INTERVIEW: Jean King
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey
DATE: July 3, 2003

[TAPE 1]

Interviewer: **So, we're ready to record. The first set of questions has to do with just gathering some biographical information, so if you could tell me where you were born, when, and describe your family circumstances in your early years.**

J. King: I was born in Chicago, in Illinois Central Hospital, March 16, 1924 and my father was a YMCA executive and my mother at that time was a mother. She subsequently got her Ph.D. in psychology, but that was long, long after that.

Interviewer: **She did? Was there any reason why she pursued higher education at a later period?**

J. King: Well, she said in her autobiography that she was inspired by one of her teacher at a college that she went to. That would mean she had been remembering the psychology teacher for a long time, but that is what she thought was her inspiration. She went back to school when she was forty and I went to law school when I was forty-one. She had made it look easy.

Interviewer: **And you were out of the house when she chose to go back to school?**

J. King: I don't remember whether I was or not. I came to Michigan when I was seventeen and you have to add twenty-four and seventeen. She might have already started.

Interviewer: **Okay, can you describe the economic circumstances of your family; were you well off?**

J. King: My father did not lose his job in the Depression; I think he got a reduction [in pay]. I don't know how much. YMCA secretaries [executives] don't make much money. I can't remember what years he was making two thousand a year in. But that was a level at some point, maybe just when the war [WWII] began.

Interviewer: **Did you have brothers or sisters?**

J. King: I have a sister, who lives in North Carolina, and between me and my sister, my parents lost a baby at two weeks.

Interviewer: **And did you practice any religion?**

J. King: I think [as a baby] I was sprinkled as a Presbyterian. I refuse to be baptized as a Baptist, because by the time we got to Pittsburgh we were members or attendees at the First Baptist Church in Oakland. And to be baptized you have to go up front to be dipped [in a pool up in front of the church] and then the water will run off your hair. I drew the line at that. I would not do that.

Interviewer: The funniest thing that makes us…

J. King: Well, I was ten, eleven, or twelve. I mean that's ridiculous.

Interviewer: You know I'm going to change the battery right now.

[Pause]

J. King: So, now I'm in church only on occasional funerals.

Interviewer: You are?

J. King: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: When you think back on your earlier years can you think of anything that might of steered you toward feminism and your feminist activism later on?

J. King: Well, my mother was not a shy violet, and of course in those years we had Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt and couple of others. Well, I haven't thought about that very much.

Interviewer: Okay, what kind of education did you get?

J. King: I came to Michigan at seventeen, I had graduated from high school at sixteen, but they wouldn't let me go to college, they made me go back to high school for a year. They didn't think — they thought that [sixteen] was too young to go. And then [during] the war, my husband and I left for California and then we came back in '46 and I graduated at '48.

Interviewer: You graduated from…

J. King: Michigan.

Interviewer: University of Michigan?

J. King: That's right.

Interviewer: And what did you study?

J. King: Well, I started as a chemistry major and I took three years of chemistry, physics, math, and then I switched to English.

Interviewer: Okay, it's commonly known that women were discouraged from studying natural science, why did you pursue it and was there any reason that you changed?

J. King: Well, chemistry is not a natural science. No, I wouldn't say I was discouraged from that. I had had a science teacher in junior high school and a science teacher in high school who were, you know, pretty good. And then I graduated in English honors and then I got some jobs and in one of the jobs I was able to go to class (as well as work) and I got my Masters [at Michigan] while I was working as a secretary for a professor of social psychology.

Interviewer: Okay, and your Masters was in?

J. King: History.

Interviewer: Okay. So you were switching around the disciplines quite a bit and you worked at the same time that you pursued your higher-level degree?

J. King: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Okay, great. And did you have a spouse or significant other at anytime during this?

J. King: I got married in December 11, 1943. We had hitchhiked to Pittsburgh on Thanksgiving and I was about to get kicked out of the University of Michigan by Dean [Alice] Lloyd and forced to leave Ann Arbor. We were already engaged — you can't believe this. I mean you can't go back to those years — so, we decided to get married. We got married at a co-op.

Interviewer: In a co-op, cooperative…?

J. King: Student co-op, Lester co-op.

Interviewer: You mean the wedding happened there?

J. King: That's right.

Interviewer: Do you want to describe those extenuating circumstances or is that better left unsaid?

J. King: What extenuating circumstances?

Interviewer: You getting kicked out of Michigan.

J. King: Oh, John and I had hitchhiked to Pittsburgh.

Interviewer: Oh, that's why.

J. King: And the Dean had a very well developed spy system. There were only about ten thousand students then and she was keeping eyes on what women did. She had people telling her.

Interviewer: Wow, okay. So, you were married?

J. King: It was different period of time. It's hard to put yourself back there.

Interviewer: Did you have children?

J. King: Not until 1957. We have three.

Interviewer: And you mentioned earlier you went back to law school when you were forty-one. Could you talk about your decision to go back and what you're doing with your law career right now?

J. King: I was very active in politics and in '64 I was working for the Michigan delegation in the [National] Democratic Convention in Atlantic City. The man I went there with, Peter Darrow, at one point made a crack about Millie Jeffrey, who was very active [and thirteen years older than me]. She was one of Walter Reuther's people. Peter made a crack about — I really can't remember the words and he denies ever having said it — that indicated the older a woman gets in politics the less the respect she gets. So, I thought, "Boy, I better credentiate myself or I'm going to end up just like that." And so, I made up my mind to go to law school. I came back [to Ann Arbor] and told John I was going to law school. The children were I think three, six, and seven. Now, the miracle was I got in to the U of M Law School. I couldn't have gone anywhere else. But, I had a reference from Sidney Fine and also from my social psychology boss. They must have been pretty good [references], because the law school was not letting in forty-one year-old mothers of three children. I probably was the oldest woman that they ever allowed in. There weren't many women allowed in. I doubt any woman who then attended had children.

I discovered that going to law school was a remedy for ear infections, because my kids all had lots and lots of ear infections. But, I think in the three years in law school I only missed three classes because the kids were sick. They stopped getting sick.

Interviewer: Was your husband and were your children, to the extent that they could be, supportive of your return to school?

J. King: Oh, he was very supportive. He had to be. He took over a lot of the household tasks and I don't know whether the children were supportive or not. They knew what I was doing. One of them is now a law professor.

Interviewer: Okay, how about your friends, your social network?

J. King: I didn't pay any attention to what they thought. I don't know.

Interviewer: At that point did you call yourself a feminist?

J. King: I don't think I used that word, but in my entire experience with the University of Michigan, which by that time was pretty extensive both as a undergrad, as a employee, and as a graduate student, and as a law student, I was constantly observing the role of women students and women professors and women employees.

Interviewer: And what conclusion did you make from your observations?

J. King: It was the opposite conclusion from what [University of Michigan's President] Robben Fleming's. When we filed against the University with HEW, his response, it may still be his response for God's sake, is if a woman was having some kind of trouble on the job or as a student it's because of her individual characteristics. He had no conception of class bias and he fought the U.S. government very hard on that argument and lost. There were very few people then who disagreed with him. Women were always nitpicked as being weak here, inadequate there, poorly trained here, nobody ever thought of it — very few people ever thought of it — as a class disability.

Interviewer: Could you pinpoint a "click" moment that made you decide that you need to work for women's rights in the arena?

J. King: Well, I think I told people I went to law school to represent poor people. I think that's what I used to say. But I graduated in '68, and there just weren't any women to handle sex discrimination problems. When I was in law school, if you looked in the index of any book, women were not indexed. They were not even in the index.

There was a case in, I think Alabama, I'm pretty sure [the Federal Court in Montgomery] Alabama — Judge Johnson, in which a couple of people from Washington had litigated whether women should serve on juries. It was White v. Crook and I discovered it when I was doing a note for the law review and I would go back every once in a while [in the law library] and rub my hand against the back of the book. I knew exactly where the book was. There was nothing, absolutely nothing else [about women].

The Title VII had passed with sex in it because, we thought, of a joke of the

southerners, which Martha Griffiths had picked up and ran through, but it was 1968 before there were any court opinions where it would be helpful. And I graduated that year.

The [Federal] Equal Pay Act had passed in 1963 and went in to effect in '64, I'm not sure I ever heard of it at that point. There was just no discussion of it, but plenty of evidence of the need for it.

And of course as a woman you got treated differently. I was lucky because [at 41 years of age] I knew who I was. I really felt sorry for the other women, who were coming in [to law school] in their early twenties. [In my first year] I sat beside somebody in criminal law for two weeks and then she just disappeared, just disappeared. Nobody knew where she went.

I think we had eleven women in our class, out of about 350 and you could walk the halls of the law school for three weeks and not see another woman. There were no women faculty, every one of my law professors made (independently— they were not working together on this) in the process of teaching us or pulling information out of us. I would say something like, "The judge would consult his wife to see what was fair," and I would think to myself, "What is he consulting his wife for? Making that decision was his job." That was a stereotype I did not understand, but it was very pervasive: wisdom, truth, beauty, and justice rest in women. Nobody had really taught me that and I couldn't understand these guys. They didn't check with each other before they said this. They all said this at various times in the [four separate] courses in my first year. And I started to grapple with that and see what that meant, 'cause it was not something that I had ever heard of.

I only had one professor [Tom Kauper] who treated me in class the same way he treated the men. The others either ignored me or behaved as if they were playing ping-pong with a three year old.

Now, they're better. They're a whole lot better. Women have liberated, slowly liberated the University of Michigan Law School. They first started by hissing at sexist jokes. That was a great technique because you can't tell who's hissing, but I don't think that happened until five or so years after I graduated.

And then they did a content analysis of the exams because exams are story problems, and generally, if not exclusively then, the women in the story problems would either be waitresses or prostitutes. So, they did a content analysis of everyone's exam, but they [the women leaders of this exercise] did not feel that the women students who did the analysis should make the presentation to the faculty. They felt that the women who were on law review should make the presentation because they would get more respect.

And I been involved with almost every one of those attempts of women to

change the law school [including the strong protests against the all white male portraits on the walls]. So, I'm aware of those struggles.

Interviewer: **So, at some point, during your experience at the law school, did you transform from this idea that you're going to help the poor to the idea you're going to fight for women's rights?**

J. King: I'm not sure. I can't put myself back there. I had several jobs and in the summer of '68 I ran a campaign against Doug Harvey, I ran a candidate against Doug Harvey, who was our awful [Washtenaw County] sheriff, awful sheriff. So, I wasn't working over the summer. I later had several jobs and then I became the referee of the [Washtenaw County] juvenile court. And then in '72 I went into private practice.

Well, in [January] 1970 I founded the Women's Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party and [in May 1970] I also filed a complaint under the Executive Order 11246 under the University of Michigan on a whole lot of categories; it was not a lawsuit but an administrative complaint.

[I passed the bar in June 1970] and sex discrimination cases of all different kinds began to come to me, because there weren't any other attorneys for them to come to. I remember, this was not a case I handled, but I remember in the last two weeks of law school, that would be about probably May [1968]. Somebody called me about a library student and Russell Bidlack was her professor and she went into labor on the day of her final exam and he wouldn't let her make it up. He's still around. I still listen to him lecture on the Anns that came to Ann Arbor. I don't think I ever given anybody his name before. I think oh my God. I think I sent that over to CEW [Center for the Education of Women].

Any place you turn at University of Michigan they were doing something to women and they continued to and I continued to have to work on it. Like they wouldn't send — well in the first place they wouldn't let women in the band, they wouldn't let women be cheerleaders, and then when they did let them be cheerleaders they wouldn't send them to the Rose Bowl. They had a banquet down at Schembechler Hall, which I'm sure you know where it is, which when it was held at Barton [Halls] Country Club, where they honored three athletes, all of them men, to which women were not admitted, not even the mothers. Now, technically Barton [Halls] Country Club was probably a public accommodation, but when it [the banquet] moved to Schembechler Hall, one of the men reported that [the exclusion of women] to the *Ann Arbor News*. The *Ann Arbor News* called me and asked me if that was illegal and I said it was illegal because it was obviously a public accommodation. Some of these guys were raised by single mothers, who took them to all their games and their mothers [to say nothing of other women] could not even come to the award presentation. This was the theme of the University of Michigan. Those were

just three incidents, there were probably twenty. The honorary fraternity for the School of Education would not admit women. The School of Education! It's so bad that there's no sense telling people about it, because they don't believe how bad it was.

Interviewer: **So, did you work…**

J. King: And they all came to me.

Interviewer: **They are came to you. Were you being paid for your work?**

J. King: Usually not. In sports cases I accumulated a great collection of t-shirts and one autographed water polo ball. Generally not, no.

Interviewer: **So, you did start working for quote-unquote "feminist" causes in the 1970s?**

J. King: Yeah, that's just because people brought it to me.

Interviewer: **You founded these two organizations, were you also a member of NOW at that time?**

J. King: Yeah, actually I founded three organizations and I was also a founding member of the National Women's Political Caucus in July 1971. Dorothy Haener and I were the only Michigan women at the founding meeting in D.C. I was also a board member of WEAL [Women's Equity Action League — in D.C.] for more than a decade and a board member (and chair for a couple of years) of the Women's Law Fund of Cleveland.

Interviewer: **You talked about the Women's Caucus…**

J. King: The Women's Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party.

Interviewer: **Okay, what was the third?**

J. King: The Religious Coalition for Abortion Reform. In '72 we had a referendum in Michigan, which would have [made abortion up to 20 weeks]. It was voted on in November of '72, about three months before Roe v. Wade. I've just read the funniest joke in an account of Bob Hope. He said, "Dan Quayle thought that Roe v. Wade was two different ways to get cross the Potomac." So, I was the co-chair of that campaign. Lorraine Beebee [former Michigan Senator] was the other co-chair. And after Roe v. Wade, we — Eleanor O'Brien and I — went down to Washington (with a bunch of materials that the anti-abortion people had used in Michigan) to talk to the religious supporters [of our referendum] that we had worked with. We had received $7,000 from the Methodist Church for our campaign. Doesn't sound like much money, but it was a lot of money

then. And we got everybody together from various different churches at the Methodist headquarters in Washington. And we explained to them what was going to happen, cause they all thought it was all over. But we had seen the strength of the anti-campaign. At that time women and girls frequently went to ministers for assistance. And they figured that, "I'll ought to send them to Sweden, I'll ought to send them to Japan, and then to Colorado, and then to New York," and so forth. And the ministers were constantly involved in this issue, so we said, "It's going to get worse, and you guys ought to form an organization." It was first called the Religious Coalition for Abortion Reform, its name has [since been] changed slightly. It was formed because Eleanor and I thought we ought to tell these people in Washington, who thought everything was over, you know, Roe v. Wade in January of 1973 had solved the problem. No, it hadn't solved the problem. So that's one. Then the Women's Caucus was another, and then the organization that filed a [administrative] complaint against the University [of Michigan] was the Focus for Equal Employment. So, that's three.

Interviewer: **Can you recall any significant events within any of these organizations that might be good to record on tape for this project?**

J. King: Your mean other than what I told you about the Religious Coalition?

Interviewer: **Uh huh. Any dramatic moments or significant events that might transfer well for women of the future to listen to?**

J. King: Well, sitting there around the table and having people there from the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church tell you that the abortion problem has been solved, while you dragged out pictures of fetuses in buckets and whatever to explain to them that they were, it was a lot of beltway thinking and they didn't know what was happening [outside of D.C]. That was probably dramatic. In that later organization plus other organizations that climbed on [the issue have since] been working extremely hard to keep abortion rights available.

I don't know how many times Dorothy [Haener] and I had gone down to Washington to march either for the Equal Rights Amendment or for the abortion. I must have marched, seemed like twenty times, probably more like ten.

Focus on Equal Employment filed a complaint [in May 1970] against the University, documented by me and Mary Yourd, by this time. I had came to Michigan in '41 and I had started to subscribe to the *Michigan Daily* in 1940. So, by this time I had thirty years of familiarity with the University. [I had three degrees from the University of Michigan and had worked for it in five capacities]. I had worked as a secretary [1948-1952] for a woman professor, I worked for Ted [Newcomb] and for four others, but mostly for Ted and I saw what was happening to her [Professor Helen Peak]. I knew what was happening

to the [graduate and undergraduate] students. I knew how the staff was treated. I still think it's probably still true that there are some [University of Michigan] secretaries on food stamps. Not long ago there were.

Interviewer: **I know one who has three jobs.**

J. King: Do you? It's sad. The UAW tried to organize them [and failed], but they tried to organize them with men.

And the other person that needs to be videotaped is Vicki Neiberg in East Lansing, but she's going to call on MSU, who's going to do a lot more interviews. Vicki organized the nurses at the University of Michigan Hospital. It damned near killed her. The University fought so hard, that was twenty years ago. Every time I go over there I asked the nurses, "How's your contract? Have you got it? We need it." Of course they don't remember how hard it was to get it. Organizing nurses and organizing secretaries is extremely difficult because their allegiance is [often] to their boss, and it is hard to teach them they need to hang in together. Well, Vicki did that.

As far as the Women's Caucus was concerned, we called a caucus in January 1970. That was after 1968 in Chicago in which the Democratic convention turned into a riot. And Sandy Levin was chair of the party at that time. He called a special convention, and Republicans didn't have an analogous convention as they usually do by law. He called one in January [1970] to deal with the problems of the party; they dealt with students, they dealt with African Americans, they dealt with this, they dealt with that, they dealt with the other thing. And I saw what they were sending out in December [1969] and they didn't do anything for women. So, I drafted a resolution and I sent it around to the few people [women] I knew around the state. One of the problems, of course, is that you don't have contacts. You're lucky if you knew somebody here and you knew somebody there. I knew Lois Craig in Flint, because she and I were serving on [Democratic] State Central and we had talked about whether we should resign because of Johnson's position on Vietnam, so I knew her pretty well. I knew…I'm blocking on her name, but she was on the eleventh district, the Upper Peninsula, her name will come to me [Ginny Selin]. I think Sandy had put me on [a Unit Role] committee with her, so I knew her. I knew Nita Hardy in Kalamazoo, because she had been in charge of students at the 1964 convention in Chicago and together we formed a group that called the [Women's Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party].

[At conventions] we put fliers in the elevators, which were of course torn down. [In January 1970], we had a meeting of a hundred and fifty women [in the Masonic Temple in Detroit], which I chaired, and the Women's Caucus is still going on. I mean talk about the problems that women had to deal with — we were dealing with the University, dealing with it in the party. We got through resolutions that required half men and half women at every level of the party.

On committees, instead of putting one woman on a committee, they had to have half. Of course they put the men all in as alternates and we had to pass another thing [resolution to give women half of the alternates]. Typically in the caucus, I would reserve the room for the caucus and the union guys would occupy it and I would have to go to the chair and get him to throw the union guys out of the room. I would have literature stolen off the floor, but you get used to it — you know it's going to happen. And Michigan sent a delegation to the 1972 Democratic National Convention that was half men and half women and then in 1976 the [national] party adopted that as a rule for everybody.

Interviewer: **Did they still?**

J. King: They still do. Although now there's some muttering within the party. I understand [some are now saying that one half is] not fair, there's a quota. My response used to be it's God's quota. I don't know if they'll get rid of the one-half rule. I don't think they will. But it gave hundreds of women something to put on their brochures, on their vitas: "I was a delegate to this convention. I serve on this committee. I did this, did that." Instead of, "I licked envelopes." So, the problems were so obvious, just as the problems in Michigan were so obvious. At one convention, I can't remember what year, no woman had ever chaired the Michigan Democratic Party, and I persuaded one woman to let me nominate her because in nominating speech at the party convention you get five minutes, you can say whatever you want to the whole convention, they can't shut you up. And I've used that several times. I nominated Eleanor Vader, of the Upper Peninsula. And meanwhile [I] laid out a litany of what was happening to women. They couldn't do anything about that. Not Walter Reuther, but the leader of the UAW [Doug Fraser] just after him, sent somebody up to me, up to the stage to harass me because of a comment I had made that was construed to be anti-union, in other words that the union wasn't supporting their women, well of course they weren't supporting women…One of my best friends was Dorothy Haener, an international representative. I knew what was going on with her and everybody.

Also, there were two Democratic National Conventions in years that were not presidential election years, like 1978 and maybe 1974, and I was a delegate to both of them, and we were able to make some substantial changes in whatever the powers that be wanted to do by linking up with the Black Caucus. Somebody took a movie of that. I never seen the movie. It was somebody who was an assistant to Blanchard and he was down there documenting it, documenting everything that we did.

As far as the Religious Coalition, only that meeting around the table at the Methodist Church at something like 1000 Maryland Avenue…And maybe Eleanor and me going on the plane and going through the briefcase that she brought with her. Of course the briefcase was full of anti-choice (we didn't call it anti-choice then) anti-abortion materials. [Before the November vote] we had

a poll and we thought we were winning [60/40] in September [1972] and then the anti-campaign came in for a month, it was the first one in the United States and it switched things around [to 40/60]. There was another referendum that year and I think in the state of North Dakota, which failed, and prior to that there had been one in the state of Washington that prevailed by 55.5%. So, a few states were trying to do something. I had no idea that the issue was in front of the [U.S] Supreme Court. [I was] stunned to open the paper and realize that it had been argued.

Then I worked hard, as all of us did, for the Equal Rights Amendment, and we're [now] still working on the Equal Rights Amendment; as you know there's the three-state strategy. And Illinois apparently has the votes in the Senate to do that. The House passed it and now it's gone to the Senate, but I don't think that the [Illinois] Senate is going to reconvene until September.

[In a much earlier year] Dorothy and I persuaded [Michigan's Attorney General] Frank Kelly to rule that a state cannot withdraw its ratification. Dorothy usually had the UAW clout when she spoke.

We used to send people to other states when we campaigned [for the ERA]. I can remember when Lillian Stoner went to South Carolina to help with ratification. South Carolina had not redefined (and still hasn't). Because my mother was a Mississippian and my father was a Pennsylvanian, I'm more aware of southern customs. I remembered forgetting to tell Lillian to wear gloves, so I sent her a telegram.

Interviewer: **Do you think that helped?**

J. King: I don't know. Gloves and a hat at that point might have made a difference. Mary Yourd, who with me chaired Focus on Equal Employment, put a great stress on wearing a hat and wearing gloves. She thought that was really important. Her mother was a suffragist.

I supposed I got into all these things by default. I mean what other attorney were you going to send it to?

Interviewer: **It seems as if you used multiple strategies though to achieve your goals: you went to protests, you attacked it from the legal side, you formed organizations with various groups.**

J. King: Strategy is my strength. I'm really good at thinking of something, especially when people who don't expect it. There's a lot of satisfaction in that. Either strategy or tactics, I never understood the difference.

Interviewer: **What would you think were the main achievement, your main personal achievement within your activism?**

J. King: Well, I think there are a lot of women who have gone on to law school, who have become active feminists, who used me as a model. With the University of Michigan complaint, we made sure that every development there got into the *Chronicle for Higher Education,* from the initial complaint on. The complaint was filed on May 27 and it was featured in the [Detroit] *Free Press*. Helen Fogel was the reporter. By October [1970], [University of Michigan President] Fleming had refused to give the federal investigators the data they were asking for, just stonewalled them. We were astounded and delighted to discover on October 16 in 1970 that a federal contract had been withheld from the University of Michigan. Now it was for birth control services in Nepal, which we for a while thought was deliberate, then later we didn't think that was deliberate. By Christmas, I was talking to Senator Phil Hart's office to Muriel Ferris. She's still living in Virginia. I think she's ill. She told me $15 million worth of contracts had been withheld or were about to be withheld from the University because the January 1st [1971] deadline was coming up.

I've always fantasized about the Deans calling up Fleming and saying "My guy is not getting his contract, what are you doing up there?" and Fleming will say, "Well these women think they are a class and I can't allow that." "God damn it, fix it." I'm sure that was going on, especially in engineering.

So, [President] Fleming appointed a committee. [In January 1971], he doubled the salary of something like a hundred women faculty, which then was still below what they should have been paid, including Libby Douvan, and several others. At least a hundred others I had heard. And they started to study the wage level.

We also wanted to file on behalf of [discrimination in] admissions and we tried very hard to get that included — this was way before Title IX [and even before Title VII applied to university faculty] — but, finally the Feds decided admissions was not part of a contract complaint. Because mathematics had no graduate students that were women, you can document that all over the place.

So, slowly the University began to move toward HEW (this was before the Department of Education was formed) requirements from their fundings. There was a whole bunch of things that the University had to do. They didn't do them in a hurry. They did them slowly and they studied the hell out of them. And of course he [Fleming] appointed a committee. I think that committee is still going on. It didn't do a whole lot. The resistance in the faculty and in the Deans was really intense.

And CEW [Center for the Education of Women at the University of Michigan] I think now helps a lot, because women faculty have to be coached. I had a client once who had a half-time appointment in a University department and a half-time appointment in a [University of Michigan] museum, which really

made her vulnerable. She was the only female scientist in her field in the world and they weren't giving her tenure. Now there was somebody in her department who put out a journal that she had no respect for and she had refused to contribute to it. And just one little two-page article that he had written for this guy that she could put in the journal that she did not respect would've gotten his vote. That's not right. You don't do that. You have to butter up the rest of the faculty if you want those votes for tenure, but there isn't anyplace for, unless they have a mentor who's male or a successful female person, there's nobody to teach them that. It doesn't do any good for me to teach them that after they been denied tenure. It's very frustrating, very frustrating. Often women whose fathers are in the same profession or who have mentored them through school and through their jobs, do a lot better because they have easy access to what they called "the male point of view." I suppose it's getting better. I don't know if it's getting better or not. I mean if you look at the percentage of CEO's in Fortune 500 companies it's getting better very slowly.

Interviewer: **When you think back of all your work, which is still continuing it seems like, did you have fun or did you consider it work?**

J. King: I loved every new problem. Somebody called me and complained that the judge wasn't letting her wear slacks in the courtroom I would say, "Oh good there's a new one!"

Bill Ford was our congressman for awhile, and one of my best friends was Catherine East, who was Executive Secretary of the President's Commission on the Status of Women with a WATS line and an office in [Washington, D.C. in] the Department of Labor, and she watched the things that I was doing in Michigan and we became very close; I often went to Washington and I often stayed with her. Now where was I going with that…[In 1989] when I was admitted to the Michigan Women Hall of Fame, Catherine came and made a speech for me. That's not where I was going with this. Catherine was always a wonderful resource and the way she functioned was to take the ideas from the states, from people like me and other places, and spread them around. And she was also critical in organizing the Houston Conference in 1977.

I asked her what Bill Ford's record on women was and she was right on top of all the legislation, right on top of all the committee work, and so forth. And we were giving a dinner for Bill, out some place in Ypsilanti, because he'd been a congressman for twenty-five years, and Catherine looked up all his votes, usually she doesn't have to look, she knew, the only bad vote he had in 25 years was he voted wrong on an attempt to liberalize something for gays in the District of Columbia, but I decided to ignore that. We did it in one afternoon, typically I always do things at the last minute because I don't have time. So, I called up Jan Ben Dor, who I think then was chair of NOW, and I said we need a resolution in honor of Bill. The dinner was going to be at 6 o'clock, this was like 2 o'clock. So, we drafted one and put it on the computer and then I got my

husband to frame it, and I presented it to Bill at the dinner. Well, he turned bright red, as red as that wall, absolutely bright red. Because he had done all these things, but nobody had ever made anything out of it, and maybe he didn't really want to have it publicized, but every single vote in twenty-five years was pro-feminist, pro-choice.

Then he took me aside after dinner and he said that when the Equal Rights Amendment was up for a vote in the House, and of course he had to ride back and forth on the plane with Martha Griffiths, and Martha had a maternal attitude towards all these new congressmen; he was going to make a speech about the Equal Rights Amendment and he was not going to vote for it, and then he thought [again]. He actually had the speech in his pocket. He thought about it and then he thought about the icy plane rides home with Martha Griffiths, and he decided to vote for it. I thought that was wonderful and I told Catherine that story, which I thought was funny in itself, but Catherine focused on "What could he have possibly said in his speech against Equal Rights Amendment?!" 'Cause we all worked so hard on that, worked very hard on that. Catherine worked very hard in Virginia, which is where she lived. She lived in Arlington. And they would take polls. They would try to convince the last person. I mean they would lose by one vote [in states] all over the country. I mean they would lose by one vote and they couldn't figure out how to get that vote. It was very frustrating. But that red face on Bill Ford, I will never forget it because I never seen anybody that red.

Interviewer: **The next set of questions in the interview ask you to reflect upon the second wave of feminism, '65 to '80, more or less, and the first question is: what is your definition of feminism and has it changed over the years?**

J. King: I never tried to define it. Enabling women to behave equally. Now there are some areas where you need to behave more than equally, like breast-feeding, pregnancy rights, and so forth. They don't fit in to the standard sex discrimination formula. It just manifests itself as gross unfairness, it's very easy to spot. If you are confident in yourself. There were so many women, fewer now than used to be, who could be talked back into the Dark Ages. There are not too many women like Katharine Hepburn. I often said that I could stand at the foot of the bed of a brand new mother and either talk her into nursing or talk her out of nursing.

You know, they're vulnerable. They have to be pretty stubborn and pretty self-confident, and ignore what other people think or discard the people who disagree. There are still not a lot of people who do that. A lot of people worry a whole bunch about what other people think of them; well it really doesn't matter. If you got people who don't like what you are doing, well move to another set of people or just be yourself.

Interviewer: **Sage advice.**

J. King: What?

Interviewer: That's sage advice. I'm applying it right now to my own life. Do you think that the press accurately portrayed the feminist movement, the second wave?

J. King: I think the press has been extremely helpful, extremely helpful to me, because the female reporters are still so oppressed that they just love to grab on to stories like this. They're not writing about themselves, they're writing about some other bunch of women. Down the hall from me is Maryanne George, who's the *Detroit Free Press* bureau, we're very close friends and if I got a story that really ought to land in the *Free Press*, Maryanne will do it, although right now she's got a set of bosses that are not interested in Title IX, that are not interested in this and that, but that'll change. She gets strength out of that too. And Helen Fogel, that's another one. Helen asked me in January of 1970 what I thought of the Equal Rights Amendment. I said, "I never heard of the Equal Rights Amendment," and I hadn't. I didn't know anything about it.

I had a wonderful encounter with the first wave of the women's movement. It was 1970, when August 26 came I wanted, I didn't achieve it, but I wanted the music for the [University of] Michigan carillon, so it could play on the fiftieth anniversary of giving basically white women the vote, not most Black women the vote, so Catherine sent me over to the National Women's Party, which has in a building in D.C. right behind the Senate, which is probably the most expensive area in Washington, and she said that Alice Paul will have some music. Well, Alice Paul was trained by the British feminists, who were really pretty violent and she ended up in 1918 or 1919 in a Virginia prison and was force-fed. But [in 1970] she was still extremely active in the National Women's Party. So, I go in the door and there was a young woman with long brunette hair, who was just saying good-bye to Alice Paul at the front door, and I'm sitting there waiting to talk to her, and —

[TAPE 2]

J. King: It was something like Alice Paul saying to this girl who was leaving that she looks like Susan B. Anthony when she was young and my first statement to Alice Paul, which just shows my abysmal ignorance then of women's history. "Did you know Susan B. Anthony when she was young?" Well Susan B. Anthony was born in 1820 I later discovered. Alice Paul had a reputation, which I didn't know about until later, of using anybody who came anywhere close to her to achieve her objectives. She didn't have a huge network. She realized I was from Michigan and she wanted me to explain why the UAW has just changed its position on the Equal Rights Amendment to be favorable, 'cause she didn't really trust it. She had drafted the Equal Rights Amendment [in 1923]. So I was supposed to explain that to her and I tried to do the best I

could. Dorothy was a friend [and had talked to me about the UAW's change in position] and that helped.

And then she [Alice Paul] was missing a portrait of one the very early feminists. Somehow it was gone from its place in the National Women's Party building. And she assigned me to find it because it had gone to Michigan. I am still looking for it.

And that's what she did throughout her career. She did not have huge armies and huge forces. She was an excellent strategist — she would turn on Democrats who were for votes for women, she would campaign against them. Out west. And I can't tell you what the flip side of that was, but it really helped to get it [national suffrage]. She wouldn't go in the predictable direction. If you don't have a whole lot of power you have to do something differently.

But the press — it's really the female reporters — some of the male reporters and editorials are helpful. There is a sort of female caucus at the *Detroit Free Press*. That gets articles in the *Free Press* in March, which is women's month. And they do have some women editors that are higher up. I don't know if they emphasize that, but I always found the press to be very helpful

Interviewer: **The next questions are about some more recent analysis of second wave feminism and some analysis have described second wave feminist as overwhelmingly middle class in their concerns, and racist as well. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment?**

J. King: Well, I can remember when we were working for abortion rights and Millie Jeffrey was telling me that the Blacks are not in favor of it. I would talk to people in the [Women's] Caucus who were African American and they said, "Jean, we can't do this, but you go get them." They were not free. Not free in many of the Black churches.

The characteristics that we were talking about are much more common in Black women than they are in white women in terms of being confident about yourself, knowing who you are, not giving a damn about other people whose opinions shouldn't be respected. At least up to fairly recently you're much more likely to find those characteristics in Black women than you are in white women. So, there's some aspect of strengthening women's characters and personality. For many Black women, they've gone through such hell anyway and they had to hold their whole family together. If they have five sons, two or three of them are in Jackson [prison] and that's literally true. And they got a husband who can't get a job. I mean, the burden is just enormous. And they might not have benefited as much as white women.

I served on the [Federal] Glass Ceiling Commission — Bill Ford put me on it. Bless his sweet heart — The Speaker of the House [Tom Foley] had an

appointment. And Bill was chair of the House and Education and Labor Committee and he [Foley] just asked Bill who he wanted to put on. Bill nominated me and that was four years of flying around the country holding hearings everywhere, talking to all kinds of people. It was originally designed as a commission that would study the role of women. But the Black Caucus took hold of it in Congress and made it interracial and then Hispanics, American Indians, first Americans or whatever we decided to call them, I can't remember and oh I forgotten…I don't remember whether we did handicappers or not. We did five: white, Black, Indian, Pacific Rim, Hispanic…We work very closely with all of their organizations in each of those categories that had studied their populations. So, the report that we put out was not just for white women. It was for everybody who was not white men. And actually the disabilities had a common theme through the five parties.

I had a theory that didn't get in the book. Apparently the people in Labor Department liked it. It's called the Theory of the Crumbs. Once the white men get all there is then the little bitty crumbs [that are left] are divided among these five groups.

Our report came out in two versions, small version and large version. Because the government has changed it hasn't been used very much. But it's there and the study is really well done. So, working hard in all those areas, second wave of the women's movement is just for middle class women? Maybe that's what it looks like for some people, but I don't think it is. Each one of these groups had the same sort of grievance: they are not white men. I used to say white, straight, Presbyterian, right-handed, football playing men. And my cousin down south said, "Gee, Jean that's me."

Interviewer: **Another common assertion is of the women's movement originated with bored suburban housewives. Did you or the women that you work with fit that profile?**

J. King: No.

Interviewer: **Alright. I think part of…**

J. King: Bored, suburban, college-educated, housewives I would say because Betty Friedan was reflecting on what her classmates has done. And that was the limitation. What's the matter with trying to overcome boredom? They had the resources. They had the income. They could at least pay for telephone calls.

We operated on nothing. Nowadays, if you're gonna do something in the feminist area there's two or three organizations who are already doing it, and they're funded. We were operating in seventeen areas and we didn't have any money at all. I mean my family ate hamburger for years, because we were paying the phone bills.

When I called Catherine, and I'm sure she did this to everybody in the United States, she would always say let me call you back on the WATS line. Because she knew we didn't have any money. We didn't have any money for copying and postage. We didn't have any money to do anything. And I don't begrudge people their money, but it wasn't easy and there was a large financial sacrifice. Particularly for traveling and phone calls.

Now I don't pay attention to that and maybe it's happening and I just don't know it, but women still have enormous problems. Not as bad as it used to be. I just wrote an article for a law review on Title IX litigation and that certainly has improved, but we still get lots of complaints.

Interviewer: **What do you think the outstanding issues are that the next generation feminists will have to confront?**

J. King: Abortion.

Interviewer: **Any advice?**

J. King: They're not going to give up. See abortion is freedom. It is the key to women's freedom. It's also the key to men's heredity. And the clash there is very difficult. The strengthening of the faith-based stuff is not helping women at all. What did the Southern Baptists just do — they won't let women be Deacons? Something like that. Abortion, equal pay — comparable worth not just equal pay. And we ought to have the same sort of regulation that the Europeans have with regards to pregnancy, pregnancy leave, breast-feeding leave, and we need huge improvement in health care and childcare.

Interviewer: **Do you think the same strategies that worked in the second wave will work for the next generation of feminists? Do you think strengthening organizations, forming coalitions, lobbying, going through political avenues, is that the way or do we need to think of some new or different ways?**

J. King: I'm not very creative in this respect. I think we need to elect spokespeople like Bella Abzug. We need to have people who would speak on the floor of Congress and who come from districts that would send them back again and again. I was really unhappy with her when she ran for the Senate. She should have run for the House again. I have heard that liberal or liberal-tending Congressmen who arrived on the [House] floor and didn't know the issue [that was up for a vote] would say, "How's Bella voting?" and vote that way whether or not they knew what they're voting on. She really led a large group of people.

We need spokespeople. Democrats for example need spokespeople. We need spokespeople who are invulnerable and can't be quashed and beaten by another

multimillionaire. We don't really have them in the Senate. Barbara Boxer does the best she can. And so I'm very much in favor organizations like Emily's List, which does a good job in just creeping up the numbers of Congresswomen and [women] Senators but we haven't anywhere near reached the quantity that we need.

The current [Michigan] state senate's pitiful. I don't think there's a woman lawyer in the state senate or the state house, with the result that the male legislators run circles around them. I often seen legislation, which is going to have adverse consequences for women and the women legislators can't spot it because they're not lawyers.

And the judiciary is going to be — the Supreme Court is going be an enormous problem. And Michigan Supreme Court, and U.S. Supreme Court, god knows whatever other supreme courts. The appointments Bush is making are going to last for fifty years. And outside of burning down the White House, I don't know what we're going to do. The British have already done that once and it didn't do any good.

Interviewer: **Can you name some of the outstanding figures that you work with and whom you learned the most from?**

J. King: Catherine and Dorothy.

Interviewer: **Catherine East and Dorothy Haener?**

J. King: Catherine East and Dorothy Haener. Some of the people we are honoring in this group are people we have fought on abortion and affirmative action, who then discover that the women's movement has a lot of power and they just change. But, there were a few people who were just really solid from the beginning. Those were the two. Dorothy died in January [2001]. She and I used to go together to marches and meeting and so forth and then she got too feeble to go. But she liked to go with me as she got older because she didn't feel comfortable alone, and of course that meant she was really feeble because she was an international rep and had been used to traveling and so forth.

And we would sometimes be on opposite sides of the issue. If the union told her to support Mike Cavanagh for the [Michigan] Supreme Court she would do that and I would interfere with his nomination because his position was wrong on choice. So, when we had to disagree we had to disagree but it didn't make us not friends.

And Catherine's roots…Catherine knew everybody in Washington. She knew everybody's history in Washington and she had this wonderful independence and an assignment [and an office and a secretary] in the [U.S] Labor Department. I don't know how many honorary events for Catherine I went to.

She was put in the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls. Women in Washington had two or three things for her. She was driving a car longer than she should have been and hurt herself, but I surely depended on her.

And also my mother's attitude I'm sure influenced me because she would take on obstacles. I only realized much much later what obstacles she took on by remembering the tilt of her chin or something like that. I mean I didn't realize she had so much trouble getting admitted into the Ph.D. program [in psychology at the University of Pittsburgh]. And I don't think I would have gone to law school if I hadn't had her example. Because most people think going back to school at 41 is very very difficult. It's not really all that hard. I don't think I had any…

Well Ted Newcomb [Chair of the University of Michigan Doctoral Program in Social Psychology], the man I worked for as a secretary for five years was — it was through the McCarthy period. Obviously I knew what he was doing, organizing what few little liberals that there were [in the University of Michigan faculty]; there was one in every department, but I don't think there was one in the Engineering school. I watched how he worked and learned from him.

I may be neglecting other people that I should be mentioning, but those were the three I know. I learned from my husband. He is a retired engineer, he's also a carpenter, he's also a cabinetmaker and I remember early in our marriage he was working on a wooden bureau. He was working on the drawer of the bureau, he's working on the back of the drawer of the bureau. He was working very hard, sanding it and getting it perfect and I said, "John for god sakes nobody will ever see that." And he said, "I will." And it is that sort of standard, then not only in behavior but in woodworking that he does.

And my grandma [Sarah Lydia Cruthirds Herrington]. My mother's mother. It's hard to say what I got from her, but a sense of family. She lived with us in Chicago and she lived with us in Pittsburgh. She's a Mississippian and I'm sure she missed living in Mississippi, but there wasn't anyplace for her to live down there and that's why she lived with us and why I got to know her so well. I remember she had a pronounced Mississippi accent and I remember when I was six years old I was in her bedroom [in Chicago] and I can remember the [yellow] sun coming in the window [in her room] and I criticized one of her pronunciations. "Winder" I think it was. She said, "winder" and I said "window," and she gave it to me both barrels. I'll tell ya. I'm now 79 and it's 73 years since it happened. That's the sense of who you are, the genuineness of who you are. I guess I got some from her. I never corrected her after that.

Interviewer: **Well that's the conclusion of the questions that I have.**

[END]