INTERVIEW: Elizabeth Homer
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey
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[TAPE I]

Interviewer: **The first set of questions has to do with your personal biography your background and any way that this may have led you into your feminist activism later on. So just the basic first where you were born and when?**

E. Homer Well, I was born in Flint, Michigan, although my — I was born in Flint, Michigan, and I lived there for about a year or two then moved to Imlay City, which is the gateway to the thumb. And I grew up there in a pretty nice community that was central to the farming community around it, and my education was…. sincere.

Interviewer: **What do you mean by that?**

E. Homer Well intended (laughter). Perhaps not as comparable as to what my husband was (receiving) in Ferndale where there was huge — well let's put it this way, I graduated with a class of 85. And in those days, we did not say the word "sex" in Imlay City, so I had no knowledge of sexism and sex discrimination, sex bias, anything like that at all. So, I had to piece it all together later.

In looking back, I can see some of the incidents that might have led to my interests. But I think the underlying interest was being raised a Methodist with this really big drive to make a contribution. You should always make a contribution to your society and to your community and so forth, and so there was a lot of awareness. The youth were led by some really devoted people. My Girl Scout leader was also the superintendent of the Methodist church and a very good role model. Those kinds of things led to my interest, and then also you know we had no minorities and as I say, we didn't talk about genders or sex or anything there. So, when the racial problems started in the south, the way I learned about them was through the New York — the *Time Magazine* and they made a big impression on me. They were very shocking to me. When I went to the University of Michigan I had never experienced comments that were racial, racist or anything like that, and that was also a very big shock to me. When I would hear a name and people would start making a stereotypical remark about it, and I would always think, "How do they know?" 'cause like I'm Scottish, but my name is Homer and you know I just wouldn't make any assumptions based on a person's name. So, I was like a naïve country girl in some ways.

Interviewer: **What did your parents do?**

E. Homer My mother was a teacher and taught off and on. We had five kids in my family so she didn't teach full time every year, but it was one of those situations when they got in a pinch they'd come and ask my mom if she would teach a class or a year of something or other, and so she would teach a little, and then my father was the co-owner of a construction supply company with his brother.

Interviewer: And how many brother and sisters did you have?

E. Homer I have three sisters and a brother.

Interviewer: Okay, and so you think that perhaps your religious upbringing influenced you a bit towards your latter?

E. Homer Well, it was a lot of having to do with ethics and morals and values, and I think that — and my parents were similar so there was not any conflict with that kind of teaching and the community being pretty closed and yet open to taking kids to learn about other religions and open to taking them to learn about other cultures and participating in activities in Detroit. So, I had maybe an unusual background in that way, but it wasn't what you would think from a small community. I went to the United Nations with my youth group and things like that and I participated in some political things like Girls' State, which I always try to remember because you know those were sponsored by organizations who I think did a valuable service to people like me by sending me to those kinds of things.

Interviewer: And you mentioned that you went on to get a college education, was this expected of you and your family and what did you study?

E. Homer Well, I became a teacher and that was because I think there were very few choices, and there were no role models, and I simply couldn't think of anything else to be. I didn't mention — I should mention this, that I had dyslexia but I kind of grew out of it in a way about the age of twenty-nine. I still have some remnants of it. So school was hard for me in that I was probably studying harder than anyone else to get to the point where — you know. I remember I took a course in art, that was one of the things I was interested in — art — and my mother was never sure how I was going to turn out because sometimes, she would be saying, like "Well she seems very smart," and the other times she'd say "I'm not so sure," because I couldn't learn phonics and I had all these quirks and problems but mainly I just sort of covered them up, and when I took art I got interested in packaging and not just in the design of packages but in the engineering of packaging and then later when my brother graduated from college and — he graduated from high school and he was fifteen years younger than me, I'm the oldest and he's the youngest. He tested very high in mechanical ability and so every school wanted him — he took all this math and computer and all that and I saw what was happening to him, and then it came to

my mind I tested very high in mechanical ability also and there wasn't anything that I could think of to do. I've always been fascinated by children and their growth and development. And so I became a teacher and taught for three years after I graduated.

Interviewer: **So, at what point did you ever get married and have children?**

E. Homer Well, unlike many of the girls I went to high school with, I did not get married right away, but I did marry a person that I met in high school and that was a very common thing and almost everyone married their high school sweet heart. But, I went to college, and my husband, John Giese, went to college too here at U of M, and then got married. So, I was twenty-one and then, that was in 1964 that I graduated from University of Michigan and got married. Then it was in 1970 that I had my daughter, Ann.

Interviewer: **And you continued teaching for a long while?**

E. Homer I only taught three years. I taught two years in California. We went out to California. We sort of had a prolonged honeymoon out in California. Taught school, and I taught one year in Alma while my husband was getting a masters degree in physics, to teach physics. And then came to Milford, Michigan, which is where there was a physics job available but there were no elementary teaching jobs available. I loved teaching, I really did. I loved the kids and it was very challenging and fun, but there were absolutely no jobs and there didn't come to be any and so I taught preschool for about five years, which would be like about a few hours a day for three days a week or something and raised my daughter. I was a stay-at-home mom.

Interviewer: **Okay, and looking back on your earlier life do you pinpoint anything that influenced your feminist activism later?**

E. Homer Well, I try to think of what my mother was like and whether that had anything [to do with it] because all the children are feminists, my brother included. And my mom was very subtle about it. I mean it was really her assumptions about people. She takes people as they come, how they are, and accepts them the way they are — doesn't prejudge them. Those kinds of things I think would be — and the sense of social justice that there is. That kind of probably had to do with it more than anything else. And there was never any feeling of the inferiority of girls from my dad or anything like that, so...

Interviewer: **The next set of questions refers to your activist involvement in the 1960's through the 1980's. We are basically focusing on the second wave of feminism. What led you to become active?**

E. Homer Well you know you hear of about the famous "click." I'll tell you about my famous "click."

Interviewer: **Yes, I'd like to hear it.**

E. Homer It really had to do with the fact that my sister, Nancy, who was about four years younger than me was attending Wayne State University. And, she'd come out and visit me in Milford. Now picture this — I've set up the ironing board in the living room and I'm ironing cause that's what we used to do in those days, I don't know why. But I was ironing, and we were talking, and I was telling her about the Human Relations Council because I was active in the Milford Human Relations Council and she said. "Well," some thing like, "Well, why aren't you active for women's rights too?" and I said, "Oh well that isn't as important as racism." And well, da ta da da da… "click." And you know that was how I got involved in the women's movement. And Nancy said well that Betty Friedan was coming to the YWCA in Detroit, did I want to come and meet her? And of course, I hadn't read her book but I'd certainly heard of her book and so I said, "Sure." So we went down and heard her speak and I joined NOW and that's how it started.

Interviewer: **So, you make the connection between your activism and the civil rights movement, and anti-racism activism with the feminist activism. Did you simultaneously work for both causes or did you see them as separate things or different things?**

E. Homer Right, I worked on redlining which was an important issue and all facets of — I mean to me it was really the broader issue of equity and fairness to people, and also caring about people who are poor across the board. I think that's true with many feminists, the same way. I was involved with the Human Relations Council in Milford which you might kind of laugh —

Interviewer: **What is this?**

E. Homer The Human Relations Council, when there weren't many minorities at all in Milford. But we started with friends of mine, Joan Boyle and Alice Davies, and a whole group because there was all this horrible anti-busing stuff going on led by Bruce Patterson in Oakland County, and there were Ku Klux Klan members who had just blown up a bus in Pontiac and that kind of thing happened. So, we decided to have this series of lectures in Milford, and we had them in this high school, junior high school, gym and we had some really quite well-known people and one of them was Judge Crockett oh, he was Congressman Crockett who came to speak and Fleming — what's his name, the former president of U of M — when he was there. And he came and several others, and the Ku Klux Klan threatened to come to this meeting and bomb us - I guess is what they were going to do. And I always remember because I lived across the street from the head of the chief of police and he was very angry at me and at the Human Relations Council because of all this trouble we had caused. And I'm like, you're angry at me? - what about the Ku Klux Klan? But what I thought was

interesting about Milford, although it was very hard to get them to do anything, — like pass a resolution against the anti busing people — they wouldn't stand for this kind of behavior on the part of the Ku Klux Klan. So that particular lecture was standing room only in this gym — was a great statement to the Ku Klux Klan who were outside threatening and all that, and I remember I was inside and I was like the, oh, liaison to Congressman Crockett who came with bodyguards. And that was my first experience with handguns, having guns there and everything. So, it was a scary thing but it was something that Milford — when something like that happened they wouldn't stand for it — and so I was pretty proud of them for that. Then we did a lot of other things - we had anti-war programs and I was involved with a lot of that too, …. Another Mother for Peace…

Interviewer: **Now going back to the time you were involved with NOW, what was your role and did you increase your participation or were you instantly enmeshed?**

E. Homer I was pretty much, you know, being in Milford, I felt a little closed off from the kind of person that I am, from people like myself. So I was happy to be involved with people who were activists. And one of the things I did was get involved with the childcare issue because, see, I was a mom so I was a perfect person for being involved with childcare and took that on as an issue. Not necessarily as my most - the highest priority but where I thought I'd be most useful. I can remember going to meetings at Joan Israel's house and Joan was a little older than me. I was like twenty-seven and I can remember just being in awe of them because they knew how to do everything as far as organizing things, and how to put a mailing together or contact the media or whatever they wanted to do. They were just so creative and so knowledgeable and I was just like this kid you know. So, it was a real learning experience for me.

Interviewer: **And what were the other main issues you worked on?**

E. Homer Well, I was very interested in politics. My friend, Joan Boyle, that I mentioned was very active in politics; she was about 10 years older than me. She took me to my first state convention and explained on the way there everything that was going to happen and who was going to fight with whom and what was going to happen. And we went there and of course everything she said was going to happen happened. And so I got a good acquaintance with an introduction to politics and was fascinated by the system. I learned how to operate the system to move feminist issues onto the agenda of State Central and get resolutions passed and did all that kind of stuff, and was spokesperson of the Democratic Women's Caucus for — I think that was 1975 I was on the State Central Committee. And then became a spokesperson for the Democratic Women's Caucus.

Interviewer: **Now you label yourself a stay-at-home mom but it seems if you were also**

out of the home with the activism, what was that like and were you supported?

E. Homer Well, it was a wonderful thing for the feminist movement that some of us were able not to work, because I think now of the struggles we have because so many of us are working. I was not working and so I could devote my time and thinking to what needed to be done. Then, as time passed, more women <who were working> went into the women's movement — it's harder to do things.

Interviewer: Interesting. Was your family supportive, your immediate family supportive?

E. Homer Very.

Interviewer: Can you recall any significant events that occurred in connection with your activism, any stories you might like to make sure would get told and passed down?

E. Homer Gosh. There's many. I remember the first convention I went to in Grand Rapids. I was sitting with the people from Milford and my friends in Highland.

Interviewer: Did Milford have a separate chapter?

E. Homer Well, we're talking about the Democratic Party. And so we were kind of back and I'm looking down and there are these women, Eleanor Vader and Jean King, whom you'll probably interview, in yellow dresses which was — I remember yellow dresses but I had no idea why they were yellow. And they had the audacity to nominate Eleanor Vader for chair of the Democratic party. And the men put up just a horrid uproar and my [male] friends were standing on their chairs yelling and booing, and I was in total shock. I couldn't believe it then. I was like shaking them like, "What the heck are you doing?!" But I was just shocked at their behavior. Well, that was the first and last time that ever happened in the Democratic Party. But it showed the gut reaction to this that was like the first cannon, you know, in this battle.

And I went to the caucus meeting, which was held in a large room that was packed with lots of women, but not very many from my county would go. It was in that time they were experimenting with not using Robert's Rules of Order so it was pretty tedious and took forever. Everything took forever when you didn't have Robert's Rules of Order and everybody had to reach consensus, and all that. Well, that kind of got laid by the wayside, it wasn't really functional. And I got involved with a lot of things in terms — or things like writing bylaws for people, writing resolutions for people, a lot of sort of like kind of helping kinds of things with the Women's Caucus and moving the issues into the mainstream.

Oh, I know here's a good story: Dorothy Haener was a founder of NOW. She was in the original organization that formed in New York with Betty Friedan and she was involved in the Democratic party here in UAW, and one of those years in there — and this in [the] mid 1970's — the two of us were on the economics committee, and just getting on the economics platform committee was a big deal to get a couple of women on that committee. And so we were on the economics committee and we got put in the position of writing the resolution that would come out for the platform through some cleverness of ours — I don't know what. So anyway, I went down to Solidarity House down on Jefferson Avenue and there was Dorothy whom I knew somewhat but not real well and she said, "Well, this is how I do it." She says, "I cut pieces from here and there, the things that I like, and I put them all together and then I cut and paste and put this resolution together." And so I said, "Well if that's the case I think I have something here that has just about everything that we want.' and I had the *National NOW Times* and on the front page was the planks of national — the economic planks of *National NOW Times* and I read it over and I said, "This is about what we want." She looks at it and reads it. We cut it out put it in this resolution and she had a paragraph that began it and we kind of ended it and we had it typed up by one of the staff people and we took it to the economics committee and neither one of us ever said anything such as, 'by the way this is the platform of National NOW.' Everybody liked it fine. I don't think they changed it

Interviewer: **And it went right through?**

E. Homer And then I went to — when we had the convention, I presented it to the convention and they all passed it. But if we had ever said, "Let's pass this resolution from National NOW," it would have been nowhere…So that was a fun story from that time. But, when I was spokesperson of the Democratic Women's Caucus, I had people saying, "Why do you have to be called 'spokesperson'?" Everything was like small steps. Every little thing, every bit of progress was like a little step. Nothing was ever given to us. I remember lobbying to get Bill Fitzgerald, who was our candidate for governor, to have a woman on the ticket. That was a huge thing to get them to consider a woman. And we got the list [of potential women Lt. Governor candidates] together and gave it to them and all that. Abortion was a big issue then and we finally got Libby Maynard to be accepted as the pro-choice, to his being against, on the ticket.

And I remember when they were doing polling, and I think it was Sander Levin was running for governor, going, and doing— having to do this big lobby job. And my friends Joan Boyle and Alice Davies and I wrote a big paper and the whole point of all of our research and talk was to get them [the Levin campaign pollsters] to ask a question about women in their polling. So, it was big break through. And when Carter came, when he was candidate for president, just getting them to do a piece of literature that was aimed at women that had

women's issues on it, childcare, employment, and so forth. That was like these tiny little steps. We're like pulling teeth for everything that we were wanting to do.

I know of another one and this is with Dorothy Haener too. So, you know how the candidate comes flying in the airport and there are all these men in the pictures. We wanted to have women in the picture. Now see, this is the kind of stuff — you are trying to change the culture and things. These are the little things you are doing. So we got Morley Winograd who was the chair of the party at the time — the director of the party at the time — to allow them [Democratic Women's Caucus] to have women. So he said, "Okay, then you," — meaning me and Dorothy Haener — "can go and meet the plane and be in the picture so there will be two women in these pictures." So, we had to go and drive in our cars from one place to the next and be in these pictures like, you know, just be bodies to have women in the pictures. But when we got to the airport and we were going up there, one of the things I noticed was that the men clearly thought they were the most important people and they were, you know, anything but gentlemen — forget it. They were like knocking everyone over so they could be in the picture. It was extremely awful, I thought, and [Congressman] Bill Brodhead was one of those people I remember. They all wanted to be in the pictures with him [Carter]. That was one of the kind of stupider, kind of humorous funny things that we did. And as we were both getting into our cars we looked at each other and just roared. I mean the whole absurdity of it was just ridiculous and how crazy we were to be putting ourselves through this dumb thing. So that was one of the things we did and that's the kind of thing — you get a picture of it?

Interviewer: **Definitely. Were you ever interested in politics, in being a politician yourself?**

E. Homer In the way I don't think I'm temperamentally the type to be a legislator, but after I had been the spokesperson of the Women's Caucus, and I was a stepping down we were still at a point where women didn't run for office. And in my particular district, which was basically a Republican district, the Democrat who was running was really not representative of the views of Democrats in our area and we were kind of horrified that he was running and going to be our candidate and so some of my friends said why don't you run. Well, I thought about it and I decided to run even though I knew it was a Republican district. And so I did. And I remember one of the interviews that was done, the reporter wrote in the article afterwards that "either she's very naïve" — this is what he wrote: "either she's very naive or she has a deep understanding of the issues" and I thought, "Oh god, I hope they choose the second one and not the first." But that's what he wrote. And I did get a couple of letters from old men who said things like, "You should be home with your family" and so forth. The person that won was the Republican who was an alcoholic, but he won over me. I won the Democratic primary, which was okay. But the interesting thing that I

learned from that was after. Even though I had lost, even though I'm exactly the same person, just as knowledgeable as I ever was, there was an automatic layer of respect put on you for just having been a candidate. People called me for my opinions more and wanted me to do this and that and the other thing. And that little bit of something power goes automatically to all these men that run and don't win. So let's have women run and don't win and get some of that.

Interviewer: **Who were your allies at this time for your activism?**

Allies in what way do you mean?

Interviewer: **Personal and organizational allies, who supported you, who helped you, and then were there people who were against what you were doing? These old men who wrote you, for example, or anyone closely acquainted to you? Who did you lean on most for support?**

E. Homer Well, my friends, I mentioned Joan and Alice, who were about ten years older, were very supportive and thoughtful, but more traditional, you know. I was younger and a little more "have to get out and do stuff" like that and probably brought feminism to them in a way. We all had daughters named Ann. Let's see, in terms of who supported me. You know it's like I had — because I traveled all over the state and talked with people all over the state — I had many friends all over the state, and still do, that were leaders in various things, whether it was the abortion issue or the political part or the childcare or economics. I got to know people all over the state that way. And I think that was very good for me and [Democratic Women's Caucus] lucky for me because it gave me the kinds of support that I needed that I wouldn't have found if — I don't know what would have happened if I just stayed home and had to stay in Milford and grow up there and not have any kind of really big challenging thing to do. I don't know what would happen, you know, without the women's movement. You know for me it would have been a hard, hard thing and you think of the leaders that I met through the Veteran Feminist thing and I look at them and what they have done with their lives and I see how smart they are, you know, how perceptive and creative, and skilled they are. And some of those I'm sure would have succeeded no matter what, but others would have had some — many doors slammed. It was a very good, lucky thing for us.

Interviewer: **Did you have fun?**

E. Homer Yep, it was very stimulating to me.

Interviewer: **Good. The next sets of questions are reflections on second wave feminism. What's your definition of feminism?**

E. Homer It's a movement to bring about change in the political, social, and economic status of women and to bring women into equal partnership with men, with

equal rights and responsibilities.

Interviewer: **And has that definition changed through out time?**

E. Homer No, we still need to do those things.

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

E. Homer Well, you know I've been — I gave a bunch of stuff to the Bentley and I've been going through a bunch of stuff to make a time line for the Veteran Feminists and I have a lot of press clippings. There was more coverage at that time, because it was the issues. The movements of the time were given more coverage than they are today, I think, in many ways. And we were new and not understood and when I was a spokesperson for the Democratic Party there was a lot of attention paid because they didn't know what we were going to do, be for, or against, or what. So the media — well even as an example when I was director of PEER [Project on Equal Education Rights] I did the first study on the status of the sexes in education and it was on the front page on the New York — I mean *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News. A*nd when I did the 25th annual anniversary of Title IX study, they wouldn't cover it - because the reporter came, did like a two-hour interview, but the editors were not interested. So you see the difference?

Interviewer: **Interesting. Could you talk about your first study of the sexes in education?**

E. Homer Well this goes to after I had run for office. It was in 1978 and I had been involved with a group called the Coalition for Non-Sexist Education because I was always interested in sexism in the schools and Title IX. Title IX came to be in 1972 and that would have been — I was still pretty young. I wasn't part of getting Title IX too much. I might have written a letter or something like that. But let's see, I became the executive director of the Project on Equal Education Rights and this was a project of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, and had come to this state through the involvement of Jo Jacobs who was the first Title IX coordinator for the state. She had got them — they were going to have a project on the implementation of Title IX - she got them to choose Michigan as a state and she decided I was going to be the executive director, which I didn't have in my plans, but it was, like, "you're going to do this." So that's how I became the executive director of the project and it was a really important lesson to be learned because we had a lot of money from the Ford Foundation and the Mott Foundation. We were able to hire three full time staff to devote themselves to the implementation of Title IX. I worked with Jo Jacobs, and you've already met Marcia Federbush and so forth, and there was a huge network of people. And what I did was a lot of community organizing. So once again I'm traveling all over the state giving talks about Title IX, organizing communities, working with the superintendents, because, see, this is

a grant, so the grant is like they're a little scared of what we're going to do. So they want us to be sure and work with the schools. So I worked with the schools. And went around and gave workshops and gave talks. And I did studies because I've always believed that you need that data to back up your points. I organized these different groups and got a lot of people who became active in other things, like Sue Grimes Munsell, who was a League of Women Voter — got her involved in the PEER project and later on she went on to become a state legislator.

A lot of those people that were drawn into this PEER project went on and did other things. And we had done a study and I have mentioned to you the value of the fact that people were not working full time. We were able to organize groups and do these huge studies on schools in all facets of the education, elementary and secondary, and math and science and collecting the numerical data, as well as observing the classrooms and all that. Well, then, the value of having a full time staff is that they can pull all this together and make something of it. Volunteers really need that kind of support and it's very difficult to obtain when you're working on an issue like this, as opposed to Head Start, Red Cross, or something like that - to have that kind of support for volunteers. We were able to generate all kinds of volunteer effort, but then I would pull all this information together and I wrote a report by analyzing all these studies and this information. I didn't know at the time, but because of PEER being a national project they were able to tell me this was the first time they'd had a study that actually documented how sexism occurs in the schools. And we called it "You see the cat walking," after the title — there's an old South American saying, "You see the cat walking, but that's not how it catches mice." And that's because in the schools we see, you know, daily occurrences of it but we don't see *how* it's happening and *how* it occurs unless we identify it. So I did, I gave lots of examples and I also had lots of charts of data and statistics, which I always liked personally, and recommendations for change.

And then, because of the grant, we had lots and lots of money to publish the report and disseminate the report. A lot of those archives are — those studies and reports - are in the Bentley Archives and I'm really happy about that because it — people need to know in the long run how much work went into the implementation of Title IX, how much work it was, and how hard it was, and how many women all over, you know, worked to make that happen. And that, is to me kind of like a tribute to them for all of the work that they did. That was once again another way that I met so many people all over the state, some really neat people.

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

E. Homer Well, legislation is really important. When I was involved in the Democratic Party and moving those issues to the agenda and the platforms and then

eventually through the party system and thinking that they eventually would become legislation — that's really great. I think things like credit for women will be a long-standing thing. When my mom got divorced my brother who was twelve got mailings offering him a credit card, while she could not have one — had to rely on her brother, my Uncle Cam. So I mean that the way women now can have access to money, handle money. We still have problems getting loans for business projects and things like that, but that's come a long way and because we are a capitalistic society I don't think we are going to lose any ground there.

I think in the field of domestic assault - that went from being a non-issue, absolutely never discussed issue, to being an accepted thing so that now police know that is part of their duties and responsibilities and also a source of the crimes and problems that they have in their communities. So that's made huge progress. But we're dealing with the results, we still haven't got at the causes well enough, I don't think. So there's still work to be done. But now if a women is raped — I mean, I notice now it's just like "Damn it, I'm going to do something about this" — it's not the horrible shame where you wouldn't even tell your mother, you'd be so shamed. Now people are angry when it happens and rightfully so and not begging for anonymity like they did in the past. So that's a big change, but we still have the problem of rape in our society. We've gotten more of a support system but it isn't universal; we still have date rape and all these drug rape things that are pretty disgusting. But that is huge progress nevertheless.

In the field of education, there's no doubt, even though when I did the 25th anniversary study I was sort of ambivalent. I didn't know what to say exactly because we've made a lot of progress but yet "Hey folks it's been 25 years! Why is this all the progress we've made in 25 years?" on one hand, and on the other it's certainly light-years from where it was. And I see in the issue of sex role stereotyping, because we've got this "men are from Mars and women are from Venus" thing going, a lot of niche marketing going on, and playing to stereotypes. You can go into Toys R Us and this horrible pink aisle here is for the girls, that's Barbie, and over here these black, pow wow, action figures, horrible, ugly things are for the boys. And there's some in between, and wise parents can find the in between. But the marketing to children based on stereotyping is really quite, quite overwhelming.

Interviewer: **Do you have anything you might consider a failure of the second wave feminism?**

E. Homer Yeah, I think there are definitely failures. We tried to make the point that feminism was for men and for women and we have now men who are feminists. But as far as legislators, we still have a lot of extremely conservative women who are getting elected — every one of them is a failure (laughs). I think that and religion — we haven't made nearly the progress that we should in religion.

It's still, you know, there's still a lot of power in religion that's not easily shared, apparently, by leaders of various religious groups. Whatever group it is. And I'm not talking about just the fundamentalists but they have been able to make us their enemies.

Interviewer: **Nevertheless you had said that your religion, your Methodist upbringing, did lead you to be influenced towards social equity and feminism so —**

E. Homer Equity and feminism — all the children, you know, 'red and yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight.' We learned that in and out, in and out, but we also — curiously enough there were several women ministers in my area, not in my church, but in my friend's church and they were Methodists and so forth. I did see women role models although it's taken them many years to bring women into the Methodist church. In the Unitarian churches there are about half female, but there are many churches that are not. And the Catholic churches are still hanging on to their sexist ways. I don't see a lot of organizing with women within the church. A while back I went to a Methodist conference and there were many women ministers in the meeting I was in. I forget what the topic was, I think it was maybe Women in the Pulpit or something like that and I felt very - almost to tears, by the pain of those women who were being treated with such meanness by their fellow ministers and that has — that was pretty sad. And it's like, you wonder how a person can be a minister and treat someone like that, a colleague.

Interviewer: **A lot of women, when we have been mentioning failures of the second wave feminism movement, have mentioned the Equal Rights Amendment and the fact that did not get passed.**

E. Homer Yep, and that's the, you know, Phyllis Schlaflys. The right wing, the conservative. It did pass here in our state and fairly easy and slickly with the help of the fact that Governor Milliken was the governor, or had it been Blanchard. Had it been Engler, I don't know. I don't know in this day and age if we could have passed it. But we passed it then and I was involved with a lot of that. That was great, that was fun and having done a lot of work through the Michigan Women's Studies Association which we haven't really talked about, I did a great deal of research and the forces that were — I was just thinking about this the other day - the forces that were at the turn of the century, like at the 1890's to 1910, were very much similar to what we are experiencing today — the conservative forces, the great push to plutocracy, the privileged elite, conservatism of that time. And I was thinking about that and thinking that probably had a lot to do with how long it took the women's movement to get the right to vote. Because after Black men got the right to vote you would have thought it'd been in fairly short order that women got the right to vote, but at that time then was growing the conservative movement and I can remember Clara Author, one of the great suffragists in Michigan people don't know about, saying you know, the enemy of our movement is conservatism, the cloak of

conservatism — and that's true now. I think that's our biggest threat too right now, very big threat.

Interviewer: **What do you say to people who have characterized second wave feminism as a bunch of bored housewives that who had nothing else to do, and also they've characterized it as racist and middle class, expressing middle class concerns as opposed to general concerns? Do you agree with this characterization or —**

E. Homer Well if that's a characterization of me, I hope not.

Interviewer: **Does it reflect your experience?**

E. Homer If it reflected the people I know, then no. I think there was a great effort to be egalitarian, and you meet the other, the older leaders, older than me. You see it throughout their — in their approach to coming to this issue. And I think because that's true, feminism is a much deeper threat. And why it's fought against so much is because it has a lot to do with a whole lot more then just feminism: the economics that we seek, the idea of diversity, all those things come through the feminist movement as well and emerge, and entwine with others because the overall view is "what is justice here and what's in the public good?" and that's not even an issue on our political stage today. We don't talk about what's for the public good anymore — it's what's for the bottom line. And so the feminists are a threat. They are a very big threat and they'll always be a threat. Because we'll never be done 'til we really do have all the options open for all people. And the other part of the failure, and goodness knows, people like Betty Friedan have certainly tried, is to get across to men the changes that need to be made, how sexism hurts them, how stereotyping hurts them.

I used to talk about it when I was the director of PEER. I would go out and I'd be giving these general — a lot of times the group would be forming and they'd have me come in, and I'd come in and be the keynote speaker and I would try to lay out for them the value of dealing with sexual stereotyping for both girls and boys and where we would kind of envision that we would like to have of boys and girls, and the ideal partnership, and how to use data, sex segregated data, not to sex segregate people but to really use it as sort of a flag to tell you whether you were reaching the kind of programs that you should, through those programs reaching kids as you should. I felt that the audiences — you know they were — it was just something they couldn't seem to get - the part about the boys. I'd talk about how girls are hurt most economically by this segregation, the sex discrimination, sex stereotyping, but boys are hurt psychologically, perhaps hurt even more psychologically than girls are because they're not — it's not the economic impact, it's the psychological impact that's hurt them. And you know some people listened, but some didn't get it. It's slowly coming and you can see the changes and even with this whole thing with the clergy and

the Catholic Church, as horrible as it is, the good thing is now men are talking about the abuse that they suffer, you know? They're where women were thirty years ago in terms of rape and abuse in their homes and men speaking about what's happened to them. In the long run that will be a good thing if it continues and we don't say "well that's just in the Catholic Church, that's just male clergy, that's the only way it happens is in this little area over here and that was in the 80's and 90's but not now." If we admit that abuse is what happens to boys as well as girls, then I think that will be a good thing and a good outcome. But slow, slow in coming, you know. And so on.

Interviewer: **You seem to be talking about what lies ahead for the future for this new generation of feminists and the issues they are going to have to confront. Do you have other ideas about what those might be?**

E. Homer Well, I think right now a real threat to us is the same threat to our society, our democracy, and that is the rise of conservatism and the rise of the privileged in our country, like the end of the estate tax, which is the end of tax on privilege, the manipulation of the media, what's happened with the FCC — the fact that now fewer and fewer groups can control the media, the media elite. All those things have a really big impact on feminism because it impacts the image that we have in society, and of ourselves, and the options that we have, and men have.

The economics, which is going to become a struggle. And one that we never really come up to, but we're coming up to again, as we did in the 1880's and 90's, of class. Every time we bring up the issue, "Hey isn't it unfair that these really rich people pay only one percent of their income and we pay twenty percent for these people down here? Isn't it unfair?" That's called class warfare and we shouldn't talk about that. But it impacts women a great deal because they are of the majority of the poor in our society, and feminists are still going to be against that sort of thing. And then when you buy the courts as we did in the 1880's and 90's — the elites were buying the judges, getting the opinions that they wanted and they're doing that right now. It was just as blatant then as it is now. And it's happening around the world, selling of public assets, taking control of our resources for the privileged, benefiting a few. All these things are things that impact on feminists. So, feminists have had the same job they always have, that the whole thing has to be fixed not just this little piece, because we are so much a part of it.

We have areas of education that still need help. Like, we still don't have women having the opportunities in fields of technology and engineering. We are making many inroads in many areas and we cannot get to the point where there's — let's say it's not exactly a success if more women are going to college than men because men still need to go to college. So, we can't not care about that. We have to care about the fact that there's not enough men going to college. It's not just a success if women start to realize they are good in math

and their daughters can be good in math and they can be engineers if boys don't learn to write better and we don't address that the boys cannot. So, you have to work on that without getting into sex segregated schools and classrooms. We're trying to pull people together and I think in the future — I think we'll come to the end of the "women are from Venus, men are from Mars" phase. We'll start to see that we're quite a bit alike, us human beings. If you talk about what the aspirations of men and women are, men's aspirations are very similar to ours and the need to be loved, for security, and family and fun, you know, all those things, are very — are our needs and aspirations, are very much the same and I don't think we are as different. We are currently going through this phase where we're so different. We need to work on that a lot and we won't have — that would be hard as long as the media keeps pushing this niche advertising and stereotyping as they do.

Interviewer: **You seem to have a very nice broad definition of feminism and all that it entails. It's nice. We have three minutes left on the tape and I can switch to another tape but I really have one more question on the sheet of paper which is: what advice would you give to future feminists?**

E. Homer Well, co-opt more organizations.

Interviewer: **And to do that?**

E. Homer Make them work for us. I mean we should co-opt the Chamber of Commerce and Michigan Retail Association — the Michigan Manufacturers Association. We shouldn't just go, pay our dues, and try to fit in, but really change those men. I think that would help us a lot. I think we need more women in political office. I think NOW is pretty much settled on the fact that we've gone quite as far as we can go unless we can change the people who are in office and that means really we have to be more gutsy about our complaints about conservatism and how it hurts us. And I think we do work quite hard actually, many women do as much as they can.

Interviewer: **Great. Do you have anything else? Well let me take a few still shots and if you have anything else you want to say we can put in another tape.**

E. Homer Okay.

Interviewer: **Sounds good, alright so if you'll look at me.**

E. Homer So we did an hour and a half or what, an hour?

Interviewer: **It's just an hour, our tape is 60 minutes, so. Okay, I got one little photo.**

E. Homer I didn't talk about vocational education and employment.

[TAPE 2]

Interviewer: **I'm with Liz Homer, alright Liz so there were a few more things that you wanted to talk about one was the Women Studies Association -**

E. Homer Oh yeah and employment, abortion.

Interviewer: **So yeah three issues.**

E. Homer Let's talk about abortion first. This is something I have been thinking about lately. I can remember in the mid 70's going to give testimony at a hearing in Lansing. I was spokesperson of the Democratic Women's Caucus and I was trying to explain that in order for a woman to have personhood, you could not grant the fetus personhood as well. The way I put it was, if we follow the line of thinking the anti-abortion people wanted us to, we'd be granting citizenship rights to a fetus.

I remember the response I got from that was that people were just puzzled, they couldn't even understand what the heck I was talking about. Over the years that's what's happened. We have personified the fetus to the point where it is practically a citizen and has rights under the law. Some people would have us to the point where police, the courts, can intervene on behalf of [the] fetus. Whereas, they don't want to accept the fact that the fetus is within the woman and therefore is more or less her territory. I think in life sometimes people make decisions that we don't like, like they drink when they shouldn't or they take drugs when they shouldn't and that's not right. But I don't think the government can intervene on behalf of the fetus. And that was a mistake. Part of the way we got to that mistake I think is by giving in to this. People would go on about [abortion] based on their religious beliefs, I believe, the fetus being a human life without distinguishing that the women has a life. The fetus in a sense has no life and we use the terms and meanings of those words in twisted ways. And for the non-thinker, they're easily conned into 'this little heart beating' and so forth, but it's the brain functioning that makes the person in the life of that individual and that doesn't happen until they're born. So I'm all for the decision that came down in Roe v. Wade, that we allow it through the first trimester, two trimesters. But I think it was a mistake for us to give in, in a sense to these anti-abortion people by saying, 'oh it's a terrible thing, we wouldn't want a woman to have to make this decision. It's tragic,' and blah blah blah. But you know in some cases they really must decide that they shouldn't carry the pregnancy. By capitulating and giving in to that we've practically got a fetus to the point where they are a full grown kindergartener in this person, the unborn child is practically a person — an individual person, and they aren't yet. And the way I would put it is, an acorn is not an oak tree and a fetus is not a human being. I hope I don't sound too unsympathetic or heartless about what a fetus is, but I think we've gone into kind of a nutty world with what a fetus is.

Interviewer: **Do you see any way to get out of that? If this is a detriment to the feminist movement with pro-choice —**

E. Homer Science, more scientific understanding. You know you can whomp up that little picture of a fetus and it's this big. And if you put it beside a pig fetus what have you got? You know, which one is which? That kind of thing. I think science is one way — because it's kind of irrefutable. And what they're doing now is using, playing on people's lack of knowledge and emotions and very intentionally doing that. They are. The science doesn't come back on the other side showing this is kind of nonsensical. And not that I think that it is healthy for a women to have abortions, it isn't, but most abortions happen because people didn't plan, things went wrong, or kind of went wrong, whatever. So we've kind of passed by talking factually any more about abortion. Part of it I think started with giving in to this idea that it was like a major tragedy when for many — for the millions of women who have had an abortion it has not been a tragedy. They go on and on. But when they're ready they have a family of their own you know. So that's my thoughts on one of our mistakes I think. And that has led to a point where in the Republican Party — yeah, the Catholic Church being highly organized, and the fundamentalist church being highly organized, and the subjugation of women as part of their power structure. They need it to maintain their power. They've used this issue as their organizing issue and forced the Republican Party, or captured the Republican Party, to the point where those candidates can be for anything. All they have to do is tip their hat to the anti-abortionists. And that has helped to bring up the rise of this conservative movement and this power elite. By only caring about this one issue they've neglected what's happened to our country, and really what's happening to our democracy.

Interviewer: **The other thing you had said you wanted to talk about was your activism in something to do with women's education?**

E. Homer Oh employment, employment was the first Through the Project on Equal Education Rights, I did a lot of study of the different curriculums in what is taught in the schools and so forth, and I found that one area that was difficult to understand was in the area of vocational education. I actually got a masters degree so I could understand vocational education and job training and the economics of the whole thing. And I got really good training and background in it, and was then able to serve on, like, the Vocational Education State Advisory Committee and I was on the Board for the State Community Colleges and so forth. And what I did was learn how jobs are put together, the tasks that are put together, The Dictionary of Occupational Titles and how you can track jobs and relate them so you really can compare apples and oranges in the terms of comparable worth and all that sort of thing, and wanted to get at the discrimination in vocational education. So, I took the data from vocational education and compared it with the economic data and job wage data and was

able to demonstrate that the jobs they were training girls for in health and in childcare and in foods and hospitality and cosmetology and all those were really jobs you don't need training for. In most cases you can get the job without spending two of your high school years, two hours a day in these programs. So we went after that in terms of the fact you are training for jobs that don't need training, and then you're training for jobs that don't pay the minimum wage, cannot make a living wage on these jobs.

I remember once testifying on that and explaining that, and having to say, after great deal of thought, that really to do [so] is immoral. I thought I would be discredited for going into the issue of morality in terms of these vocational programs but later the director of the vocational education was speaking and told people it was immoral and I thought, "Oh, well, good!" But the state Department of Education under [the] Blanchard administration — this was before Engler — really did everything they could in terms of administrative rules and how they funded things to move us away from that kind of training for girls. And we did pretty well in almost everything except for technology and Trade and Industry, which remained still about as sexist, in stereotypes, as it ever was. It hasn't changed at all and that is probably where the most high-paying jobs and most important ones are. And the interesting thing about that is the women do not get the support and encouragement in high school. But we're still seeing women going into those fields at the community college level without the benefit of the support such as the boys who are going in get. But they're still choosing those careers. So that's one of the areas where we still have to go into and then another thing —

Interviewer: **Can I ask you one thing about this? When you were doing these studies on the vocational education, around what time period was that?**

E. Homer Well I started when I was doing PEER, which was about 1978 to 1984, and in about that time, '84, '86, I got a masters degree in Voc. Ed. Then I served on the [Voc. Ed.] Council and I also was a consultant to the Job Training Partnership Act when some of the women legislators wanted to have more women on the Private Industry Councils. So they more or less forced the Department of Labor to hire me as a consultant. I would go around to all these Private Industry Councils. What I did was, rather than just talk to them and try to persuade them, I would analyze their councils and the regulations that applied to the council, which were very restrictive. And then I would take this information to them and show them the analysis and go over the different spots on the council, each one, and discuss who was in it and who could be in it and how we could expand the number of women. So that went from, I don't know, like 11% or 7% to about 34% when I left after about two years. We did get some real movement on that and if we'd have kept at it I'm sure we would have done even better.

And then I did some of the early — I used my feminist background to work on

coordination of services and then did studies on the programs that were being offered in terms of childcare for women who were working and transportation that's needed. And of course now, today, almost everyone realizes you can't expect a single mother to have a full time job - cause we aren't going to give them welfare anymore - and do it without any child support or transportation, childcare or transportation — we know that but then we didn't know it. They [women] were supposed to have what everyone else had and that was what the men had. I also found they were talking about creaming a lot — taking the top, the best, and not the most needy. And I found that was not true with men. They really did try to get those men who needed it most into training programs but with women they did the creaming.

So I found a lot of things — I find a lot of times when people have pages and pages of data their eyes glaze over and they don't, they don't get it. They don't care, they don't want it; but I love it. So I would take all this data and go over it and sort of translate it into paragraphs instead of numbers and explain it to help guide the policy. That was fun. But in those days if you were a consultant after about two years they wanted you to be employed with the department because in those days they did not want contractual employees. Now of course they want you to be a contractual employee, not [an] employed full timer. I was not the type of person that thought that I could sort of live within the construct of a state agency. So I didn't do that.

Most recently, serving on another Advisory Council for Vocational Technical Education which - they come every three or four years, they have to put in a plan for what they're going to do, a five year plan - and so I served on the council and they were putting in goals — now everything is goals and you're accountable and everything. Of course in the area of Trade and Industry they have very few women and its stereotyping, but at least now they look at the data and they have to do all this stuff. Well they had a goal of 1%, that was for the next three years. A 1% increase in enrollment in the Trade and Industry is silly and I said "Well this is less than a person, this is nothing for a program to try to get 1 % of increase," and I said "I think it should be at least 5%" or something like that, which I think is nothing either but everything is relative. So I asked them for all this data. I got all this data and I took it home and I analyzed it and made all these charts and figured out how, how many people -if you were going to raise it to 5% - what would an instructor in a voc tech program have to do? And I knew how many programs there were in the state and all that and I figured out they would have to recruit two additional girls into their program in order to raise it to 5%.

So, I thought, this is going to be very reasonable. And I sat down at the tables that day and I sat beside this guy and we were waiting. So, I started telling him what I was going to talk about and everything and it turned out he was the head of the Deans of Vocational Education — deans for the community colleges — and he raised a few questions and I answered them and went through the — and

he said, "Well yeah, I can support that." So, I mean I just started talking to him and I got that! So I made my presentation and there were all the usual complaints. I think some of the nastiest letters I ever got were when I said childcare did not provide a living wage and I said we shouldn't train people for things that don't provide living wage, not that I'm against childcare of course, but they might as well go to college and go on to being teachers and maybe do their childcare work that way. But anyway, I made this proposal and they had these objections and the dean got up and said he was for it. And everybody voted for it and I felt what a glorious thing, we've raised it to 5%. Well, this was during the Engler years and very slanted wise, not directly, I found out that the director of the voc tech simply just changed it back to 1% and overrode the whole council, the people they had brought in for these meetings and everything. So, I mean that's what happens now; I don't think that would have happened if we had made a decision in the past. So that's some of my activities in employment training, covers that.

Interviewer: **Wow, wow yeah and the other thing that you wanted bring up and talk about…I thought there was something else.**

E. Homer Oh a little bit about Women's Studies because that was another thing that I got involved with when I was a part of the Project [on] Equal Education Rights because every time I did a study then they would ask me to come in to their conference and give a talk on it and so I got more involved with them. They started in 1972 and —

Interviewer: **[Were there] Women's Studies departments in universities?**

E. Homer Yes, now, but then it was lobbying and pushing for a Women's Studies class, and then maybe two classes, and then maybe an interdepartmental class, and finally they moved into — and so now I mean here you have a job in Women's Studies where as before it was like, what are we going to do with Women's Studies because, "What kind of job can you get? What is it?" So, people would get an endorsement or something but they wouldn't have a minor or major in it, and so see how it's grown into a whole field of study? But at the beginning it was a very….considered as really sort of a stupid idea, you know, "What do we need this for?" And so they started it and I was involved with these studies, which is how I link with them and then later they invited me to be on their board, and I was then and doing the same things I usually do - which was creating their policies and starting the Friends organizations and stuff like that.

But then when the Hall of Fame opened in 1987 they asked me if I would serve as the full time staff person for the center and Gladys Beckwith was the director, the volunteer director but she was also president of the Women's Studies Association. So I said yes because it was right then when I was getting through being the consultant of the Department of Labor and I'd been doing some consulting for the Department of Education and I thought I would do that

for a little while. But I really wanted to continue on with my employment related stuff that I was trained to do. So I did that and was quite, you know — I did that for 10 years which up to then was the longest I ever did the same thing. I usually would change careers about every 5 years. So, I liked it because it was all new, we didn't really know anything. To give you an idea, we didn't even know for sure when we were - even the most devoted of us - when starting this Women's Hall of Fame and Historical Center we didn't know what women's history was going to be like, whether it would be interesting, whether we were going to be able to find it. It was that, that out in the distance, really. It was just faith we had, history.

Interviewer: **What types of people did you ask to help you?**

E. Homer Well, there were people from community colleges, from universities and in the Midwest — we do tend to be egalitarian. We did not make it exclusively a university kind of an organization. It was really intended to be for anyone who was interested and that included elementary teachers, high school teachers, activists of any kind. So, the organization had a broader base to it.

And, well, I can remember, you know, we were supposed to do exhibits and we have nothing, you know? There's no — nothing in the drawers, nothing on the bookshelves, there's nothing. And we were starting to find people who had been doing a little research here and there, writing some things. I decided I would do women's suffrage because there seemed to be artifacts and that seemed to have about the most research. So I started out with women's suffrage and having my background in politics that really fit in well. And I had also done a lot of reading; there were people like Gerda Lerner who were writing books trying to set out a vision of the agenda or work plan for what would have to done in order to find and develop women's history and you get a feeling for all the analysis to be done and how much you have to learn before you can start to interpret it. There are so many areas of women's history that we haven't even reached that point. Yet we were still just collecting bits and pieces and I remember going down to the Burton because I had heard of this women Clara Arthur, who was a leading suffragist who would have been my absolute hero if I had ever heard of her, you know. And we went down there and we had to like talk with the workers and try to get them to go and look for her because they couldn't really find the stuff, and wait and all that, and we finally get it and there's boxes of stuff and they lugged it all up and just sort of hand it to us. So here we are taking out old brown envelopes that are just stuffed with pamphlets and brochures and correspondence - all this stuff — and laying it out on the table. We're just going crazy over this stuff because it's like grabbing your history, you know, and you have no idea what it's going to be like. We were there all day and it got to the end of the day and it was time to go home and we realized we'd never eaten and never — we just worked and worked and came back the next day. And in the end we got that information more organized, photocopied so they would give photocopies to people rather than the real

thing. And then eventually we got in contact with Clara Arthur's descendents and they helped us to get it on tape so people could look at it through the —

Interviewer: **Microfilm —**

E. Homer Microfilm. And that's the kind of work that needs to be done. And to imagine that people would actually ask me for my papers. It just seems — because twenty years ago they would have, like, "Are you kidding? Who wants to collect what?" You know? But now I mean they are actually interested in collecting information about the women's history in the second wave which seems totally, you know, amazing we've come that far. So that kind of gives you an idea. And that also meant going around the state and meeting with organizations and being their speaker for this or that and the other thing. And part of that came out of the my experience with the Democratic Party because in — I didn't mention this, that after I learned how things worked politically the next problem was you could get anything into a platform or resolution, or whatever, but in order to get legislatures to do it you had to change the culture itself. And that's really what pushed me into the Project on Equal Education Rights, and education, and history as a means to change our culture. Which is still our biggest thing.

Interviewer: **That's nice, that sounds good. Is there anything else you think that I should ask other women that I interview that might have been left out?**

E. Homer I don't know. I think I've talked a little bit about organization and how we organized and that, I think, would be interesting to people.

Interviewer: **Okay.**

E. Homer I didn't really talk a lot about the networking we did and the interaction between groups and many kinds of councils we had, and the ERA — Michigan ERA, the Michigan Women's Assembly, the Focus on Women and the IWY [International Women's Year] and all these groups were working together, and how we brought, and how NOW would work to bring along, AAUW and the League of Women Voters. The members of NOW would still be the members of AAUW. They might have always been and then they moved into NOW and they would take that back into the AAUW, the League.

Interviewer: **So people have multiple ties?**

E. Homer Yeah, I belonged to Federation of Business and Professional Women, The League of Women Voters, The American Association of University Women, the Michigan Women's Studies Association, National Counsel for Sex Equity Education, The Red Lining Coalition, The Women's Conference of Concerns.

Interviewer: **Wow.**

E. Homer Because, you are trying to move everything kind of along. And you'll find that in the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, and on and on. Because you are trying to bring them all together. So one of our strategies was to be the instigator within these other organizations. That's why I said co-opt other organizations: we need to do more because the professional organizations are what we need to belong to for employment. We have to move them in our direction because we don't have the strength to do what we used to do, which was have all of these other women's organizations.

Interviewer: Okay, Liz, those are all the questions I have and I think we are just going to sit here and let this run for a while, so we talked for about an hour and a half.

E. Homer That's good for me.

[END]