

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

California State Politics Oral History Project

An Oral History with SALLY TANNER

Interviewed

By

Brenda St. Hilaire

On November 2, 9 and 23, 2020

OH 6214

Generously funded by the California State Library

This is an edited transcription of an interview conducted for the Center for Oral and Public History, sponsored by California State University, Fullerton. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions that are not factual. The Center for Oral and Public History encourages all researchers to listen to the recording while reading the oral history transcription, as some expressions, verbiage, and intent may be lost in the interpretation from audio to written source.

Researchers are welcome to utilize short excerpts from this transcription without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, the interviewer, and the Center for Oral and Public History. Permission for extensive use of the transcription and related materials, duplication, and/or reproduction can be obtained by contacting the Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, PO Box 6846, Fullerton CA 92834-6846. Email: [coph@fullerton.edu](mailto:coph@fullerton.edu)



Sally Tanner

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: SALLY TANNER  
INTERVIEWER: Brenda St. Hilaire  
DATE: November 2, 2020  
LOCATION: conducted remotely<sup>1</sup>  
PROJECT: State of California Archives

BSH: This is an interview with Sally Tanner for the State of California Archives Project. The interview is being conducted at 10:32 AM Pacific time on Monday, November 2, 2020, and is being conducted via Zoom by Brenda St. Hilaire, and I am located in Irvine, California, and Sally Tanner who is in Ferndale, California. Sally, thank you so much for taking time today to speak to us about your political career and involvement in state politics—

ST: My pleasure.

BSH: —especially now during this Coronavirus pandemic that is impacting our world. Ideally we would have loved to have been there in person with you in Ferndale, but this is the next best thing. Before we start talking about your political career, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your family background and upbringing to provide a bit of context.

ST: Okay.

BSH: When were you born?

ST: I was born in East Chicago, Indiana. It's near Chicago, Illinois. I was born at home, and my mother was helped by a midwife. I was the youngest of eight children. By the time I was born, three of my siblings were already married and gone, so there were five of us.

BSH: What is your birthdate?

ST: My birthdate is December 28, 1926.

BSH: What did your parents do for a living?

---

<sup>1</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a subsequent protocol of social distancing that began in March 2020, this interview was conducted remotely using *Zoom* communications software.

ST: My mother was a chef. We lived in a steel mill town, so she worked as a chef for the executives in this steel mill. My dad was a plumber and had his own plumbing business. So, that's about it. My mom stayed at that job until I was maybe five or six. And then, she stayed home.

BSH: And what were their names?

ST: My mother's name was Mary, and my dad's name was Anton. My maiden name was Zinski, Z-I-N-S-K-I.

BSH: Is that Polish ancestry?

ST: It is Polish, and my dad came from Germany. Three of my siblings came from Germany with him.

BSH: Oh, so those siblings were born in Germany and came over with your father.

ST: Yes.

BSH: What years are we talking about when they came over?

ST: Well, I would guess early 1920s.

BSH: Why did your parents come over the U.S.?

ST: My mother was born in Berlin, Wisconsin. She was a native. But my dad came over, and he brought three of his children, the three he had. He brought them with him, and he just wanted to start a new life here in the United States.

BSH: I see, so he was a widower and met your mother here in the United States, is that correct?

ST: My father was a plumber, and yes, he became a citizen. He had met my mother, and we had a wonderful family of eight: five new children, and the three that he brought.

BSH: Wow, that's wonderful. Now can you talk a little bit, Sally, about your childhood and your family life?

ST: Yes, I was the youngest of the children, and I was surrounded with love. I will say that I was fortunate in that my brothers and sisters all loved me because I was the little one, and it made my life beautiful from there on out.

I remember three of my brothers were going to BAB, and I wanted to go with them. And they wouldn't let me. "Why can't I go to BAB?" "You can't come with us." And then, I told my mother, "They won't take me to BAB." She says, "I'll find out what BAB is all about." Well actually, these young boys went to BAB, Bare Ass Beach.

BSH: (laughs) That's funny; that is funny.

ST: They wouldn't take me, of course.

BSH: That's the last thing they wanted.

ST: Yeah! My childhood was very wonderful because my older sisters sort of played house with me. They dressed me, curled my hair, and I was their little baby sister. So, my life was wonderful.

BSH: Would you say you were spoiled? (laughs)

ST: I was *loved*.

BSH: That's wonderful. As a little girl growing up outside of Chicago, what did you dream of becoming? What did you aspire to be as a little girl?

ST: I dreamed about being a lawyer. That was my dream; I wanted to be a lawyer. I was in Indiana, and after high school I wanted to go to Indiana University and then to law school. Right after I graduated from high school, my mother said, "We're going to California." I said, "Mother, I want to go to Indiana U." She said, "No, we're going to California, and we're going next week." So, all my plans were changed.

We came to California. At first it was very difficult, but then I found a way to— oh, I forgot to tell you something about when I was young and still going to high school, because this is sort of a fun thing. Indiana's cold in the winter, very cold. We wore skirts and anklets, the girls did. One time I decided that I would talk the girls into wearing pants, and I would wear pants, because it was cold and it was winter. So we did, and that was my very first protest, ever. We were taken into the principal's office, and they had a fit at the school. Our mothers were called. Mine came, and she was absolutely defending me and defending all of us girls who decided we would wear pants in the cold weather. So that was finally accepted, and that was it.

BSH: That was your first political activism, huh?

ST: Right, it was.

BSH: That's wonderful, and I love that your mother defended you.

ST: I love that she did that, yeah, I love that she did. She was a chubby, little gal, and she came marching into the school, and there was my mom on my side. Oh, it was great, yes.

BSH: I love it, what a wonderful memory. Thank you for sharing that with us. Now why did your family decide to move to California? I assume this is post World War II.

[00:10:52]

ST: Yes, it was. I had four brothers in the service during the war, and they all came home alive, thank heavens. One lost his right arm, but other than that, they all survived. My mom and dad moved to Alhambra, California, so that's where I lived with my folks. I went to school. First I got a job with Lockheed. I got a job as a riveter. It was taught; they sent me to riveting school, learned how to be a riveter at Lockheed as a riveter. I

only lasted about two weeks. Somebody came and said, “We’re promoting you to a new job.” So I had to give up the riveting. I was given roller skates and was to deliver blueprints to all of the men who were working in this great, huge hall.

BSH: Like a messenger girl, right?

ST: Yes, so that was a great job—on roller skates.

BSH: Because it was a huge facility, I can imagine.

ST: Oh, huge. So I had to deliver these blueprints to these men, and it was wonderful. And that was the first real job that I ever had.

BSH: Was this in El Segundo? Do you remember what city the Lockheed facility was in?

ST: Boy, I know I took a bus from Alhambra. I know I had to get up at five in the morning to get to this bus, so I can’t tell you exactly where it was.

BSH: How long did you work or roller skate at Lockheed? (laughs)

ST: I worked there probably at the most six months, then I went back to school, college. I went to art school. Before art school, I went to Pasadena City College. From there I went to Art Center School of Design because I was very interested in art.

BSH: Well, I can tell by the artwork behind you, Sally, that you are so talented. Now is that oil that I am looking at? Did you study oil painting? What did you study at the art center?

ST: Mostly drawing live women and men, because if you could draw a man or a woman you could draw anything because of the shadows and the curves and stuff. And it really was a wonderful experience, so that’s what I learned to do at Art Center School. I also learned advertising design at the school, and from there most of my career was in advertising design.

BSH: Before we continue on with college and schooling, I want to step back and go back to your high school years and your family when you’re growing up. How would you compare your experience as a girl in your large family compared to the experience the boys had in your family? Was there indifference between the way your brothers got treated compared to you and your sisters?

ST: Well, there was a difference at times at home. When we grew up, there were two schools. There was Catholic Central High, and there was the public Roosevelt High School. All of my siblings chose Catholic Central High, and I chose—as the youngest—Roosevelt High School, so that was a totally different four years of education and social life.

There were two ice cream parlors in town. One of the ice cream parlors, my friends and I spent every after-school time there. Other groups spent their time at the

other ice cream parlor, so it was a strange thing that we sort of separated our two different groups of people.

BSH: Almost public school and private school, different little groups.

ST: Yes.

BSH: Why did you choose to go to the public school? Was it to be different from your siblings?

ST: Well, a couple of my girlfriends were going to go to the public school, and I wanted to go with them. That's the reason, nothing to do with wanting to be different because we all *were* different. My folks were wonderful. They let us all become what we wanted to become and do what we wanted to do. They were really supportive of us, all of us. And it was a beautiful life, actually.

BSH: Looking back now, Sally, what values did you acquire from your family, from your mom and dad?

ST: Loyalty, loyalty above everything else, loyalty and trust.

BSH: Loyalty to the family? Loyalty to the country?

ST: To the family and to our friends. My mother had four sons, and they all served in World War II, so she had four stars in her window. They all came home, but that was loyalty to the country. But really, my loyalty was to my family.

BSH: Yes, that's beautiful. You mentioned the wonderful memory of being called into the principal's office because you had organized a pants day on a cold winter morning. Were you politically engaged at all during high school?

ST: No, I was not. I was not even interested in politics at all. After high school I became interested in volunteering for political—well, I have to go back. All of my friends were at a period of saying "I like Ike," Eisenhower. And I thought I liked Ike, too, except I saw Stevenson, and heard Adlai Stevenson on the radio, and I was absolutely taken with him. Before that, I wasn't interested in politics at all, but Adlai Stevenson really attracted me. I told my folks, "I heard this wonderful man, now what do I do?" My mother said, "You just join a Democratic Club. There is one around you, and you can find out where and become part of that." And that's what I did.

[00:21:02]

BSH: I love that. Now, was your mom politically active? Do you remember her political positions?

ST: Well, they were Democrats, but they had all the children, and they didn't have time to really do too much politically.



BSH: Sure, they had their hands full.

ST: Yeah, they did; they did.

BSH: So your mom encouraged you to join the local Democratic Club, is this in California or is this back in Indiana?

ST: It was in California when I did that, and it was a congressional district club, so I got to know a lot of people who were involved. I was quite taken with it. I really enjoyed it. Then one of the locals, Harvey Johnson, was running for the state assembly, so I volunteered to actively campaign for him.

BSH: Were you walking precincts, Sally? Were you stuffing envelopes? What were you doing for Harvey?

ST: Yes, we went door to door, stuffing envelopes, and doing what one needs to do to help someone be elected. Harvey *was* elected. I volunteered, but he asked me to work for him part-time, temporarily. I said, "Oh, yes, I would be happy to do that." That part-time, temporary job became a full-time, ten-year job, and it was wonderful. I was his administrative assistant for ten years, and I learned a lot about the state politics. I was fascinated by it.

BSH: How old are you at this point when you start volunteering for Harvey, before he was elected to the state assembly?

ST: I was in my forties. I was just exactly fifty when I decided to run for office.

BSH: I want to get there, but I want to slow up a bit. You've moved out here to California with your mom and dad, and you've enrolled in art school. What was your first real job after you finished your education?

ST: My first real job was being hired in an art department, and it was all men, they were all men. They were not happy that I joined them, and it was a strange art department. What we were designing was bottle caps, believe it or not, and doing a lot of small drawings on these bottle caps. Anyway, they didn't like me to begin with, but we all became really good, tight friends and we were great. From there I went to the *El Monte Herald* newspaper as advertising manager for the *El Monte Herald* newspaper. So I drew up all of the ads, and actually *sold* some ad spots.

BSH: And you would lay it out? I used to work at the *L.A. Times* so I remember the old plates.

ST: Yeah, I loved laying out the ads. I loved doing that. After I left there, I got a job with Liebergs department store. They had two department stores. I was the ad manager, and I was given a budget. It was up to me to decide what to advertise. I would get up and walk around the store, find out from the people what was on sale and what did they want to push? Then I would lay out the ads, and it was a grand job and a grand opportunity.

BSH: This is what, the fifties I would imagine?

ST: Yes, yes.

BSH: That's wonderful. You had a lot of room for creativity it sounds like.

ST: It was wonderful.

BSH: Let me ask you a question regarding the workplace because you mentioned at your first job, the men were a little resentful towards you because you were a female in their department. Did you find that? Was that a common situation as your career advanced? Was there resentment towards you because of your gender?

ST: I could feel a little bit of resentment. I didn't let it bother me, and it would work out. We got to know it each other, and it worked out fine. Actually, I was so interested in the fact that women were treated differently, that once I was elected [to office], I did carry a bill to make sure women were paid the same as men for the same kind of work. My early experiences working and getting less than men did make a big difference to me and made me recognize how important it was that women be treated fairly and not be discriminated against.

BSH: Absolutely. Did you ever find out that you were being paid less than your counterparts?

ST: Oh sure, everybody knew that I was paid less.

BSH: It was common knowledge.

ST: Yes.

BSH: Fascinating. So you are running the advertising department for this department store, how old are you at this point?

ST: Well, I was in my forties because I was married by then. I got married, and then I had two children, two boys—I *still* have two wonderful sons. We love each other and we're friends, besides. And it's wonderful. I lost my place. (laughs)

BSH: That's okay. How did you meet your spouse? How did you meet your husband?

ST: I met him because I was working at the *El Monte Herald*. As I mentioned, I was laying out advertising, and I sold some. He owned a shoe repair shop, and I sold him an ad. So that's how we got to know each other.

BSH: His name?

ST: Paul A. Tanner.

[00:30:00]

BSH: His shoe shop was in Alhambra?

ST: No, the shoe shop was in El Monte, and he was living near there. So we married, and I believe we first moved to an apartment in El Monte. I am not certain about that because I haven't reviewed that for this interview.

BSH: Oh, that's fine.

ST: We called him Pat, by the way, because it was Paul Albert Tanner. So he was Pat.

BSH: How long after dating did you marry Pat?

ST: Oh, I think maybe six months, maybe three months. I don't remember.

BSH: Oh, wow.

ST: Short time.

BSH: Did your parents like him?

ST: Yes, my parents and my siblings liked him.

BSH: After you married Pat, how long was it before your first child was born?

ST: About a year.

BSH: Who was the first boy?

ST: Timothy was the first boy. Chris came along, and he actually was born in the backseat of the car, on the way to the hospital.

BSH: You've got to share that story with us.

ST: Well, I told Pat, "We have to have a neighbor go with us because I think the baby's coming right away." And Pat said, "Oh, no, it's not." I said, "Yes, I won't go unless you get the neighbor." So he got the fellow next door; his name was Bob Robbins. Bob was sitting in the front seat with Pat, and I was lying in the back seat. I was having labor pains, and all of a sudden the baby arrived. (laughs) I know. I said, "The baby's here!" And Bob jumped over to the backseat and helped me. Oh, I didn't mention I had a sister living nearby. And before I went to the hospital, I told her that I was going to have the baby right away. So she called the doctor, so when we arrived at the hospital the doctor was waiting at the curb, which is wonderful. He took the baby and the placenta. He took that and he ran. He left *me*. (laughs) My husband was so confused and upset by that so *he* started to go in without me. And then I said, "I want to go into the hospital." I was holding a towel between my legs as I went in. Instead of having a wheelchair, I was walking.

BSH: Oh, my god, Sally!

ST: It was an experience: having the baby in the car, and then my husband got so nervous he didn't know how to handle it. It was an experience.

BSH: Chris just couldn't wait to come out.

ST: He was in the hospital—well, Tim was in the hospital. He was premature. He was placenta previa, so he had to stay in the hospital. I came home without Tim. And that's a heartbreaking thing to do, leave your baby in the hospital and have to come home. So then when I had Chris—he was premature—he had to stay in the hospital until he was at least five pounds.

BSH: Oh, they were *little*. They were little babies.

ST: Yeah, little. So I had to leave him in the hospital and I had to come home without the baby, terrible. It's crushing for a mother. But then, finally, he got to the size where we could bring him home. My mom came and helped me with the baby. I was scared to death of the baby. (laughs) But it worked out just beautifully, and I have these two, wonderful sons. My husband and I divorced.

BSH: In what year, do you remember?

ST: It was probably in the early sixties.

BSH: How old were the boys at this time?

ST: They were small boys. They were little, little boys. Tim maybe was twelve, and Chris was maybe eight, but I am guessing. I am not sure exactly. But I know I took the boys, and I left home. Pat said, "No, I'll go. You stay at the house; you and the boys stay at the house, and I'll leave," which was much better, of course. But I *had* to work because he never sent me any money.

BSH: Child support?

ST: None, none, none. He never even sent the boys a birthday card or Christmas card. He just left us.

BSH: He didn't maintain a relationship with his sons?

ST: None.

BSH: Oh, I am sorry, Sally.

ST: And later, just before he died, the boys went and visited him, and he apologized to them. He said, "I am sorry I was such a poor father." My boys and I have a really good, strong, loving relationship. We enjoy each other, and the boys love each other. When they see each other, they kiss and put their arms around one another. And, of course, I love them very much, and they love me, so it's a great relationship.

BSH: I am sure. I can tell you were a wonderful mother.

ST: Well, I think I am a good mother, yes. Chris lives in New York. He is an artist. Tim is an artist as well, but he is married, and he lives in a city very close to mine. He lives in Rio Dell. He moved there from Sacramento so that he could be close to me.

BSH: Oh, that's nice. Do you have grandchildren, Sally?

ST: I have no grandchildren, but Tim married a young lady who has children. So I consider those girls my grandchildren. For some reason, Chris never married, so he doesn't have any children. Tim tried to have children, and it didn't work out, but I have Christiann's daughters. I consider them my grandchildren.

BSH: That's wonderful; that's wonderful. So you got divorced in the early sixties. You met Pat while you were working at the El Monte newspaper; you had to go back to work after the divorce. During that time, were you working, not working, or were you raising your sons?

[00:40:17]

ST: I worked *and* raised my sons.

BSH: So you were working the whole time as well.

ST: Yes.

BSH: How did your parents feel about the divorce?

ST: My father said, "Now Sally, you're not gonna move in with us just because you got a divorce." I didn't like that because I didn't have any intention of moving there. But my mother was very supportive. She liked Pat and Pat really loved my mother. He didn't love me but he loved my mother. (laughs) So they had a nice relationship, which was good as far as I was concerned because of the children. But he really was not a great dad, which is too bad.

BSH: But the boys had you, so that's wonderful. Now, as a young mother with two sons, what made you get politically involved? I know you had mentioned earlier that Stevenson had perked your interest, and then you met Harvey. But did Stevenson start that political curiosity for you? How did that develop?

ST: Well, because I was impressed with Adlai Stevenson, my mother suggested I find a Democratic Club in the area and join, which I did. I met people who very much had the same feelings that I did about life and the right thing to do. And they were wonderful. The congressman, his name was Mike Thompson, and he was absolutely a fine congressman. It was worth my time just supporting him because he was so good.

When Harvey retired, I got a job with Congressman George Danielson, and I worked for him for a while. But there was a man who had been working for George Danielson before I did, and his uncle was a great donor to Danielson's campaign, so he was important. For some reason—I guess a feeling that this fellow worker had against

me—George let me go. And so, I cleaned out my desk. A couple of weeks later, I filed for the assembly. I decided to run for office myself.

BSH: Good for you, Sally! Good for you!

ST: I decided I wasn't gonna be beaten by someone who didn't like me and caused the congressman to let me go, so I ran. I had this buddy, boyfriend, and he and I walked door to door for six months, and it was the most wonderful experience.

There was a garage door open, and an older man was sitting in a chair in the garage. There were some young men around him, and I walked in. I said, "I am Sally Tanner. I am running for the assembly and I would appreciate your vote." He asked a young man what I said. The young man told him in Spanish what I said, and we had this three-way conversation for a *long* time. He said in Spanish, "What are you going to do for us?" The boy asked me, and I said, "I don't know. I don't know." The older man said *in English*, "You *don't* know. And I trust you. You are being honest with me, and I am gonna vote for you, and everyone in my family will vote for you." He said that to me.

Another door that I went to, the woman said, "I want you to meet my husband." She called her husband, and he said, "Oh, do you like music?" I said, "I love music." For all fourteen years that I was in office, he and his three friends wore these mariachi costumes and performed for me for all those years. They wouldn't charge me a dime, and did it for fourteen years.

BSH: Aww. I want to talk a little bit about the ethnic makeup of the assembly district in a little bit, but I want to step back. You're working for Harvey Johnson as his administrative assistant for ten years, and then Harvey retires, and you get this position with Congressman Danielson. At this point in your life, do you consider yourself a political activist? How does Sally Tanner view herself at this point as a staffer?

ST: Yes, I have to consider myself a political activist, and I still have the same feelings that I had then. I believe in women earning the same. As a matter of fact, I carried a bill and authored a bill that said—women were making fifty-seven cents an hour as men were making a dollar an hour. That bill required equal pay for equal work. I was really proud of that bill because it's a very important opportunity for women to have. Often women are raising their families alone, without the help of men, often, so I felt equal pay was absolutely necessary. That's what I did. I carried a bill that required equal pay for the same type of work.

BSH: Was there a point in time or a certain event that made you realize, *hey, I am activist, I need to stand up for the underdog*. Was there ever a point that changed the way you thought of yourself politically or thought of yourself from a political perspective?

ST: Right now, off the top of my head, I can't think of it. Yes, I was an activist, but I can't remember when that occurred to me.

[00:50:15]

BSH: Maybe it happened with the pants (laughs) in high school.

ST: Maybe that was maybe the beginning. Oh, my friend has pointed out that one of my first bills was safe drinking water. Can you believe that there wasn't a requirement before that, to monitor our drinking water?

BSH: This was in the late seventies, correct, Sally?

ST: I can tell you exactly when it was: 1980.

BSH: That's shocking.

ST: Isn't it? When I was presenting that—when you have a bill, you present it to the committee that would refer it. I forget which committee it was, but I then went into the Ways and Means Committee. One of the men, a speaker pro-tem, was reading a newspaper. He was sitting on the committee but reading a newspaper. I was getting some interest—this was drinking water, our public drinking water. And I was getting some strange questions and arguments. The man who was reading the newspaper put down the paper and said, "Don't you people *understand*? She's carrying a bill about the water we *drink*!" He said, "I vote the bill out," and I got a unanimous vote.

BSH: That's so awesome.

ST: It was amazing that it took someone up there who knew what he was doing to say, "Now look, see what's happening here?" So, then it passed out of Ways and Means; I got it out of the committee, out of the assembly, it passed out of the senate, and it was a law.

BSH: That's wonderful, Sally, especially as a legislator from Southern California carrying a water bill. Water tends to be such a divisive issue in the State of California, where Northern Californians are so knowledgeable on their water policy, and Southern Californians just know that they open the tap and the water is there, (laughs) right?

ST: Yes. And because of where I lived, I also carried a clean air bill. It was especially designed for sensitive zones. I considered Los Angeles area a sensitive zone because the smog was terrible in that area. So, I was actively involved with clean air and clean water.

BSH: Wonderful. And I *do* want to get to policy in a bit. We're probably at the one-hour mark right now. I just wanted to check in with you to see how you're feeling, how your energy level is.

ST: I am fine. I'll drink a little bit of water.

BSH: I will, too. (laughs) Let's get back to your first campaign for state assembly. Congressman Danielson, for some reason, let's you go from your staff position. Is that what motivated you to run for state assembly, *or* was there a point during your career working for both the state assemblyman and the congressman that you said to yourself, "I can do what they are doing?"

ST: When he let me go, that's when I decided, Hey, I am not gonna cry about this. I am not gonna feel guilty or less a woman than I am. I am going to run for the assembly.

BSH: That's such a courageous and ambitious move.

ST: It was ambitious. This fellow that I was dating walked door to door with me for six months. It wasn't an easy win. I got to know the entire district. So when it was time for me to run, there were five men running at the same time.

BSH: Is this the primary?

ST: Yes, yes.

BSH: So, it was five Democrat men and you in the Democrat primary?

ST: Yes, and *then*, these men brought in another woman to run.

BSH: Oh, you're kidding me.

ST: No. It was actually a Hispanic woman in an attempt to cut back on my women's vote. Yeah, it made me all the more certain I was going to win.

BSH: I love your attitude.

ST: During the campaign, I went to Maxine Waters' office—she was an assembly woman at that time. I asked her secretary, "I'd like to see Assemblywoman Waters, if she is available." The secretary called and said, "No, she's very busy." I said, "Well, that's fine. You just tell her that Sally Tanner is running for the assembly and is going to win, so I'll see her then."

BSH: (laughs)

ST: *Immediately*, she came out. She came out, and (laughs) she said, "Well, let me meet you if you're gonna win. And I'll *help* you." And she did.

BSH: Sally, did Harvey Johnson retire, and you stepped up to take his spot? Is that what happened?

ST: He retired, and I was trying to run for his spot, so were all these other people.

BSH: During your time when you worked for Harvey, were you able to establish relationships that helped you in your campaign?

ST: I did; I did. Because I was his AA, administrative assistant, I went out and was in contact with people *all* the time in the district. I did that kind of work.

BSH: So, everybody had to get through you to get to Harvey, is that correct?



ST: Yes, so when it was time for me to run, it helped. I knew everyone, and Harvey also endorsed me.

BSH: Oh, he did, fabulous.

ST: Yeah, it was wonderful. And I *did* win, and I won handily. I worked really hard. I took it seriously. I had two children and no husband to help.

BSH: Did that get thrown in your face, that you were a single mother, during the campaign? Do you remember?

ST: I think people understood. It wasn't a negative thing. People really did understand, and they accepted it. They were wonderful. The fact that I went door to door, and I spoke with so many people, met so many people, and got to know the district much better—it was a little bit different, too. There had been reapportionment, so the district was a little different from Harvey's district.

[01:00:35]

BSH: Did it become more Hispanic at this point?

ST: No, it didn't become more Hispanic. I think it became more Anglo because some of the cities that now were in the district were more Anglo.

BSH: I actually know that district very well. I grew up in Whittier. So, did the Sixtieth District pick up Whittier and Diamond Bar at this point?

ST: No. You grew up in Whittier?

BSH: I did.

ST: Well, my very best and dearest friend was Patricia Hofstetter.

BSH: Yes, she was a judge at Whittier court, right?

ST: Yes. And she and I bought the house I am living in now. She and I fished together, and she was the dearest friend anyone could ever have.

BSH: Did you know Patricia at this point when you're running for the state assembly, or not yet?

ST: Yes, I did. I knew her because I had joined this Democratic club.

BSH: Yes, you mentioned it.

ST: She was one of the key members. She and another member of that club—every time you turned around, it would be, "Mr. Chairman, I have something to say." Pat was very active that I was awestruck by this woman who had all the courage to get up and speak on

all these different subjects. Anyway, she was remarkable. I thought, I could never do that.

BSH: But, look at you! (laughs)

ST: I learned to do that.

BSH: Before we go on with your legislative career, when you decided to run for the state assembly, did you sit Chris and Tim down and talk to them about it? Did you have a family meeting? What was their reaction to all of this?

ST: I said, "I think I am gonna run, would you like to help me?" And both of them said, "Oh, yeah!" I said, "Are you gonna walk door to door with me and hand out literature?" "Oh, yes! We'd love it, Mom."

BSH: They were teenagers, I assume, at this point.

ST: Yeah, and they were wonderful. Of course, they helped me, and they were wonderful.

BSH: Were your parents alive when you ran for the state assembly?

ST: No. It was the biggest disappointment for me because they would have loved it. They would have absolutely loved it, and they were both gone by then.

BSH: I know your mom is so proud of you; I know she is; and your dad, of course. So, you decide to run for state assembly. What was your platform on this first election? What were the issues that you were out there talking about at this point in time?

ST: I felt it was important that our children have a good education. I felt it was important that the community here was recognized as Latino and Anglo, and recognize this is the way people get along together and it can be successful. That was more or less what I had in mind. My very best friend in the assembly was Marion La Follette. She is a conservative Republican, and I am a liberal Democrat.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: We became dear friends, and to this day we are dear friends. I said to her the other day, "I don't like Trump." And she said, "I like him."

BSH: (laughs)

ST: That was it, and we love each other still.

BSH: You could teach us all so much just by that. I love that. I am actually trying to get a hold of Marion. I don't have a good phone number for her, so maybe Mary can give it to me at a later time.

ST: Yes, she will. I want to show you a photograph. I don't know if you can see this.

BSH: Yes, I can see it. Oh, I love it.

ST: Those are the women. There were 120 members in the legislature. This the number of women: eleven women here.

BSH: I love it, and where are you in the photo?

ST: I am standing with Marion La Follette. I am right here, and there is Marion La Follette.

BSH: I love it. That's Gwen Moore, who was my seatmate for most of the fourteen years. She was a black woman. She told me, "Sally, you're the most color-blind person I've ever known."

BSH: Oh, that's beautiful; I can't think of a nicer comment. That's wonderful.

ST: Wasn't that a nice, wonderful thing for her to say, that I am the most color-blind person?

BSH: I love it; I love it. Let's go back to your campaign for a minute. You told me you walked a lot, and you met with your constituents. Were the Democratic Clubs supportive of your campaign at this point, or the Democratic organizations?

ST: There was a Democratic Club, but they didn't get involved. I think they were supportive, but they didn't get actively involved.

BSH: Was this a staunch Democrat seat when you ran for it?

ST: Yes, but pretty Hispanic.

BSH: What would you say the breakdown was of the population?

ST: I would say at least 50 percent.

BSH: Oh, wow, okay!

ST: It was a very heavily Hispanic district, and I didn't even learn to speak Spanish.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: But they accepted me, and I loved them. I loved the people in my district, and it was a beautiful fourteen years.

BSH: I am sure they sensed your appreciation for their culture. You are a very warm person. I am sure they sensed that.

ST: Well, they knew that I loved them. They knew because it was a very warm relationship, and I hired a couple of Hispanic people to work on my district staff. I had a woman who was a secretary and was not Hispanic, but I'll tell you, I have never experienced such beautiful loyalty and love. I think about her, and it makes me feel warm all over. She was wonderful.

BSH: Oh, I love that; I love that. What were some of the obstacles that you faced as a newly elected legislator? Did you feel intimidated by Sacramento and any of that?

[01:10:25]

ST: Never felt intimidated, never.

BSH: Good for you.

ST: I hired a nice, good staff in Sacramento. I knew I was a member. As a matter of fact, this was an interesting thing. Deukmejian had a luncheon for the members, and he had the men sit with him and the women sit with his wife. After the luncheon, I told one of his staffers that I was very upset about it, and I would like to talk with Deukmejian about it because I feel that he was discriminating against women. And he and I became really good friends. He understood that I was *right*. He understood that that was not the way it should have been done because the women and the men members are equally important. Our votes are equally important. Anyway, during that period at the time, I had both breasts removed with breast cancer, and Deukmejian was extremely warm and caring about that.

BSH: That's wonderful; that's wonderful. Before we get into that administration, when you first got into office, what were some of the cities that were in the Sixtieth Assembly District? Can you tell us?

ST: El Monte, Baldwin Park, La Puente, Irwindale, and parts of West Covina.

BSH: How did environmental issues become important to you?

ST: Well, there was a terrible environmental accident in Pomona, I think, somewhere near my area, and I was very upset about it. That's when I first decided that I would make sure groundwater and air would be clean. The Department of Health Services would be required to monitor drinking water and toxic air contaminants. It stayed with me throughout my career, that kind of drinking water and clean air legislation. I worked on that throughout my career.

BSH: These are very complex and difficult issues not only to understand but to help resolve. Did you have a group of advisors that helped you with these issues?

ST: I had a chief consultant who was absolutely brilliant and understood these issues and taught me to understand them. He worked with me throughout my career. He was brilliant, and he was more responsible than I was for all the good legislation.

BSH: His name?

ST: Arnie Peters.

BSH: Because we're talking about water, I used to be friends with Harriett Wieder.<sup>2</sup> Do you remember Harriett at all? She was an Orange County supervisor. She also dealt with water from the Huntington Beach area?

ST: I have a vague, vague memory.

BSH: Okay, I just thought I'd ask. So you're dealing with all of these complex, environmental issues for L.A. County that is dealing with smog, congestion, all of these things. Did you ever feel overwhelmed by the monstrosity of these issues? These are *big* issues. Did you ever feel like it was too big of a task?

ST: No, I didn't. All the time, I felt *there is a way to do this*. I can do this, there is a way, I will get to know the people, and I will get help. I knew. I felt really strong about it. I *knew* that I could do it.

BSH: Were you working with AQMD at this point, Air Quality Management District? Who were your allies?

ST: Yes, they were. I forget the name of the group from the cities. They were absolutely a great value to me. I knew the subject. I felt strongly about the subject, and I was able then to get people interested in helping me. She's handing me a note. Oh, I took some field trips to hazardous waste facilities. You'd be surprised how poorly they were managed, so I carried legislation to manage hazardous waste materials. Hazardous waste is poisonous, and it would migrate into the soil and down into the water and then it was contaminated. So that's what I worked very hard to change.

BSH: So, you did your homework.

ST: Yeah, I certainly did, and I believed in it, too.

BSH: Would you say that your greatest ability was coalition building?

ST: Oh, yes, it helped a great deal. People who were interested in the subject, who were concerned about it, got very much involved and they're a great help.

BSH: Wonderful. Now, you were instrumental in helping Willie Brown become California's first African American Speaker of the Assembly. Is that correct?

ST: I was one of the people among the leaders in getting him to run and successfully getting elected speaker.

BSH: Can you share with us that story?

ST: Well, here is this wonderful man who wanted to be speaker, who believed in fair employment, believed in opportunities for women, believed in clean air and clean water

---

<sup>2</sup> Harriett Wieder, OH# 2527 and OH# 4516, Center for Oral and Public History. Researchers should also refer to OH# 6144 and OH#s 6155-6158 for specific interviews on Harriett Wieder.

and the things that I believed in, so I was very actively involved in getting him elected speaker because I believed in him. And I think he was an outstanding speaker.

[01:20:47]

BSH: Wonderful.

ST: He was wonderful. He was a great friend. I have a photo with him and me. I will share that photo with you; she's gonna get it. We were near the front desk having a serious conversation, and I think it shows. He was a brilliant man. He knew how to work with people. He had the support of many Republican members, which I think is interesting because you don't see that today.

BSH: No, you don't.

ST: She found the photo. (peruses photos) That's not it. It's of just Willie and me. That's an interesting photo; this is Bishop Tutu. And this is an interesting photo; that's Sally Ride. And this is the picture of Willie and me.

BSH: Oh, yeah, you guys are having a serious discussion. Look at your body language. You are right there with him. You're like, "Yeah, I am your equal, buddy." I love it.

ST: Isn't that good?

BSH: That's a great photo. Thank you for sharing that.

ST: Well, I was very serious about my work.

BSH: And it showed in the photo. When you said you were helping Willie to get the speaker's office, did that entail lobbying your party? Did that entail counting votes on the floor?

ST: It was a lot of lobbying. I did a lot of lobbying, and it was an easy sell. It really was. He won the speakership. Yeah, I helped him, but he really won. He was so outstanding.

BSH: Once Willie became Speaker of the Assembly, he created—as you know—the state's first standing committee on the environment: the Environment Safety and Toxic Materials Committee. And he appointed you as its first chair.

ST: He did.

BSH: Now tell us about that. Was this committee your idea? How did this come about?

ST: I was very actively involved with the solid and hazardous waste and the idea of waste in the state. So, yes, he decided to have a standing committee and it just went automatically. Because I was so much involved, he appointed me chair.

BSH: Was this a surprise appointment for you, or did you know it was coming down the line?

ST: I was pleased.

BSH: And how did your colleagues react to the chair?

ST: They were pleased. I put together a committee, and my committee worked well together. We did a lot of really important environmental legislation. My committee was made up of Republicans and Democrats, and we were successful. We were very successful.

BSH: Sally, did you have waste management sites in your district, or did you have trash dumps? I can't grasp the right terminology for it.

ST: That's why I got interested, because of a spill in a neighboring city, not in my district but neighboring city. It was a very dangerous and toxic spill.

BSH: Was it in the City of Industry?

ST: City of Industry was part of my district. But I am thinking it was in the Pomona area.

BSH: Because of that toxic site, that's why you got involved in environmental issues.

ST: Yes.

BSH: A few minutes ago you showed us a picture of you and the other women legislators in Sacramento, and I think there was eleven, right?

ST: Yes.

BSH: Of those eleven, how common was it to have a woman chair a committee?

ST: It was very uncommon. I guess the reason I was appointed chair of a committee was because I was so deeply involved with the problem and the need for environment laws. So, I know that that's the reason he appointed me chair.

BSH: When he appointed you as chair, did you also see it as helping to crack the glass ceiling for women in Sacramento?

ST: The fact that there were so few of us—with 120 members, there were actually twelve of women when I was first involved.

BSH: Oh, so those twelve were both assembly and senate?

ST: Yes, Republican and Democrat, assembly and senate, *all*. There were eleven in that photograph but Maxine Waters was the twelfth, and she was not in the photograph for some reason. When we formed a caucus, the men really were a little bit afraid, and for good reason. Because we decided that we would meet once a month *at least* and discuss bills that related to women or children. We would decide to support those bills whether we're in the senate or assembly or Republican or Democrat. When we decided it was a caucus bill, the men for some reason wouldn't dare oppose us.

[01:30:31]

BSH: Of course, that's wonderful; that's wonderful.

ST: They didn't, and it was a very successful caucus.

BSH: How did the California Legislative Women's Caucus come about?

ST: Two of us pulled it together. Bev Hansen, who was a Republican, and I put the caucus together. Strangely enough, not too many years after our success, a new batch of women were elected. And one of the women was *horrified* to think that we would rotate the chairmanship so that Republicans and Democrats could be chair. She was horrified to think that a Republican woman could be chair.

BSH: Who was this legislator? Do you mind me asking?

ST: Yeah, I don't mind you asking because it was Barbara Lee. She ruined our caucus.

BSH: She was from L.A. if I am not mistaken. Is that correct?

ST: She was from Oakland, I think. I'll never forgive her for it. She's in Congress now. She's a member of Congress. Our caucus was able to put a lot of important legislation through and get it passed, and I don't know why one person could change it. Why we *allowed* her to destroy the caucus is a question I am still having trouble dealing with.

BSH: That's a shame because bipartisanship is something that we could definitely use right about now. (laughs)

ST: It was wonderful. As I said, my best friend even today is Marion La Follette. I said, "I don't like Trump," and she said, "I like him." You know, it doesn't mean anything to us.

BSH: Now when you and Bev first sat down to talk about forming your own caucus, did you and Bev—considering that she was a Republican—initially start off with it being a bipartisan organization that would work to advance women's issues?

ST: Yeah, of course.

BSH: Because it was bipartisan, were there certain issues that you would stay away from?

ST: No, there were certain issues that we would especially be involved *with*. We never worried about staying away from an issue, but we were involved with issues relating to children or to women. Those were the issues that we were very much involved with.

BSH: Can you share some memories of working with Marion La Follette, Bev Hansen, Rebecca Morgan?

ST: Oh, yes. Well, I know that the women enjoyed each other. We respected each other. Rose Anne Vuich was the first woman to be in the state senate and was just an amazing woman. She was part of our caucus, and I loved her very much. Of course, my seatmate, Gwen Moore—all the women were involved, and they were wonderful women. There



were eleven women in that photograph. Maxine Waters was away when the photograph was taken, so there were twelve women, *twelve* women. Can you believe twelve women of 120 members?

BSH: That's mind-boggling.

ST: We were tough and we stuck together. That was the beauty of it. We held together. And when it was a fairly partisan matter, we stayed away from it, which was sensible, and it was safe.

BSH: And it was smart.

ST: We worked together on issues that mattered to children and women.

BSH: Okay, let's pause here and we'll resume for a second session next week.

END OF INTERVIEW

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: SALLY TANNER  
INTERVIEWER: Brenda St. Hilaire  
DATE: November 9, 2020  
LOCATION: Remote<sup>3</sup>  
PROJECT: State of California Archives Oral History Project

BSH: This is an interview with Sally Tanner for the State of California Archives Project. The interview is being conducted at 10:38 AM on Monday, November 9, 2020, and is being conducted via Zoom by Brenda St. Hilaire, who is located in Irvine, California, and Sally Tanner who is in Ferndale, California. This is part two of our oral history interview. Sally, thanks so much for coming back for some more questions!

ST: Oh, it's my pleasure.

BSH: We've had quite a busy week since you and I last met: our country decided on a new president.

ST: Very exciting.

BSH: Very exciting, and we can talk about that in a little bit. I wanted to start off where we left off a week ago, and we were talking about the California Legislative Women's Caucus. You were one of the founders of that caucus.

ST: Yes, I was.

BSH: So, I thought we'd pick up from there. How did the formation of the caucus come about?

ST: Well, there were just eleven or twelve women in the legislature. That's including Democrats and Republican, senators and assembly members. There were only twelve of us. The legislature is made up of 120 members, and twelve of those were women, which is not a very (laughs) good percentage. But we decided, because there were just twelve of us, to put together a caucus. It didn't matter whether we were Republican or Democrat, senator, assembly, but we would take certain issues that had to do with women

---

<sup>3</sup> Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and a subsequent protocol of social distancing that began in March 2020, this interview was conducted remotely using *Zoom* communication software.

or children and try to work together on those particular issues in the state laws. And it worked really very well.

BSH: Did you meet on a weekly, monthly, or as-needed basis? How did that work?

ST: Oh, we met on a pretty regular basis, more weekly than monthly, yes.

BSH: Okay, so you worked on particular issues together. Was there a particular piece of legislation that was authored by some of your members that came out of brainstorming in the Women's Legislative Caucus?

ST: Well, I know that one of my bills was equal pay for women. Women were making somewhere between fifty-seven or sixty-four cents for every dollar that men were making, so I did carry a bill that tried to respond to that problem. As I recall, the bill passed, and it required that women are paid equally for similar type of employment. That's the law, and unless someone has changed the law, I would expect that it still is.

BSH: During the bill process, at what point did the women's caucus endorse the bill? Do you remember?

ST: It would have been discussed at the women's caucus, and the women in this case would definitely support it.

BSH: So the bill already had some weight, already had some credibility because it had all of these members supporting it.

ST: Yes. And of course, the idea itself has a great deal of credibility because everyone recognizes that women who are working should be paid equally. If it's a similar kind of a job, we should receive the same amount of salary.

BSH: Amen to that. (laughs)

ST: There is no question about it, but that's not the way it was.

BSH: Right. Who were some of your Republican cohorts that helped?

ST: Beverly Hansen was very much involved in working with the caucus. I haven't talked to Bev for years, but I think she is still around.

BSH: I think she is in Sacramento area still.

ST: I am not sure, but I should have thought it out before we talked.

BSH: No problem. How would you describe Bev Hansen back then?

ST: Oh, very outgoing. Actually, Willie Brown, who was speaker, really respected her, and I think he appointed her to leadership roles in committees because of her ability. She was a mother of a number of children. I must say, she's just a great kind of a gal. It was a pleasure to work with her. Actually, it was a pleasure to work with all of the women. It

was effective because when there was a bill that we all agreed on and decided to work on, the men hesitated to oppose our bills, which I think is very interesting. We were organized and somehow it worried them, so they didn't fight us.

BSH: Do you think it was effective because not only were you organized but because the caucus crossed party lines?

ST: I think absolutely so. It was very interesting. One of my friends was Assemblyman Dick Mountjoy.

BSH: Oh, sure, from the San Gabriel Valley, correct?

ST: Yes, a very conservative Republican, and he was a good friend. It was quite generally accepted that we all worked together, and it wasn't party line kind of work. It was exceptional.

BSH: It was really working for the betterment of Californians. Is that how you would describe it?

ST: Yes. I think it had a lot to do with our speaker, Willie Brown, because he did pull us together. I have a book here that Mary is holding. It's a book of my statutes. Can you see it?

[00:10:18]

BSH: Oh, yes. Statutes authored by you, that's wonderful. It's all the legislation you authored that became law.

ST: Yes, that became laws, not those that failed. My chief consultant gave that to me as a retirement gift, and I think it was so generous and wonderful to have. It never would occur to me to have it. Of course, I can refer to it. In fact, I am startled when I look at it.

BSH: You accomplished a lot of good work, Sally.

ST: It was a busy fourteen years, yes.

BSH: That's wonderful. Now, besides Bev Hansen, I believe Marion La Follette also helped on the Women's Legislative Caucus. Is that correct?

ST: Yes, Marion La Follette was my best friend, and is still a very close friend. She and I are pretty much the same age. She is a very wealthy, very conservative, Republican, and I am a Democrat, not wealthy, but I am comfortable. We were at a party for her, a fundraiser, and a man came over and said, "It's so nice of your husband to do this for you." And she said, "Thank you, but I am independently wealthy." (laughs)

BSH: Good for her, I love it.

ST: Wasn't that terrific? I loved it. She's a strong woman; she is a dear friend; I love her.

BSH: That's wonderful. Can you describe her back then when you were working with her on the caucus?

ST: She's very good-looking. She was extremely conservative. She voted party. The Republican Party was very important to her, and she voted party. It would be interesting because on the floor there would be a bill that would come up that I supported. I would vote *aye*, and it would be a bill that she absolutely opposed, and she voted *nay*. After the assembly session, she and I would go out to lunch together or go get a drink together. So, we didn't vote the same at all, and our friendship did not depend on being the same politically.

BSH: I love that.

ST: Isn't that a good thing?

BSH: It is.

ST: I'd like to think that that exists now among the legislators. I have no idea, but I'd like to think it does.

BSH: Yeah, we live in such divided times right now. We'll get to that in a minute. So Marion was your best friend in Sacramento. I believe you also worked with Rebecca Morgan in the Women's Legislative Caucus?

ST: Yeah, Becky Morgan.

BSH: Can you tell us a little bit about her?

ST: She wasn't a really close friend, but she worked hard. No, it was Marian Bergeson<sup>4</sup> I am thinking of. I don't recall Becky as much. She was a Republican—she's showing me the photo but I don't see Becky in the photo.

BSH: By the way, Sally, all of these women that I am mentioning are on our list to interview, so hopefully I can pass on your good comments to them in the near future. You mentioned Marian Bergeson, tell us a little bit about Marian.

ST: Marian Bergeson, a Republican, carried legislation that would provide for people to be able to inherit—it was called the death bill—inheritance.

BSH: So they wouldn't get hit with a death tax?

ST: Yes, this eliminated the death tax, yes, and was very important. She was part of the women's caucus. Did I tell you that the women's caucus was broken up by a new member who was elected?

BSH: You mentioned it briefly. Barbara Lee, is that correct?

---

<sup>4</sup> Marian Bergeson, OH# 5370, Center for Oral and Public History.

ST: Yeah, I see her on television. She's in Congress now. Yes, it's really hard for me to have good feelings about her. We rotated the chair of our women's caucus, and it was about time for Marian Bergeson to be the chair. She was Republican, and this new member came in and just had a fit to think that a Republican would chair the women's caucus. It sort of broke up the caucus, and I can't forgive her for that.

BSH: Did Marian ever become chair, or did that whole situation just explode?

ST: It just all fell apart, after a number of good years and a lot of work together. We maintained a relationship, though, all of us women. One time it was my birthday—I just remembered this. It's interesting. It was my birthday, so there was a restaurant in town that everybody hung out at, and there was an upstairs.

BSH: What was the name of the restaurant? Do you remember?

ST: I can't remember.

BSH: I used to live in Sacramento, so I was just curious.

ST: It will come to me, I hope. Anyway, we were upstairs celebrating my birthday, and one of my good friends, a male member, sent up a male stripper.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: He didn't totally strip, but he did a dance, and he sat on my lap. It was just a fun thing.

BSH: That's funny.

ST: Yeah, it was; it was funny, and it was a fun thing. The members were really friendly to each other. It didn't matter that we were Republican or Democrat. We voted our party; we voted what we believed in, but we were all *friends*, which I think is just a wonderful way to work together.

BSH: Absolutely. I am actually going a little sideways, off track myself, but we mentioned earlier that we have a new presidential administration that's going to come in with Joe Biden as president and Kamala Harris as vice president. She has been serving as the U.S. senator from California. I heard this morning, actually, that Barbara Lee is being considered by Governor Gavin Newsom to replace Kamala. She's one of the names floating around.

ST: My god, I am going to have to call him.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: I really think she should not. She is very partisan—and if the governor wants a *very partisan* member to serve in that position, I guess that's fine, but it's not fine with me.

[00:20:51]

BSH: Okay, I just wanted to get your opinion on that, Sally; thank you very much.

ST: I don't think it's a good idea because I don't feel she fits that role.

BSH: As U.S. senator, right.

ST: Yes.

BSH: Well, thank you for your opinion; I appreciate that. Going back to the Women's Legislative Caucus, you and Bev Hansen created the Legislative Women of the Year Program.

ST: Yes, we did.

BSH: Can you tell me a little bit about that, how it was created and how it came about?

ST: Yes, because in every group there is a man of the year, always. The rotary man of the year; the legislature man of the year. Whatever it is, there is the man of the year. Bev and I said there should be a woman of the year. So we created the woman of the year, and believe it or not, some of the men were so angry about it—and it took votes to make it effective. We didn't get some of the male votes for a woman of the year.

BSH: What was their opposition?

ST: I can't tell you; I can't say. I mean, I would say if I remembered. But that was a few years ago.

BSH: It's such a good public relations move.

ST: Yeah. I just don't remember, but there were more than one who were absolutely opposed to woman of the year. I think Tom McClintock was one, but there were a group of men.

BSH: Tom McClintock would not surprise me. (laughs) That would not surprise me. Now, when a woman gets chosen out of your district—every legislator gets to pick their own woman of the year. What does that award or honor entail? Do they come up to Sacramento? How does that work?

ST: Yes, we invited the woman of the year. There was a woman of the year program, and each woman was introduced, "this is Marian La Follette" from whatever her district area was, "This is Gwen Moore from Los Angeles." They were not all legislators, by the way. There were some really strong women selected as women of the year in every district.

BSH: Doing good community work, is that correct?

ST: Yes, yes.

BSH: So this was an opportunity to thank them for their work.

ST: Yes, it was overdue. It makes sense that there is a woman of the year chosen in each district because women do *so much* work, so much for their area, so many volunteers that work hard. You're aware of that, I am sure, because you see women as volunteers who work hard. It's wonderful that we actually were able to find a way to say thank you.

BSH: It's wonderful that you created that program with Bev Hansen, Sally. Thank you for thanking others.

ST: Well, it was Bev and I who went together on that. And you are welcome.

BSH: That program continues to this day.

ST: I think it's *so* important, and I am thrilled that it's continuing to this day.

BSH: The funny thing is you were also honored with the award. Is that correct?

ST: Yes, I was. I forget what year it was, but I have a plaque that says "Sally Tanner: Woman of the Year."

BSH: Your local assemblyman nominated you, is that correct?

ST: Very likely, very likely could have been.

BSH: I love that the award that you created ultimately came back to you. That's great karma.

ST: I certainly didn't expect it. We're just overjoyed to be able to do this. Some of the men—as I have told you—didn't take it very kindly, which is (laughs) funny.

BSH: Funny and not so funny. (laughs)

ST: Yeah, it's funny but not really funny because it shows the attitude that some men have about women.

BSH: Right, and this probably cut into their district budget a little bit, right, because you would have to fly the lady up to Sacramento, pay for the plaque, pay for the lunch. There is a luncheon related to the woman of the year, right? Don't they all get together?

ST: Yes, and then the woman in the assembly would be introduced and the woman of the year would walk forward and be introduced and receive a plaque. It was really a wonderful event for us to be able to present a plaque to women from various districts. It was beautiful.

BSH: Yes, it is. Thank you for creating that event. And thank you for creating the Women's Legislative Caucus. Sally, let's move on to your relationship with Governor George Deukmejian. Tell us about that. Just by doing a little research, I can tell he respected you greatly because he appointed you to a task force dealing with waste, energy, and technology. Can you tell us a little bit about your working relationship with him?



ST: Governor Deukmejian is a Republican, and I expected that he would be reserved as far as the Democrats are concerned. He was *very* outgoing. During that period, I had breast cancer and I had my breasts removed. I remember when I got back to the assembly, for some reason he was going to speak. He stopped at my desk, and he said, "How are you feeling, Sally? We worried about you." That was very touching. He did wonderful things. One time, I was upset with him.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: He had a luncheon for the members, and I don't know that I mentioned this to you last time we spoke. Did I?

BSH: About the women being seated with his wife?

ST: Yes, he segregated us. And of course, he heard from me. He said he just wasn't thinking. And I said, "That's what is happening with women, people not thinking, and it's really, really serious. It isn't just a matter of having a luncheon. It's a matter of women not counting as much as men," and our vote was equal. If I wanted to vote no, it was just as strong as the man who sat next to me. So, the governor, I think, thought about that, and realized that wasn't the right way to do things. He was very nice to have the luncheon, but the men were with him and the women were with his wife. (laughs)

[00:31:30]

BSH: Right, well, good for you for bringing that to his attention. Besides putting you on that task force for waste, energy, and technology, Deukmejian also asked you to develop a state waste management plan. How did you feel about that request?

ST: Well actually, I asked the governor to support my waste management plan—because the major legislation of mine and most of the legislation that I carried had to do with waste, clean water, clean air, hazardous waste, and landfills. And I was very much involved in those things, so Governor Deukmejian allowed us to have a council, Waste Management Council, which was created by a bill that I carried. It was made up of city council members and people who were involved in waste and management areas. It was a very effective group of people, very concerned and interested. And the governor let us use his offices to meet every two weeks or so. It went on for a long time and we were able to agree on legislation, and they weren't all members of the legislature. There were nonmembers.

BSH: So, private industry people were involved in these pieces.

ST: That's right, yeah.

BSH: So, a lot of good came out of this council, I assume.

ST: Yes.

BSH: Did you ever get overwhelmed, Sally, by the complexity of these issues and by the power players in each industry?

ST: It *could* have been overwhelming, but for some reason I didn't feel overwhelmed. I had a very unusual and brilliant chief consultant. He and the rest of my staff helped me through the difficult legislation. They worked for me, but we would do a meeting on certain bills. They would explain the background on the bills and how it would affect the people in the state. And I got to the point where I really could understand the bill that was coming before us. I could speak to it or at least know how to vote intelligently on the bill. I had an outstanding staff.

BSH: That's wonderful, because there is a lot of nitty gritty, a lot of attention to detail that needs to occur in such complex, important problems that are facing our society. Well, thank you, that's wonderful. Now let's talk about one of your most famous pieces of legislation. Just a little while ago, you showed us that beautiful bound book that your chief of staff made for you on your retirement that contains all of the pieces of legislation that are now law that you authored during the fourteen years in the state assembly. The law I would like to talk about is the Tanner Consumer Protection Act, but is more commonly known as the California Lemon Law, which impacts new vehicles. Can you tell us a little bit about that, how that came about?

ST: Yes, a man came to my office, early on, probably 1980. He told me he bought a new car, he was driving on the freeway, and the car stopped. Here he was on the freeway, and he had to have someone tow him away. It was a very frightening situation. I asked him, "What did the dealer say about the new car?" And he said he couldn't do anything about it, the dealer said to try to have it repaired, and the man couldn't get it repaired. It didn't work. He lost all the money that he had put into the brand-new car, and it didn't work. And so, of course, that doesn't make sense. I thought, Well, for heaven sakes, I'll put together a law that requires a new car to be replaced or the money replaced. It wasn't easy. You'd think that would be an easy, natural kind of a law, but it wasn't. The first year, it failed, and I introduced it again the following year. It passed the assembly and failed in the senate, both times. And then, I decided, Well, the senators don't know me too well. We know each other, of course, and all of us worked together but I decided I would get to know some of the key senators more closely. So I invited the senators and their wives to dinner that I cooked at my house, more than once, and we got to be friends on a personal basis.

BSH: Very smart, Sally.

ST: And then, they began to understand the importance of a new car being returned or at least repaired so it would work. After three years and after a lot of—

BSH: A lot of cooking! (laughs)

[00:40:30]

ST: I remember one time I made my friends in the district beef bourguignon. And I took this casserole on my lap on the plane to Sacramento. (laughs)

BSH: Oh, my goodness!

ST: And (laughs) we had beef bourguignon for dinner.

BSH: Was it Julia Child's recipe? Do you remember? (laughs)

ST: Senator John Ford said, "I've had beef bourguignon all over the world, and this is the best beef bourguignon I have ever eaten."

BSH: Oh, that's wonderful. This is so interesting because these are the kind of stories you never read about in history books. Who were some of the state senators that you cooked for at your home?

ST: Senator Bob Beverly and his wife, Senator Johnny Ford and his wife, mainly those two. John Ford was a Democrat and Bob Beverly was a Republican, and I thought, Well, I would just concentrate on these two gentlemen. And we became really good friends and they began to understand the need for the law.

BSH: Did the California auto dealers oppose this legislation?

ST: They did. They did, and a representative from the auto dealers came into my office, and I said, "You really should be supporting this bill because it's the manufacturer who is responsible for an automobile not being well-built. It's not you, it's not retailers who are responsible, but you pay the price because the customer is angry with you. And that's not the way it should be. You should join the customer in the fight against the manufacturer, when there is a defect in a new car that can't be repaired. So, it worked.

BSH: That's a very good argument. By the time it finally became law that third time, were the auto dealers still officially opposed to it?

ST: No, they pretty much joined me—because it makes sense.

BSH: It does because they were left with the short end of the stick as well with the buyer.

ST: Yes. In my office I had people from all over the world who were automobile dealers, people from Japan and Germany, brilliant people who *knew* about their product and came to my office. I said, "I don't know the things that you know about cars. All I know is when I buy a new car, I am given a key. I should be able to put the key in, it should turn on, and it should drive. It should go and it should stop when I put my foot on the brake. That's all I know about cars." Eventually the dealers were not actively opposed to the bill.

I had friends in Southern California who had lemon trees, and one time when I was presenting the bill to the assembly, I brought eighty lemons. I had to get permission from the speaker, and he said I could do it, but I put a lemon on every desk in the assembly. It went over big.

BSH: I am sure. You're amazing. That's such a smart move, both the cooking of the dinners and the symbolism of the lemon.

ST: It was a fun thing to do, and it was effective. I believed in the bill I was carrying. I really believed in it, and that makes a difference, too, because it makes me work harder and makes people understand that the member who is carrying the bill really believes it's a good law.

BSH: I can feel your passion about that and about clean water and environmental issues even today, so yeah, thank you for that. I have a question and I am not sure how to pose it. You're known for authoring and advocating issues that are very complex, environmental issues and this lemon law. These are not typically female issues. We're not talking about daycare. We're not talking about childcare. We're not talking about typical female concerns. Were you ever criticized for that?

ST: I don't believe so. In fact, until you just mentioned it, yes, it is true that those bills would be generally carried by men, but that never occurred to me when I was working. I believed in it, or I didn't carry it.

BSH: Sally, you were in the state assembly for fourteen years. Did your issues or areas of concern change over time? Or, during that first campaign when you ran, did those issues pretty much stay the same?

ST: One major issue was right to life and choice. I was a Catholic at the time, and I really believed in the right to life. Of course, I still believe in the right to life, but I voted against choice. I thought about it long and hard. I've realized that I was wrong, and I think a woman has a right to choose in certain cases when it's not just an arbitrary kind of thing, but when there is a really good reason for a woman to choose to abort a baby. I think that that is acceptable. It took me a number of years—Maxine Waters was a big help. She was an extremely important person in my becoming elected the first time. Maxine Waters is a believer in choice and a promoter of that, and I let her down because I really felt strongly about the right to life. But the more I worked and the more I thought about it—not because of pressure from outside—I decided that a woman has a right to make that choice at a certain time of her pregnancy. And so, I changed, and I felt good about the change.

[00:50:55]

BSH: So, it was an evolution of that decision. It came with time.

ST: Yes, it took a while, and it was correct.

BSH: Wonderful, well, thank you for sharing that with us. Were there any other issues that evolved with time or your position on certain issues?

ST: I don't think so. That was a major issue. It did affect a lot of women, and I can't remember any other issues. Every bill that I carried, I believed in, or I didn't carry it. For most of them I thought there ought to be a law, so I had this wonderful staff that were

able to write those up, with a legislative analyst. They wrote up really good legislation for me, and then I was able to carry it. Did I tell you about the first time I carried a bill on the floor of the assembly?

BSH: No, you did not share that story. Can you do that now?

ST: Yes, I had a bill listed and numbered. I don't remember the bill. It was a very simple bill, but I was having *such* extreme stage fright. My bill was maybe number fourteen. We got to eleven and I was feeling ill, I was so frightened. We got to thirteen and the speaker said, "We will recess until Monday." This was on Thursday, and we would recess until Monday.

BSH: Oh, my god.

ST: That didn't make me feel good because I knew that I would be a wreck all weekend, and I was.

BSH: (laughs) It prolonged your agony.

ST: Yes, it prolonged my agony and my fear. When I finally got up to speak—it was a simple bill—there were microphones up all over the floor, and I didn't know what was going on. The Republican men were just giving me a fun time, a *hard* time, just playing, really: why are you carrying this bill? Who made you do this? Why do you believe in this bill? It got to the point where I couldn't breathe. (both laugh)

BSH: Trial by fire for your first time, huh?

ST: They were just playing with me, teasing. I took it seriously, of course, because, my gosh, I was so worried as it was. Then they had all these microphones up. (both laugh) That was an experience.

BSH: That's a great memory. Thank you for sharing that. I can see you in my mind's eye on the assembly floor. Now, why did you decide to retire in 1992?

ST: What happened was the people voted for term limits. That didn't affect me because I was grandfathered in. It offended me because there were members that I worked with—senators and assemblymen—that I didn't agree with a lot of the time, but I respected. And I felt it was an insult to the members of the legislature to pass a law to limit the terms. It didn't affect me because I was grandfathered in. But it did affect me in that it upset me. I could've continued on for probably another four or six years, but I retired because I thought, The people chose to limit the terms of members, and it was not a good idea.

BSH: I agree with you.

ST: Yeah, because it's such a complicated business.

BSH: There is something powerful about having institutional memory and knowing how things work and operate.

ST: That's it. Institutional memory is so important. The help that you get from the people who oppose your bill or support it—and to learn about what is important in the state. How does this law affect the people in this state? So important, and I felt offended that that law that was passed. It was called Prop 13?

BSH: I don't remember what the proposition number was, but it passed overwhelmingly. I do remember that.

ST: Yes, and isn't that a strange thing when you think about it? The argument for passing, I can't imagine what that was. It's a very complicated business. One learns how to really work in that business, how to develop relationships with other members, and that makes a big difference. Yeah, it hurt me. It hurt my feelings; it offended me, and I decided to retire.

BSH: I want to ask you just one more question regarding term limits because I feel that the voter already has the power to get rid of your legislator. If you don't like your legislator, you just can vote the legislator out, right, so why would you need term limits?

ST: Of course.

BSH: Do you think term limits empowers the staff? Do you think term limits shifts the power from the legislators to the bureaucracy of the state capital?

[01:00:00]

ST: Not to the members' staff, but I think to organizations that are formed to control legislation.

BSH: So, do you think the power moved to the lobbyists then, do you think?

ST: I think so. It certainly gave the lobbyists a lot more power than they had.

BSH: Because they become the instructors, really, to the fresh crop of legislators, right?

ST: No, the lobbyists could really make a big difference, but I have such good friends who are lobbyists, but they didn't personally affect me. What affected me is that they lobbied for term limits—not these particular friends of mine—but generally, it was lobbied. And, term limits passed. What is said was you're lucky to have a job for six years, I guess, but then we don't want you anymore. Well, that's a terrible thing because it's so complicated and such hard work. You work all day, constituents come to visit, and you work every evening. If you are not interested in working hard, you didn't want to be in the legislature. It was hard work, and it was serious work. And then, all of a sudden, the law was passed and it wasn't that important after all.

BSH: I agree with you completely, Sally. So, in 1992 term limits passes, and you decide to step down as a result of that law. You didn't have any desire to move to the state senate? You were just done, is that correct?

ST: No, I was finished. I felt very strongly about term limits passing, and no, it would have affected me into the senate. I could have run for a seat in Congress, and it wouldn't have affected me at all. By then I had a friend, she and I went fishing a lot and I thought, Well, I am gonna have a free life. I am gonna be able to fish and paint and do the things I love to do and not work anymore. So, that's what I did. I am a great fisherman, by the way.

BSH: I know, I am gonna get to that right now. But one last question before we go into your retirement. You left the state assembly, and I believe after you retired, your seat was won by a Republican if I remember correctly, Paul Horcher. How did you feel about your seat getting flipped?

ST: I think my seat was won by Hilda Solis, and she was not a Republican.

BSH: I must be confused. I wonder if your district number got reassigned.

ST: Oh, it could have been.

BSH: I think that's what happened. Okay, so let's move into your retirement. You basically grew up in Southern California, had children in Southern California, represented Southern California in the state assembly. How did you end up in Northern California? (laughs)

ST: Well, that's a really a good question because all of my friends were in Southern California and that was home. My dearest friend was Judge Patricia Hofstetter, she and I fished together. We fished usually in Oregon because there were so many good rivers in Oregon. So one day we had fished and Pat was driving me back to Sacramento and we stopped. I was looking at the map, and I said there is a confluence of rivers right as we're coming up to this Ferndale exit. And she said, "Well, let's take a look at it." And we took the exit, and we drove into that area, and it was pastures with cows grazing. It was beautiful, the hills in the background and trees.

BSH: It sounds like a scene that you could paint.

ST: Yeah, what a beautiful place, I thought, and said, "What a beautiful place." The city is so charming, Victorian homes, beautiful. And I said, "Oh, my goodness, Pat, I am gonna retire here."

BSH: Just like that. You fell in love with it.

ST: I said, "Let's see a realtor right now." We went over to this realtor's office, and she said, "Yeah, I can show you some homes that are available." She showed us a few places, and she showed us this house that I live in now. I said, "I am gonna buy that house; I love it." And Pat said, "I'll buy it with you." And I said, "No, no, I am gonna buy this; I am

gonna *live* here.” And she said, “Well, let me buy it with you.” So we bought it together, and we wallpapered every room in the house together. We’d never wallpapered before in our lives. We had so much fun fixing this house up. I wasn’t retired yet. This was 1990 when we bought the house, and I was retiring in ’92. There was a bedroom where I am sitting now in this kitchen. I had a carpenter open up the bedroom and make this beautiful, beautiful kitchen with lots of cupboards and lots of drawers and a lot of space and light, because of windows on the side, and it is a wonderful kitchen. So the year before I retired, we had this man make this house beautiful.

[01:10:40]

BSH: Oh, that’s wonderful. Is it a Victorian house?

ST: It’s a Victorian house. There was this terrible earthquake, and the house went down. The house is raised up. There is a space underneath the house, and it was raised up. It went down flat. It went down and turned. It was a terrible earthquake, and we decided to not try to raise the house. Well, yes, we did have a man raise the house, built a perimeter foundation around it—it didn’t have a foundation before. There were posts and piers underneath. So now the house is very secured, very safe. That was a blow for us but we weren’t living here at the time.

BSH: Oh, thank goodness.

ST: As a matter of fact, one of my sons and dear friend were visiting. I was downtown with Pat when the earthquake happened. And I thought, Oh, Chris and Pam are in the house. Oh, my goodness! We ran, and the house was down but not destroyed, and the kids weren’t there. They had been shopping and were in one of the stores, and everything came down from the shelves, broken glass everywhere. It was a terrible earthquake. We found there are earthquakes here occasionally.

BSH: You did not escape them when you left Southern California.

ST: Yes. We decided, so be it. We had the house put together, and it has stayed good. And we entertain. When Pat was still alive, we had dinner party after dinner party after dinner party. I loved to cook, and she loved to bake. And we liked people, so we entertained a lot. We got to know everybody in town because we entertained. It was just really good.

BSH: When did Pat pass away?

ST: About five years ago, which was really a blow for me because she was a great friend, wonderful! She was a brilliant woman. I always remember one of the journalists had a message about her in the paper, and referred to her as the magnificent Patricia Hofstetter. And she *was* magnificent. Pat’s sister bought a house nearby, and we had a couple of really good women friends who we had met. Every Tuesday we had a poker party here. In the evening, a man who owned a restaurant called Curly’s—it’s not his name—came over every Tuesday night and brought one of his helpers with him. And he cooked dinner for us, at my house. He cooked dinner, and his helper made the dessert, and what a fun time we had together, and a wonderful, fun time for the women and for Curly. And,



since then Curly is gone, Pat's gone, and things are different, but I have great memories, wonderful memories.

BSH: Why would you want to be in Sacramento if you could do that? That sounds wonderful.

ST: Yeah, it was just special.

BSH: Now Sally, how did you get into fishing? Tell us a little bit about that?

ST: I am getting a note here. Let's see. (reads note) Remember the men picketing in front of the house as a joke? Oh yes, we were having a party for women's suffrage or maybe we were picking the woman of the year. We were to look out the front door and there were men with signs picketing. (both laugh) They were saying, "Vote no," on something that we were supporting. It was a whole group of men from town, and it was pretty good.

BSH: So they were protesting that they weren't part of the get together?

ST: With a smile, yeah.

BSH: That's very cute. Now, Sally, how did you get into fishing? Tell us a little bit about your fishing skills.

ST: I fished a little bit with my boys. And how Pat and I decided to fish, I don't know. We decided to fish, and there was a place close by in Southern California where we could fish. And then, when I moved to Northern California, Pat moved with me, and we decided to fish in Oregon. We did it often, we had special guides, and we fished in boats. We didn't shore fish very much. Here in California Pat and I shore fished; we'd sit on chairs and have lunch in an ice chest, and we did it that way. And then, when we moved, we decided to fish in Oregon. We fished with guides, and it was just years of fishing for huge, wonderful salmon. So, we were good fishermen, and we were serious about our fishing. It was terrific.

BSH: That's wonderful. Tell us a little bit about the Steelhead Derby.

[01:20:00]

ST: It's called Cal-Ore Derby. It's California-Oregon Derby. It's steelhead fishing. We did get involved with Cal-Ore fishing. It would start on a Thursday evening for dinner, and you rent a motel because it's all in one area.

BSH: Oh, is it on the border of California and Oregon?

ST: Yes, near the Smith's River is where we stayed. So, a guide was selected for us, and he was *horrified* that he got stuck with two middle-aged women. Everybody else had men who knew how to fish and here he was with us. Well actually, we won. Pat and I won. There is a photo right there.

BSH: I love that! Is that your guide in the middle?

ST: Yes, the guide and us. We won, (laughs) and from then on, of course, we were accepted and the men wanted to be on our team.

BSH: Oh sure, you served some humble pie on that weekend.

ST: Isn't that something? Isn't that a wonderful thing? Pat and I did that. Every year we fished the Cal-Ore Derby until she got to where she couldn't do it anymore. And yeah, I miss her, and I miss the derbies. One time, we were fishing with a guide on the Umpqua River in Oregon. And I caught a sturgeon that was eight foot, six inches. Can you imagine? When I set the hook, he jumped out of the water. The guide and Pat and I just went whoa! And then getting that fish in—because he was strong! I had to pass the rod over to Pat for a while and rest my arms. I got him alongside the boat and the guide measured him. He was eight foot, six inches. And then we released him. That was the biggest fish I have ever caught.

BSH: That's amazing.

ST: It was sturgeon; he was beautiful, and I hope he's still alive.

BSH: I am surprised you didn't hurt yourself trying to pull something that big.

ST: I didn't. My arms got tired, and then I passed the rod over to Pat. She took over while I rested my arms, and I took it back. It was *my* fish.

BSH: Were you able to get a photo?

ST: There is a photo, and I don't know where it is. I haven't been able to find it but there is a photo of it.

BSH: My teenage son is a big fisherman, and once this pandemic is over, I'd love to bring him up to Ferndale, and have you tell him some of your fish stories.

ST: I'll tell him about an eight-foot, six-inch sturgeon. It looked like Jaws.

BSH: They look prehistoric anyway. I can only imagine.

ST: It was exciting.

BSH: That's wonderful. Okay Sally, we're gonna wrap up here. I want to ask you some reflective questions. There is a Sally Tanner Park in Rosemead, and there is a Sally Tanner Drive in El Monte. Can you tell me about these honors, how they make you feel, and what do your sons think about these honors?

ST: And there is a Sally Tanner Way as well. My sons and I are great friends. We love each other, but we are good friends. Chris lives in New York, and he is an artist. He is coming next week; he'll be here, and he'll spend the holidays. Tim and I play gin every night. He moved from Sacramento to Rio Dell, which is a city that's just close to Ferndale, so he could be close to me. It is really wonderful, so I see him a lot, and we

enjoy each other. My boys love each other very much. When they greet, they kiss and hug. They are both very much men who don't hesitate to show they love each other.

BSH: They must be so proud of you, right, with all of these public spaces named after you.

ST: They love me. And they are. (laughs) My son Tim calls me a rock star.

BSH: You are a rock star, absolutely. So how would you describe your leadership style, Sally?

ST: My style is getting to know people—and then the leadership sort of is a natural thing. If I know the people, if they know me, then we're able to work together. And that's how it happened. It's hard for me to describe my style because I like people and I enjoy people. It's probably reflected in my ability to be a leader when it's necessary, so that's what it is.

BSH: Well, you're a very warm person, I can tell that just through Zoom. So I can imagine how wonderful you must be in person.

ST: Thank you so much.

BSH: What were your greatest challenges that you faced while in office?

ST: In office? Well, at first being a woman, and for the men to take us seriously, that was a challenge. They found that we were as serious about what we were doing as they were, so they did accept us. One time a little, funny thing happened. One of the men was leaning over my desk talking to me, and he said, "Sally, you have two different color shoes on." (both laugh) I must have gotten dressed in a hurry because I had a blue and a black shoe on. (laughs) And he noticed it and told me. Imagine!

[01:31:00]

BSH: That's funny. You mentioned you were raised Catholic. Did your faith play any role in your activism?

ST: I think probably it did. Actually, I became a Lutheran. I really believe in God. There was a period in my life that I was very concerned about my oldest son, and I sort of connected with Mary. It really seemed to make things better. He doesn't use drugs anymore, and he is a healthy, wonderful man. I think it had something to do with believing in God and connecting with Jesus's mother.

BSH: Thank you for sharing that. That's beautiful. I appreciate that.

ST: It's pretty private.

BSH: Absolutely. Well, I am a mother, so I'd love to take any kind of tips. (laughs)

ST: Well, there you go.

BSH: Thank you, Sally, thank you for sharing that. So, let's move on to our current political situation. We just had a very important presidential election. How do you feel about American politics right now?

ST: I am so delighted that Biden and Harris won. By the way, Kamala Harris and I worked together. Willie Brown appointed us to a commission, so we sat side by side, working together. That's where I first met her, so we became friends. And then she moved on, she decided to run for district attorney of San Francisco. Every time she ran for a different office, I'd send a check because I really believe in her. And so, when she was running for president, I sent her a check. Of course, she didn't win that, but she was happily asked to be the vice president. To think that Kamala, a gal I worked with, is going to be vice president of the United States—and one of these days the president of the United States, I know for sure—is wonderful. She is brilliant. She is warm, and she's loving. The country is only going to benefit, really benefit with Biden and Harris.

My feelings are pretty strong. I feel that President Trump is not interested in being a president. I don't think he ever connected with people, and I think he doesn't understand. He's never held office before, and I believe there is a feeling that one must have, one should have, to represent the people. You should have respect and love for the people that you're representing. I believe that President Trump doesn't feel that way. I am not going to be critical of him, but I am overjoyed about Biden and Harris because I think they can do so much for this country and for the people. It just is so exciting. It's a real thing. We will all benefit. My entire career I worked on environmental legislation, and to see those laws cancelled by the president was a very serious thing. It wasn't a personal hurt. It was very bad. Now Biden and Harris are going to change things. And I think the country is going to be a happy country and well, well taken care of.

BSH: Well, I love your enthusiasm. It's contagious. I appreciate that. Do you remember the commission that you served on with Kamala?

ST: I think it was medical assistance, something like that.

BSH: Wonderful. Now since you did bring up President Trump, what impact do you think he has had on women in politics?

ST: I think that President Trump thinks of women not as women in politics but women to sleep with, and that's my impression.

BSH: As a result of all of his comments and Tweets, do you think that has empowered women across the country to get out and vote, to mobilize, to become politically active as a result of his presidency?

ST: I didn't hear you well, but I think women voted in great numbers for Biden and Harris because they recognized that President Trump is not a pro-woman president. He pays for women—it is just so offensive to me that it's hard even to discuss it in a logical way.

BSH: Yes, I agree with you. Okay, one last question, Sally, and by the way it has been a privilege and an honor to conduct your oral history today and last week, so thank you for

your time. What would you say to a young woman who is thinking about running for office or getting politically involved?

ST: I would say please do it. Please do it and believe in what you are doing and make a life for yourself in politics because it's a beautiful profession, and you can change things. You can actually make things happen that are absolutely wonderful. There are men who have been in office forever and I can't point to any special things that they've done, except that they are in office. And you can, you *can* do things, you can *change* things, and you can make things better for all the people. And you can make things better, certainly, for women. It's such an opportunity. I want women to run for office. I want women to be active politically. It is a very healthy, exciting kind of work to do. And I would be willing to help any woman who wants help. I am here, available.

[01:41:33]

BSH: You're wonderful—and you helped Kamala. Well, thank you so much, Sally, for your time and your memories and—

ST: It was nice meeting you, Brenda.

BSH: —and all of your amazing work that you have done on behalf of the people of California. Thank you so much.

ST: Thank you very much.

BSH: I am going to stop recording now.

END OF INTERVIEW

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: SALLY TANNER  
INTERVIEWER: Brenda St. Hilaire  
DATE: November 23, 2020  
LOCATION: conducted remotely<sup>5</sup>  
PROJECT: State of California Archives Project

BSH: This is an interview with Sally Tanner for the State of California Archives Project. The interview is being conducted at 10:30 AM on Monday, November 23, 2020, and is being conducted via Zoom by Brenda St. Hilaire who is located in Newport Beach, California, and Sally Tanner who is in Ferndale, California. This is part three of Sally's oral history. Sally, thank you for agreeing to meet with us again via Zoom to discuss some additional memories of your legislative career.

ST: It's a pleasure. It's a pleasure to do that. I'll begin with my first job: I was a comptometer operator. I was just out of high school. No, I was a senior in high school, and visiting my sister in Michigan, I got a job in Detroit as a comptometer operator. I didn't know what a comptometer was.

BSH: I was gonna ask you the same question.

ST: But I said, "Yes, I can do that."

BSH: (laughs)

ST: And happily, when I went to work, the women there taught me how to use the comptometer. It was a personnel department, and it was a wonderful summer job. Then the next summer I got a job at the *El Monte Herald*, the newspaper. I had to drive because I had to drive into the community to pick up ads and information about advertising. I didn't know how to drive, so the weekend before I went to work, my brother-in-law taught me to drive.

BSH: Oh, my goodness.

ST: (laughs) Monday, there was the car and "here are the keys." It was absolutely frightening, but I made it in one piece.

---

<sup>5</sup> Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and a subsequent protocol of social distancing that began in March 2020, this interview was conducted remotely using *Zoom* communication software.

BSH: Did you have your license, or were you driving without a license?

ST: No, I didn't. I drove over and got a license that very first day, but no, I didn't have a license at the time.

BSH: Oh, my goodness.

ST: It was a new job, a new car, and a license to drive. But anyway, it worked. It was one of the highlights in my life, learning to drive.

I wanted to talk to you about women's issues. A group of us women legislators had a hearing in a women's prison. It was shocking what women went to prison for, *for life*, such as women who were beaten by their husbands and finally killed them. In *no case* were they given a self-defense justification, and they were sent to prison for life. One of the women, an older woman who testified, told us that she went to her priest and talked about her husband beating her all the time. The priest said, "You go home and be good to your husband." Can you believe that? That was the whole attitude: she asked for it, and she deserved it. That was the terrible attitude.

BSH: Sally, what year was it that you and the other female legislators visited this prison?

ST: It was in 1980 or '81.

BSH: Do you remember what prison it was?

ST: It was Tehachapi, or it could be. After that, my friend, Patricia, and I went and visited Bali and Hong Kong, all over. When we were in Manila, we were walking down the street towards a lovely shopping center. A couple of young men were walking towards us, so Pat and I single filed. And I heard, "Unh!" I looked around, and Pat was down on the ground.

BSH: Oh, no!

ST: This young man was pulling her purse. And I was enraged. I jumped on him, and I just beat him up. There was a second young man, he started to intrude, and I beat *him* up. I had both of those young men running away from me. They thought these rich, American ladies, we'd just grab their purses. They found out that these American ladies are tough ladies.

BSH: I love it. I love it, Sally.

ST: Yeah, it was an interesting event to happen.

BSH: Was Pat okay?

ST: No, she had a concussion. I had to take her to the hospital. It took a while before she felt well. But it was a very serious matter. If you have a child or a dear friend, and something like that happens, you don't think. They could have very well had had knives

with them. But I didn't think. I was just absolutely enraged. So we won, and they went running.

Another incident was a group of us friends from Southern California went to Los Angeles on a Saturday night to have dinner together. And then, when we came back—

BSH: May I interrupt? Was this when you were a legislator, or was this when you were a young woman?

ST: I was a legislator, but it was early on. I was with a man who was a local judge, and he took me. After we came back from Los Angeles, he took me to my car, and all of a sudden there was a gun at my neck. I started to turn my head, and he said, "Don't turn your f-ing head and look at me. Just give me your purse, give me your money, give me your jewelry," which he took. My friend, David, was being held up at the same time but by another man. So when it all ended, another one of our friends came along, and Dave and this friend just took off to find the robbers. And there I was left alone, scared to death. They didn't think. But anyway, I knocked on the door of a friend, and I stayed there until the police came. It was a terrible experience.

[00:10:04]

BSH: What time of night was this?

ST: Probably close to midnight because we had been out to dinner and came back to pick up our cars and go on home. I remember driving—I didn't drive home. I drove over to my friend Pat's house because I was afraid to go home alone and be alone. Oh, she was horrified. In fact, she was sort of angry when I first drove in, "Why are you coming over? It's so late." But she got over it (laughs) in a hurry.

BSH: Did they find the criminals who stole your purse and held you at gunpoint?

ST: They did not. They did not, and the police really tried because, after all, one of them was a judge. I forget his last name, but he was a fellow I was dating.

BSH: I am sure you made the headlines if one person was a judge, and the other person was a state assembly member.

ST: Oh, yes, we did. Yes, we certainly did. But they were not caught.

BSH: May I ask what jewelry was stolen? Was anything significant of yours stolen?

ST: I had a wristwatch. I had a pearl necklace and earrings. My evening purse had about \$20 in it because my mother always told me, "Never go out without money in case you need to call a cab." But, yeah, it was a very frightening experience with the gun. Today, I can still feel that gun right there, and it was a very frightening experience.

Another thing happened sometime later. I got a knock at the door. And a young woman was dressed with just a little top, otherwise she was without any clothes, and she



was covered with mud. She was crying, and I brought her in. My boys were ten and fourteen at the time, and they were just stunned and shocked to see this young woman. My husband got so nervous, he picked up a broom and was sweeping the floor where the mud was dropping. (laughs) We did call the police, and I took her into the bathroom and drew a bath for her. I got in trouble for doing that because apparently they had to check for rape.

BSH: Oh, I see. Was it domestic violence, or was she a rape victim?

ST: Yes, she was raped. Nevertheless, when the case went to court, I was a witness, and I testified. The boys, she remembered who they were, so they were sent to jail. I don't know whether it was prison or jail, but they were convicted. It's a terrible thing that happens to women.

Another thing that happened, a group of us were going to Sacramento from Southern California. We were caravanning to Sacramento.

BSH: You and a bunch of other legislators or staff members?

ST: No, it was a State Central Committee meeting. And we stopped on the way to have lunch—and these were all friends. And I was bending over looking in the jukebox. One of the fellows grabbed my fanny. And I came around with my fist, and I buried my fist in his belly. I knocked him out.

BSH: (laughs)

ST: It was all just a reaction, and a *good* reaction because the other men all realized that's not the kind of thing one does. I reacted, and they carried him away.

BSH: Oh, wow, Sally, that was a little preview to your Manila fight. (laughs)

ST: (laughs) So that was an interesting thing. I don't know how many things you want to hear. One summer vacation, I was visiting my sister in Dearborn, Michigan, and I got a summer job in Detroit. A group of us waited for the bus every morning, the same group of people, and we got to know each other. It was very nice. And one day, one of the fellows who was in the group drove up and said, "Hi, Sally, I'll give you a lift to Detroit." And I said, "Wonderful, great!" So, I jumped in the car. And he was sitting there with his pants unzipped, he had an erection. And, as the car was driving, I got out. I didn't even tell the police. I didn't even tell my mother. And that's a strange thing, that women hesitate to tell. I think about it now, and I wonder how could I *not* have called the police? How could I have *not* told my mom? But that happens. Men get away with things like that.

BSH: It's almost like we take responsibility almost for that crime.

ST: Yeah, I "asked for it." I didn't feel like I asked for it. I knew I hadn't asked for it, but that's what people said.

BSH: Sally, I'll ask you. You had this terrible experience as a young woman working part-time in Detroit, and then you as a married mom helped this rape victim, and then you and Pat were attacked in Manila. Did any of these issues that impact women find themselves in the legislation that you proposed? Or did any of these situations lead to some sort of action?

ST: The only thing that I can recall having done is equal pay for women. I don't believe that I carried any legislation that had to do with women's abuse, but I can't swear to it because I haven't looked through my records.

BSH: Sure, when you went to Tehachapi and visited that prison for women, how many legislators were with you, and what came out of that visit?

ST: Well, there were probably eight or ten of us, both senators and assembly members and Republicans and Democrats, so it was a mix. I didn't carry any legislation, but there was legislation offered about women being abused, recognizing that women were being abused by their husbands, and the fact that women don't often tell that it's happened. In one case, there was a doctor who was beating his wife, and he beat her from the shoulders down so nothing would show on her face. *It happens*. There was legislation that was offered, and we all supported it. I don't remember what it was, and I can't remember which members authored the legislation, but there was.

[00:21:22]

BSH: Was this the Women's Legislative Caucus that went to Tehachapi?

ST: Yes, pretty much. It was a group of us, pretty much the women's caucus. And let's see. I talked about getting a lift in Detroit. One of the good things that happened when I was in the legislature—well, there were many good things, but there was a men's club. It was called Derby Club, and it was a restaurant in Sacramento where the men would meet, and they wore derby hats. It was men only. I was invited, with Senator Rose Ann Vuich, to be the first two women to belong to the Derby Club. So we were given hats, and we were the first two. And then, more women were part of it and it was integrated. It was a wonderful group and luncheon club, and we enjoyed each other. I was very honored to be one of the first two women to be derby members.

BSH: That's wonderful.

ST: Yes. I have a dog, and his name is Ralph. I didn't name him. He is a rescue dog. Mary tells me that this is the seventh rescue dog I have had.

BSH: Oh, that's wonderful.

ST: Yeah, I keep them until they die. They turned out to be wonderful, wonderful animals. They just need a home to live in happily and to die in. When they die, then I have them cremated. I put their ashes in a hole and I put a rosebush on it. So each dog that I have had has a rosebush in my yard.

BSH: That's beautiful; that's beautiful. Now, what kind of dog is Ralph?

ST: Ralph is a beagle. A beagle that is a lemon beagle, which is good. He's almost all white. I've had a lot of beagles through the years, and this is the first lemon beagle I have ever had. He's deaf, he's fourteen, and he is really happy to be here.

BSH: I am sure his life is just heaven now that he has found you. (laughs)

ST: Yes, I know that he is happy. He knows the house now, and he feels so comfortable. I have a bed on the floor in my bedroom, and he sleeps in my bedroom at night. He is happy, and I am happy to have him.

BSH: How long have you had Ralph?

ST: About a month.

BSH: Oh, he's new.

ST: Brand new, yeah.

BSH: I want to see.

ST: He's on a walk.

BSH: See, Ralph is enjoying the good life. (laughs) Well, that's great. Now, are there any other issues that you wanted to talk about today?

ST: No, I think I covered just about everything.

BSH: Then I have a couple of questions for you. Since you were such a trailblazer for women on so many issues—whether it was being a graphic artist, or being in the newspaper industry, or in the marketing industry, and then, of course, your amazing legislative career and what you've accomplished there—what do you think are the most pressing issues now, moving forward in the year 2020?

ST: I think that today the situation is pretty much the same as it was when I was a young woman. I think it's very hard for women to get a good job, and when they do, they still are not paid the same as men, and I think this has to change. I *did* carry legislation that required equal pay for equal work, but that happens to be forgotten and people don't consider litigation, so it is still happening. I, of course, am not involved politically anymore. I think it's too bad that women are not recognized as far as pay is concerned. Now, there is one thing that I want to mention: Kamala Harris, did I mention her before?

BSH: That you worked together on a committee?

ST: Yes, we were on a commission together.

BSH: Yes, you did mention it.

ST: I am very pleased to think that the future vice president is a friend of mine. That's *very* exciting to me.

BSH: That's very exciting, and a Californian at that.

ST: And I think eventually she'll be the first woman president. Won't that be good?

BSH: I love that she wore white when she made her first speech as vice president elect.

ST: I loved it, yeah. She is very brilliant and very sharp and extremely warm. I love her, and I am so excited about her future.

BSH: That's wonderful; that's wonderful. So, you mentioned that the issues you were fighting for are still the same issues for women today. Does that frustrate you? Does that dishearten you? Or is it just the situation that we're in?

ST: It doesn't frustrate me. I think it has to change. It has to change. Women today in charge—Maxine Waters, for instance, is a very strong woman. And I really am going to contact some of the women I know who are in office and start trying to get this straightened out, where women are paid equally. It's not an easy thing to do.

[00:30:00]

BSH: No, no. How do you think it gets solved, Sally? Do you think it's through education and just educating our young women, our girls?

ST: I think that has a great deal to do with it. If women recognize that their jobs are just as important as the fellow next door, they should receive the same amount of money. I think education is important, but I also think legislation should be considered that would require that people are paid equally. I did carry it, and that was a law that sort of gets forgotten.

BSH: Well, wonderful, Sally. I have enjoyed interviewing you immensely. It's been one of the highlights of this year for me, so thank you so much for your time.

ST: Thank you so much, Brenda. I think you are lovely, and I appreciate you doing this.

BSH: It's an honor. Thank you, Sally, and happy Thanksgiving!

ST: Same to you, bye-bye.

BSH: Thank you. Okay, Sally, I am going to stop recording.

END OF INTERVIEW