move.

P. Widmayer: It does not. I don't know the answer. I don't know the answer to that because they come back at us with "but you interrupted your career" in one way or another because we chose to have a family and spend some time with family, or because, in my case, I chose to go into consulting rather than taking a full-time position when I went to Illinois, because that gave me the flexibility to travel and to do some of the things that I really wanted to be able to do rather than moving in at the level where I would have been a university administrator . So that when I did go back into the academy at Northwestern University for a time, I was not at the level of the men who had just continued to move their careers

steadily up the ladder at Northwestern University. So I became the Special Assistant to the Vice President rather than the Director or some other title, or Associate Vice President rather than special assistant to the vice president, doing much the same work. It's hard to be able to think about that whole issue in a way that gets us to equal pay because that's, even with the laws, as you know, something that we just have to keep struggling with given our diverse career paths.

And much the same way with sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is something that, sadly, has to be handled company by company and woman by woman, or department by department, or group of friends by group of friends. And that's what I talk about in terms of organizing—if we had a really solid structure where people knew where they could turn quickly and be able to know how to document their case. But it's so painful. I know within the university community, which is where I've spent my career for the last twenty years, women's appeals of sex discrimination in the cases of tenure are seldom successful…seldom successful. They tried to document and spent years… There was just recently a study released on how few were ultimately successful and how costly it was if you alleged sex discrimination in denial of tenure cases. It's really hard.

Interviewer: **So there are women trying.**

P. Widmayer: Oh, there clearly are. And when I say individual tenure cases that have not succeeded, on the flip side some very prominent women at MIT, I believe, or Johns Hopkins, I'm not certain which, documented how different the circumstances were for women across the institution, and the president immediately started into fixing every single piece of it. They had smaller labs in terms of square footage. They had fewer lab assistants. They were being promoted more slowly. There were fewer that became department chairs. And these were women who had the same number of published articles and research and books, and they were tenured—all of the things that you would expect of a member of the university community with status—and yet there were the differences.

Interviewer: **Just to get back to the personal side again, nowadays one of the reasons given sometimes is that, well, so many women are working now, working full time, raising families—**

P. Widmayer: You mean those privileged white middle-class women aren't around anymore. [Laughter]

Interviewer: **But you, Pat, were working full time and raising a family and doing amazing things every moment of your life, it seems. I mean, you did that for years.**

P. Widmayer: I was. Yes, I did that for years. When I first was with Michigan NOW, I was not employed. Those early years when I was writing the newsletter for Michigan NOW and doing that first organizing work around equal pay and reproductive rights and all that was Michigan NOW, I was not employed, but I had my wonderful Carole & Chris, and they came with me. And then when I took the position with the Speaker of the House after I finished my Ph.D. and went to Lansing, you're absolutely right, from that day on I was working full time. And although I had the unique experience, as I described, in those first two years I was in Lansing, to combine what I believed in terms of the organizing and my work, after that it was all on my time because I then ran the congressman's office, as I said earlier, for two years in the mid-seventies, and then I went to the Michigan Department of Education and was their director of legislation for six years, and then went to the governor's office as his policy chief and then head of the Higher Ed Commission. So it was a progressive movement within government to move my career at the same time I was spending lots of lunch hours doing the other organizing work.

Interviewer: And yet you were progressing and certainly they knew you were a feminist and a leader.

P. Widmayer: There was never a secret. Every person who employed me at my next move in state government knew full well because it (Lansing) is a small town at its heart and they knew exactly who I was.

Interviewer: And they knew you were an activist?

P. Widmayer: Yes, they did. And fortunately those people with whom I worked admired that and were pleased because, you know, there's a synergy to it also. What you learn in terms of organizing in the women's movement—and Liz, you're a perfect example of that—there's a synergy because what you learn about organizing and creating events for the women's movement translates into creating events for preservation activities, or for a city government event, or for a corporate event. It's all there. It's the same skills and we were gaining them as we grew within the women's movement as well.

Interviewer: Would your life have been different if you hadn't been in the women's movement?

P. Widmayer: Oh, absolutely. Without the women's movement my life clearly would have been different in a way that would never have been as rich, from the friends I made, to the skills I gained, to the opportunities that opened up. That door I kicked open with the women in Lansing when I first arrived in terms of equal credit… To this day I carry my own credit cards. You know, I went immediately to Winkelman's (after the equal credit legislation passed) to open a credit card. I never bought anything there again, but I went to get my credit card. And I still think about it, frankly—every time I pull out my credit cards

in my wallet—that once upon a time this wasn't my option. And it's made me so much more able to travel on my own, to maintain my own finances as well as with my husband—just a whole lot of things. And I don't wear skirts to class, I guarantee you. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Now is there anything else that you think that I should ask other women perhaps when we interview them, or any topics or issues that we haven't covered that you would like to go back and…?

P. Widmayer: I think we've covered most of this because to me it was all about strategic planning and coalition building and playing the role of the person who had that particular set of skills, and being able then to pull a whole lot of other skills from other women so that we came together to make a whole. And I think that was our true legacy and what we did for each other as well. It was such a joy at the Veteran Feminists Conference to see some of those women with whom we had worked, whether it was the MEA Caucus or Michigan NOW or the AAUW and many others who had been with us, and I wish I could see more. I was thinking as we were talking about talented young women like Barbara Craft who worked with us during those days and has gone on to I don't know what in terms of her own career. I am certain though that if I went back to find her she'd be doing really wonderful and interesting things. And people like Patricia Burnett, who got into the women's movement with her beauty and flair and with both feet because someone asked her to sign one of the portraits she painted with her first initial rather than her name because they didn't want anyone to know that a woman had painted the portrait. I guarantee you she writes in full bold letters, "Patricia Hill Burnett." And it's great to talk to all of them and know how much we did accomplish.

Interviewer: Now is there anything else that you think that I should be asking women that I interview that might have been left out?

P. Widmayer: Oh, you mean some with whom you should speak—

Interviewer: When we're asking questions.

P. Widmayer: I think you did a pretty thorough job of where we've been, what we accomplished, where we need to go. In some ways, you know, maybe you could ask them to wave a magic wand and tell us how would it be different—where else would we have gone if you could rewrite the story.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Well, what would you do?

P. Widmayer: You know, I think I would have spent even more time trying to help women run for office if I had to go back and do it again. As much as we can count all of the enormous successes and seeing Jennifer Granholm and Debbie Stabenow standing on the podium, (Michigan's current) governor and U.S. senator, seeing

my local congresswoman in Illinois, Jan Schakowsky, serve as the House minority whip in Washington, seeing other women across the country. But only the second congresswoman from Illinois has just been elected. I don't think there is a congresswoman in Michigan. Debbie stands alone, I believe, in the delegation. I think Lynn Rivers was in the congressional delegation for a while, but …..

Interviewer: **Well, there are two: Candace Miller and Kilpatrick.**

P. Widmayer: Oh that's right, Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and Candace Miller. I stand corrected. Not enough.

Interviewer: **Yes, just those two.**

P. Widmayer: Not enough. I remember saying, "Don't ask permission. Ask forgiveness. Go for it." In the early seventies many thought: "They won't give us_____," fill in the blank—whatever you want to fill in the blank. I and you and many others said, "Un, uh, that's not the way we're going to play it." But, I think we didn't keep going, and it was perhaps that we couldn't. We'd spent every amount of political capital we had and we weren't going to be able to do a whole lot more. But that next generation…we didn't create successors. We were so consumed with trying to move things forward for ourselves and our daughters and sons and others in our community and all the other communities that the next generation isn't there. That worries me.

Interviewer: **There is an altruism about it. I don't think people were thinking about what they were going to get out of it so much.**

P. Widmayer: You're absolutely correct. Well, no—I was thinking about what I was going to get out of it because I wanted to open doors, for myself as well as for others. We ended up doing more than just for ourselves, but in the early days we came to it because of something that happened in our lives that you either wanted to make sure that no other woman had that happen to her, or you were still looking for that opportunity for yourself. And so in many ways, as we started to shift, as I said, we took advantage of the doors we opened to be able to advance our own lives and our own families and our own daughters, and hoped that those doors remained open for a lot of others as well. It's a different way of looking at it though because it wasn't all totally altruistic although, as I said, we gave more than we were ever going to see back personally.

What do you want me to do? Do you want me to talk about Helen?

Interviewer: **Yes. Since you knew Helen Milliken and were involved in so many things where you were benefiting from her help, you might want to talk a little bit about that.**

P. Widmayer: Helen Milliken was a unique woman who really had her influence in a way that she used very subtly. (Note: Milliken was the wife of progressive Republican Governor William Milligan and Michigan's First Lady from 1969-1983.) She was extraordinarily well regarded by the Republican party and she and her husband had this remarkably solid relationship. How she decided that equal rights was something that was going to be very important to her, I've never discussed with her. But the bottom line was that during those years in which I was active in Lansing from the early seventies until the mid-eighties, Helen Milliken was the one who gave us – Democrats, moderate Republicans and independents -- political cover whenever we needed it or she saw that we were in trouble. She, for example, utilized the Michigan Women's Commission as her vehicle for much of what she did. If you look at the Women's Commission, the commissioners during that era, they were people that she felt comfortable with and trusted—surprisingly the Republican Committeewomen (who were, at that time, quite moderate). But perhaps what she did was get women who agreed with her to be Republican Committeewomen. Also, many of the people who are now in charge of the Republican party (ultra-conservatives who opposed nearly all efforts to enact equal rights) were not allowed in the door when the Millikens were in their fourteen years in the governor's mansion, and so there was a really exciting bipartisan dynamic that Helen was able to draw on. She appointed Margaret Cooke as head of the Women's Commission, and Marge served from somewhere in the mid-seventies until 1983 when Jim Blanchard became governor and wanted to appoint someone else. Helen then, along with Marge, faded in many ways from the scene in the women's movement because Jim Blanchard wanted to have his own agenda.

But during those very crucial years, Helen gave us lots of political cover, and many other prominent Republican and well as Democratic women, so you would see "Honorary Chair" on many, many letterheads. That was Helen Milliken, Mildred Jeffrey (a highly regarded UAW staff member, Democratic National Committeewoman, past president of the National Women's Political Caucus and recipient of the Medal of Freedom) and (former Michigan Congresswoman) Martha Griffiths, or some other combination of the labor union women, who are the Democratic leaders, along with the prominent Republic women, and then Martha Griffiths as the one who had sponsored the ERA. She was—Helen—as active and deserves the same kind of credit in many ways during those years as Millie and all of her passion and her endless energy in her activism. So it was quite a remarkable combination. When she (Helen) brought her husband to basically support Jim Blanchard in the '82 election rather than the Republican candidate—the Republican candidate, who was anti-ERA, anti-women (he was very, very "regressive" is the best way I can say it)—he (the GOP gubernatorial candidate) called her (Helen) all kinds of names and she just stood up to him and went nose to nose.

Interviewer: That was Richard Headlee?

P. Widmayer: It was Richard Headlee. Helen gave the sanction so that when -- I think it was at the Detroit Economic Club when Jim Blanchard was speaking -- the Republican women (who supported equal rights) all walked into the room to support him (Blanchard) and it made headlines across the state. Without Helen's sanction and blessing, things like that would not have happened. But in they walked, and so it was a very important…

You look back, too. I started to talk to you earlier about Patricia Hill Burnett who also was a very active Republican. For those of you who may be watching this (or reading) and don't know Patricia Hill Burnett, she is a prominent portrait artist, runner-up to Miss America of 1942, and glamorous every day of her life. And when the ERA came up for consideration in the Michigan legislature within weeks after it was passed by the U.S. Congress, the (Michigan) Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing. State Senator Danny Cooper was the chairman at the time, and I think there were only six or seven of us in the room. I can remember it was a room with small school desk chairs or something, so it was not in the big rooms. It was in a back room. That's how they (the Michigan Legislature) considered the ERA at the time: "Okay, let's get it over and done with. We're okay." And as I said, there were just a few of us. I happened to be there. It was before I worked in the Michigan Legislature. I was then the editor of the newsletter for Michigan NOW, and so I came as part of the contingent, but Patricia Hill Burnett is the one who stepped forward as the—I don't remember if she was still the president, but she was our spokeswoman, and in all of her glamour and style and flair, she sat is one of those little school desk chairs. She had on a dress that had this huge zipper down the front of it and she took a look at the chairman, walked out of the room, and pulled it a little bit farther down before she went back into the room to make sure that he understood that beautiful women were supporting the ERA. [Laughter] It worked, and from there it just sailed through the Senate and the House and no one in those days even thought about it.

There was an attempt in 1975 to move to rescind Michigan's ratification. I was the staff person at that point assigned by the Speaker to work with Representative Daisy Elliott and we dispensed with that attempt in short order.

Interviewer: What was the group that was opposing the ERA in Michigan?

P. Widmayer: Did it have a name? Was the opposition organized and did it have a name? There were Concerned Women of America or something like that. And there were two groups that ended up, I think, coming together. There was a woman by the name of Elaine Donnelly coming out of suburban Detroit and then there were the Amway wives coming out of Grand Rapids, and it was those two forces which also came together to make a move to try to get some of the seats for the International Women's Year delegation from Michigan as well. They were more organized by then, but—

Interviewer: **They had a couple, didn't they? We kind of gave them a few, didn't we?**

P. Widmayer: Did we give them a few at IWY? I didn't think so. I thought we just shut them out completely. I'd have to go back, but I'm not sure I have the final slate.

Interviewer: **Well, there were a couple that weren't too bad.**

P. Widmayer: So we let them in? Maybe. As I recall, Liz, you were the one who was negotiating that slate. I was out on the floor still counting votes for something or another and the slate was being chosen back in some other room. That was not part of my assignment. Negotiating things like that was not one of my strengths. One of the things that I know is that being out on the floor and counting votes and putting coalitions together was where my strength was. Trying to negotiate and compromise was a bit more difficult for me, so that was your assignment. [Laughter]

Interviewer: **The opposition that we had was mainly those women, wasn't it?**

P. Widmayer: Yes. They were coming out of the same network that Phyllis Schlafly was running with the Eagle Forum. Phyllis Schlafly lived in Alton, Illinois, which is just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, and she had a substantial amount of money with a wealthy husband who kind of turned over the family resources and she was organizing it, and that group was affiliated, I think, with Elaine Donnelly. They were very good at finding bright and attractive spokespersons, and Elaine Donnelly was that. Why she chose that path, I don't know. I think she's still very active now in Washington, DC. But then, of course, the Amway money was starting to come in big, and Betsy DeVos, who's now chairman of the Michigan Republican Party and—I don't remember the name of the wife of the other head of Amway (it was a team)—

Interviewer: **Van Andel.**

P. Widmayer: Van Andel. Thank you. I knew several buildings were named for them in Grand Rapids. So that resource was large and they were just beginning, and obviously now they've learned a whole lot more about tools and tactics and so on in a way that has made a difference in Michigan politics since then. But at that particular point we were able to say, "Okay, we talked about it for five minutes in this little subcommittee in the Michigan House, and no, we don't want to rescind ratification of the ERA. Thank you very much. Goodbye." And away it went. It is possible—because a young woman in the mid-eighties at the University of Michigan was doing a paper and scoured everywhere across Michigan—it is possible that the only data about the attempt to rescind is in my file box. She said she never did find anything else except what I had in my files and what I told her. I mean, we did—a little room and, "Okay, we talked about it. Thank you very much. Goodbye." And it never even went into the official record. So, it was an extraordinary time. And again, you could call up and say,

"Helen, help!" And if it had even started to pop, we could have counted on the influence of the governor to make it go away. And then when Elly Peterson became the co-chair of ERAmerica, that's when we started organizing Michigan ERAmerica, again at Helen's behest, just to help Elly nationally. Michigan ERAmerica was really nudged along by Helen.

Interviewer: It was Lavonne Bliesner and Marge Cooke that were working with the ERA—

P. Widmayer: Yes. For a long time LaVonne Bleisner was working with Marge, as well. Marge was the more capable strategist and organizer, and so when she was Executive Director, the Women's Commission was even more active. LaVonne Bleisner was engaged for a while and tried very hard and gave a whole lot. She just didn't have the same kind of organizing and tactical skills that Marge did, and I frankly don't even know where she is now. She went to Washington to work for the woman from the Upper Peninsula who became head of the Peace Corps. She was the wife of the congressman from… Lorrette… Lorrette…<Ruppe.>

Interviewer: I thought she married Judge Brickner.

P. Widmayer: No. That would be somebody different. That's Joyce Braithwaite. Joyce Braithwaite was the woman in the Milliken administration, and she ultimately married Jim Brickley who was lieutenant governor and then Supreme Court justice. Oh, gosh, she was good. But her interest was in taking care of the Milliken administration. She handled appointments and agenda and she did much for Bill Milliken what Karen Hughes is doing for George Bush today. She just was the woman who moved all that. She and George Weeks and a couple of others were the ones who surrounded Bill Milliken. So she was supportive of the women's movement, but didn't do anything directly. You never saw her name on anything and we wouldn't call her unless to say, "Here's what's going on. Please make sure that nothing from your camp happens to cause a problem," and then we were done.

Interviewer: Okay. Anything else?

P. Widmayer: I don't know. You can turn off the camera and I can repeat anything again later if you want me to say it.

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity to reflect on our work for the Michigan's women's movement and for the women of America. It was truly an honor and an exciting time.

Interviewer: I'll turn it off and you'll think of something else. [Laughter]

[END OF TAPE 2]

49:05