INTERVIEW: Allyn Ravitz
INTERVIEWER: Sarah Arvey
DATE: July 8, 2003

[TAPE 1]

Interviewer: **So Allyn, we're recording now. The first set of questions have to do with your personal biography and your childhood and your life experiences earlier on in your life, and what that might have to do with your feminism activism later on; so if you can talk about where you were born and when, and describe your family life circumstances, your economics and perhaps your religious affiliation if that was important.**

A. Ravitz: Okay, I was born in 1942. For a brief period of time my parents were at North Carolina where there were "No Jews or Dogs Allowed." We were Jewish but we did apparently find a place to live and we moved up back to New Jersey, where both my parents were born, when I was about three years old; and I grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey with one sibling, an older sister, so I was the younger of two. Her name was Marilyn — is Marilyn — and mine was Allyn — is Allyn. So, people always asked me if my father wanted a boy but that wasn't the case. I was actually named after an actress, Allyn McLerie, who spelled her name the same way and since it went well linguistically with "Marilyn" my father was pleased. We were Jewish, not very religious at all, but were middle class. We were probably one of the poorest families of all the families that my sister and I hung out with. We were sort of on the fringe. My father worked and he was - is- a very decent man. He's still alive today at 92, but he didn't start making significant amounts until much later in life. My mother did not work outside the home except during the time when we went to college, when she earned extra money to help out. But she was very strong dynamic woman very active in women's organizations in leadership positions. She was on the national board of Hadassah when Israel was being formed as a state. She was, you know, very active. Very powerful.

Interviewer: **What type of woman's organization?**

A. Ravitz: Hadassah was the name of one where she was president for a long time. And there were other organizations where I remember carrying cans around for all sorts of things for the neighborhood to collect — the March of Dimes. I think if she had lived at another time she would have probably been a high-ranking executive in a company because she had power and fire in her. You know in those times you had to work through your husband to achieve financial status or whatever. My father — money wasn't his goal. He was a lawyer but he wasn't practicing law. He was a business broker. He got out of the law school during the Depression. He's educated. My mother had gone to college, too — to sort of

like a finishing school. Her father had sort of a lot of wealth and essentially gave it away during the Depression forgiving rents on all the properties he owned and bringing food to the people who were living in those places. He was just an incredible guy. But anyway I grew up in that household. My father didn't said he didn't want a boy, but I was always his and he was very encouraging as was my mother, but he, was particularly — was very encouraging in everything I did.

And as I was growing up I read a lot and I noticed years later, in a Ms. *Magazine* article on books that had been favorite books for various feminists, how many of them I had read, and one or two of them I was very surprised that anyone had read these, probably no one had heard of these books. One of these books was called *Caddie Woodland — Woodlawn* and it's about this 11-year-old tomboy who makes peace between the Indians and the settlers. Very strong characters. Well that was the books the apparently other (feminists) had read. *Little Women* — and those of us that read it that were in the *Ms.* article had, of course, identified with Jo. Nancy Drew. Those kinds of books. So I read those.

Anyway, I was exposed to a lot of things as a child. We lived very close to New York City and, as I grew up, I wound up going to the public high school in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Interestingly, there were three public high schools. One was for the trade school kids, which was coed for the boys and girls who were learning a trade - who were skilled. Then there were the two other high schools. One was all for girls, a public high school, and the one all for boys, and they (the two single sex high schools) had the general students and the college prep students. In Battin High School, where I went to high school, the number of people going on to college was very small. I'd say at most 5%, but it was an all-girls high school, so all leadership positions were held by girls and I had a lot of opportunities and was very active: an editor of the school paper, I took over for the choral teacher and did Christmas pageants and stuff like that when she was sick, I was in a lot of different clubs, I can't even remember them now. I was very involved and even did some writing for a local newspaper once when our school caught fire.

But, so from that experience, I did very well at school and did very well in my SATs and when I went to apply to college, I applied to several women's colleges because, at that time, there were no schools of the same level that were available to women as the best colleges of the country except single sex women schools. Of course Yale, Harvard all those schools were still single sex. Wesleyan and Williams, Amherst and Dartmouth. So I applied to a bunch of colleges, several of them women's colleges. I applied to the largest one figuring that it would be more of a magnet to the men's schools because if I were a guy I'd go visit the school with the most women. So, I went, I wanted to go to Smith. It was interesting — I interviewed at the University of Pennsylvania - which was — I interviewed at an urban, large university, which was University of Pennsylvania and a rural one, Cornell. The admissions officer (at the

University of Pennsylvania) I was interviewing with said, "Look. You're accepted here, there's no problem. But, I'll give you a piece of advice: go to a women's college — you will not get that experience at any other time and you probably will be going to graduate school anyway." And so I did and at Smith, again, it was just so empowering. Women ran the school. There was no holding back in classes. In classes, no embarrassment about being smart or being experimental in your answers. You just had total freedom to say and do what you wanted to do. And there were no men at Smith during the week. We saved that till the weekend. So we really were able to concentrate on our studies.

It was during that time Kennedy was elected to President. There was a commission on the status of women that he had going on and he was very encouraging of students and of women. His administration was, in fact. There was a point of time he invited students from a whole bunch of universities and colleges to meet at West Point to tackle solutions to world problems and we wrote papers on various problems. Mine was, I was in a group on India/Pakistan, and those papers were read by the State Department — they were hoping that students would come up with new solutions. It was a very heady experience. And the summer between my junior and senior year, I went to — no my sophomore and junior year — I went to Washington D.C. for the summer as an intern. And, again, the Kennedy administration totally coddled the college students. I wound up as a GS 2, which I think is the lowest you could possibly go, and working on an special project with the head of the Department of Labor, which was Arthur Goldberg at the time, and the head of the department, and I was in a secret project and researching laws — and again it was just a wonderful experience where you were really appreciated and nothing could stop you. Well so, I did those kinds of things. I was active at Smith. Got to be head of different organizations, and then it was time to get married.

Interviewer: **According to whom?**

A. Ravitz: According to the unwritten laws. I had met my husband - to - be at Washington that year and he was working for the government having completed a year of law school while awaiting security clearance. By the end of the summer, he was planning to return to the University of Michigan to finish law school. I had wanted to be a lawyer and so I applied to law school and was accepted to the University of Michigan Law School. However, since he was on scholarship, I had to get not only a scholarship to cover my tuition, but living expenses for the two of us. Otherwise, I would have to work, because my husband wasn't working (my husband to-be). I got a letter back from a man called Dean Profit which said "It's nice that you want to begin marriage and law school at the same time but University of Michigan is not going to accept that dual — it's not going to support that dual effort," and I was denied that scholarship, although my grades and my LSAT scores should have qualified me for one. And that was probably my first direct hit, but I didn't really…sex discrimination wasn't

really on my radar screen. I really didn't know that as a sociologically phenomenon and I just thought: "That was a crummy decision." and I was mad. So, I put off going to law school for later on.

Now, that was 1964, and Betty Friedan, who went to Smith also, as did Gloria Steinem, had come out with her book *Feminine Mystique* a few years earlier, but I was not aware of it. I got married and I got, I was able to get, a teaching job even though I didn't have a teaching degree. I taught for a year and my husband and I, when he graduated from law school, moved to Detroit and I ultimately applied to law school. By this time, I had one child. I had my second when I started law school in 1968. I went to a local law school nearby — I chose it because of its proximity to my house (so I could minimize the time away from home) and because of the ample parking, (so I didn't have to get their early to find a space) and I squished day and night classes together so I could finish my week's work in a few days and not have to have a sitter too many days a week. I was one of three women in the law school and I got pregnant my first or second week of school so that by the end of the year I was huge. I think I gave birth a week or two after final exams. It was a Jesuit law school and there were — women were new to them and pregnant a woman was very difficult for them. In fact a professor stopped me in the hallway as I was running around with my typewriter to take final exams and told me I didn't have to take this exam he'd give me a "B" that would be fine, and I'm like "Well I'm going in with an 'A', if you give me an 'A' I won't take the exam." So I wind up having to take that exam. I did get the "A." But, there was discrimination against women.

In fact — this was 1968 — I don't know if it was then or a year later when I came back (because I took a year off to stay home and nurse my second child), but the dress of the day was — was epaulettes on your shoulders. So I had this khaki outfit with epaulettes on it, and some guy asked me if I was in the army and I jokingly said, "I was in the paramilitary army of the women's movement." He thought I was serious!! Still some other things happened at the law school — I tried to start daycare there and men did not want to even think about daycare because THEY were fine. I spoke once to the law students' wives club. Why they invited me to speak, I don't know. There were — the women that ran it was a Stepford Wife type, but during the course of it, I said that "Many of you women are going to be divorced once your husbands get out of law school. You know you'll be growing apart. You have to do what you can to keep your lives together, interesting together and grow, but that is — the reality is that it's a good likelihood, given the divorce rate." I said "I know many of you are typing up their notes and their exams, probably some of you would be just as good if not better — you might want to think about going to law school." Years later when I spoke to a Women's Lawyer Association luncheon or breakfast, some women came up and said, "We were in that group, we were at that group." So that was encouraging. Anyway, so that was my experience. I went back to law school and I graduated.

The women's movement was starting to come about and I still have the first issue of *Ms. Magazine* when it came out and I think it was in that issue an article "I Want a Wife" was in, and I remember being invited either as a freshman law student or as a second year law student, when I came back (after taking a year off to nurse my second child) to lecture a domestic relations class on the women's movement that I used this article as my stepping off point.

Interviewer: **Now were you involved? What —**

A. Ravitz: Yes, I started off involved. I just cannot tell you what a relief it was to find out that the…I can only describe it as boredom, dissatisfaction after I had my first child. I was always at home and I was dangling ribbons, Geselle and Ilg. Talk about that! And playing Bolero and different music. But my son slept a lot and I just wandered around the house watching "Dark Shadows," television, and I felt so unfulfilled and I felt so ashamed of myself as a woman that I was not fulfilled by having this infant, and a friend and I started an art gallery which we really did to fill time. We just had shows four times a year so it didn't involve being away from the kids. It was so wonderful when I found out my feelings, personal feelings, were more a sociological problem. And I remember reading an article somewhere about a test if you went to a party and spent time talking to women rather then men would you feel that the party was not a success for you? I realized that this (the women's movement) was something I'd be very interested in and so I got involved in the women's movement very very heavily from that time on from when I was in law school forward.

Interviewer: **Did you call yourself a feminist at that time?**

A. Ravitz: Yeah.

Interviewer: **And was there a moment — the pregnancy, of being bored, at home — a "click" movement, or was there something else you might pinpoint?**

A. Ravitz: I don't know, because when I felt unfulfilled at home I still didn't — I still felt it was a personal thing. I think it must have been later on — I don't know if it was when *Ms. Magazine* came out. Although probably, I think that probably was later on because I was involved early in the Women's Liberation Coalition in Detroit, that was one of the first ones; with some of the women we did a sit-in in one of the councilman's office trying to get daycare. We started a daycare at Wayne State, a nursery at Wayne State called the Montief Children's Community. We started a nursery daycare with cribs near Wayne State in some church and that was the first of its kind. We begin working on laws and on credit discrimination and so now I'm at a point where I'm into me being involved in the movement and there were some things. I was more involved at than others.

Interviewer: **What were those things? What were the issues that concerned you the most?**

A. Ravitz: Well, chronologically probably the first one that I got…well daycare was the first one I got involved in. But there were other people who were totally focused on that. I then got into, became a member of NOW early on, ultimately became legal counsel for Metropolitan (Detroit) NOW. There were two women, JoAnn Parent and Valerie Klaetke, who came to me one time and asked if I could help them form a credit union and it became the first all-women's credit woman in the United States, if not the world. And it was the Feminist Federal Credit Union. We started it in 1974 and within a year we had more than a third of a million dollars out in loans to women, for things like tuition, for a printing press, for a motorcycle, for a kiln, just all sorts of things and it was a struggle to get chartering but we did it and within a year's time of our starting and with the help of the model and the breakthrough that we had done — there were six or seven states where feminist credit union had open up. That was very significant. At the same time we were trying to pass legislation in Michigan that I worked on to change the credit laws in Michigan — at that point it was still perfectly okay to discriminate women in the granting of credit.

Interviewer: **Could you talk a bit more about the discrimination? What did that entail at that time? Why did you feel the necessity to —**

A. Ravitz: Well, divorced women couldn't get credit in their own name. If you were married, your credit was in your husband's name only so any credit that was built up was built up under his name not yours. And actually, we actually saw the point system that banks used and you got points deducted for being a woman, points deducted for being a divorced woman and this was true in a number a number of things. Also there were applications, applications that if you had said distinctly your name and, if married your husband's name, you couldn't even apply for credit except in your husband's name and we worked to change that. There were some places that were amenable and saw the writing on the wall and there were others that just sneered and were arrogant.

We had a credit committee from NOW (Detroit NOW) go to these places. And so we needed a change in the credit law and we worked on it and it was a history of running up to Lansing for meetings called at the last minute, hearings on the bill — we had to keep our eyes and ears vigilant because powers that didn't want us to pass would try to pull a fast one and we had to scoot up to Lansing at the drop of a hat — Lansing being our state capital — and finally, finally after years of work, well at least a year, we got the law passed. At first there was a voice vote and it didn't pass but then a member asked for, a roll call vote that passed unanimously, which we thought was sort of interesting. But — and the reasons these guys voted for it were very interesting — some of them voted for because we were able to demonstrate through the Feminist Credit Union statistics that women were a better credit risk then men in terms of their

repayment of loans and that they were a good clients to have in terms of making interest off of them because they were reliable. So we were able to show them that it was in their companies' — it was in their economic best interest to open up their doors to women for credit. I know there was one senator who was a big supporter because he had been inconvenienced because his wife had not been allowed to register at a hotel when he was flying in from some place because she didn't have a credit card in her name and he was offended by that because it inconvenienced him, so he became a supporter of the bill. We took him without any questions. That bill was one of our victories.

We worked on fair housing. I helped write that act, too. Each of the acts I worked on because I was a lawyer — I fought to include damage provisions so we could sue and get significant money, and if not significant money for the client, at least (sometimes they did not want to do that), at least reasonably attorney fees which can add up. So, at least that was something, but I — we changed the Fair Housing Act to have no discrimination against women, on the basis of no discrimination against people on the basis on sex or age and the age was a factor we wanted so that they couldn't discriminate against women with children. A lot of people wouldn't allow children in and I tried to make it absolutely more clear what we were doing by adding a phrase: "Or that of anyone with whom they reside," so that race, sex, national origin, age or that of one whom they would reside would definitely include children but there was a legislator who made a conclusion, that I had not even thought about, that it would include people — give people the right to have housing if they were a gay couple — and she was homophobic, so she eliminated that section but as it turned out the law was interpreted that children meant not necessarily the person renting — age meant not only the person renting but the children of the person so that (our goal was met). Then we also worked on the sexual harassment. That became the focus of my work in my career. I became primarily a discrimination lawyer.

Interviewer: **Were you being paid, when you were a lawyer, did you expect to being working for these issues; also, were you being paid or was this pro-bono work?**

A. Ravitz: Pro-bono.

Interviewer: **Okay, did you have the practice where you earned money with other types of —**

A. Ravitz: Yes, right. I became a lawyer in 1972 and I was doing what a lot of women do or did at the time: divorce law. And in fact I did some interesting things in divorce law that I don't think had been done before. I waited until a case, divorce case, was over where there had been abuse. Once he got his half I sued him for assault and battery on behalf of the wife for that half. So that was fun. And, so I did divorce law, represented some men in custody suits that where of

the parents they were so much better qualifed. In fact, there were men that — were women that were so ashamed, given the pressure of society, not wanting to have their children, that they would fight it in court but they'd do things and act out in such a way, even when the trial was pending, that it was like they wanted the court to take the child from them, but they wouldn't — didn't have the guts to say, "You be — you're the better parent" of the man — They were just very interesting areas at that point. No fault divorce came in with just being boon (at first) to women, and so I did a lot of divorce.

And then one day this woman came into my office — she had found out about me because I was active in the women's movement, and she had been working on the line as a probationary employee at Ford Motor Company and her foreman had sexually harassed her even though her husband was nearby, incidentally. What happened was because she wouldn't put out she was fired before her ninety-day probationary period was up. That was the case of Nale v. Ford Motor Company and it became the first jury trial of sexual harassment in the country, if not the world. I don't know, I never checked it out. I know newspapers report it as the first one in the country, and at the time I did not know it was the first one in the country, and also at the time there was no sexual harassment law in the state of Michigan. There was discrimination on the basis of sex — sexual harassment was still something that we weren't sure the court was going to infer from the definition of sex discrimination. The EEOC had done that in their regulations, equal opportunity commission, and so under federal law; people were trying those cases without a jury — you could bring a case but under Michigan law, but it was up for grabs. Not only was the (Nale v. Ford) case brought under that (Michigan) law, but I also brought a claim for consortium, which hadn't been done before. We won that one too, which means that her husband was able to get money for loss of companionship for what she went through. We won that case — it was very hard fought, we had three different judges on it. The first judge was so horrendous and so sexist that we had him disqualified — he was making jokes about it. He said — what was it that he said? — it was so awful. I would start to tell him about the case - he said, "What? The women didn't get what she wanted so she's crying rape?" I said, "No," and explained to him what it was about and then he just made so many comments that would so show his bias to such an extent that I filed a motion to disqualify him, which was so a scary thing to do because if I lost we were stuck with this judge. And I called the Macomb County NOW chapter — if I lost this (disqualification motion) it might be an organizing tool for them to watch the trial or at least the motion to show support. So anyway, they turned out.

We had a big crowd there and from the bottom of the pile, as I was waiting for the case to be called, came my file, and it was stuck on top! And the judge agreed to disqualify himself. The second judge we had to lose because of another reason: a juror had a heart attack right before closing arguments and my client's husband rescued him with CPR and we had to start all over. We had a

third judge who was wonderful. He just let us try the case. And, the personnel of the court system would sort of laugh at us; they make jokes about us, the clerks, the police officers, and then, when we won this case, out of the woodwork came other people in the court system that said "Oh we're so glad you won it." It was all over the papers and we did TV shows. We did a lot of publicity. It became, discrimination became my specialty. Not only sexual harassment but other kinds of discrimination, which was fine by me because I find it totally fascinating.

We also got involved in violence against women. We put on a big fundraiser for Inez Garcia and JoAnn Little, JoAnn Little being a Black woman who was in a jail in North Carolina who was raped by her sheriff jailer, and when he came back a second time to rape her she stabbed him to death and fled and she was on trial for murder with a death penalty, and Inez Garcia was a woman who had been raped. A small woman who in California — Hispanic — who had been raped by her estranged husband and in the process of the rape she killed him. So, there was this big fundraiser we had in Detroit and raised money and these were the two main cases in the country where murder, murdering someone or — not murdering — killing someone as–in defense in rape was raised as a defense to justifying a killing. It raised a lot of money, cars were lined up all the way down the expressway. It was a total sellout at Ford auditorium in Detroit. Gloria Steinem spoke. Lilly Tomlin was there. One of the most moving moments was when Florence Ballard (who was one of the Supremes that was kicked out) took the stage and sang a capella Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman," in a sort of soulful Motown way. It would just send chills. We knew what she had gone through personally in her own life. Anyway that was a real high. And then we had a big conference on violence against women.

There was so much happening. It was such an exciting time. We were accomplishing things — people thought we had a lot more power then, people thought at that time we were more organized. Then the ERA came along and that I think was somewhat devastating to the movement because it — legally I do not know that it was so necessary — but it wasn't the organizing tool that people ultimately thought it was because the failure really took the wind out (of the movement).

Interviewer: **I have a question about your activism: it seemed you were able to make a connection between local levels and national levels — do you think that was because of your background in law and the idea that you could change national federal law as well as state law? Did you make a connection about the local cases you were taking on pertinent and useful to the global movement, even?**

A. Ravitz: Well, I never bought a discrimination case in federal court because the judges were more conservative and more importantly the damages weren't there so…

Interviewer: **What do you mean?**

A. Ravitz: Well, you couldn't sue, couldn't get hundreds of thousands of dollars for your client. Back in — I forgot when that case was finally resolved, let's see, 1980, we filed the case in 1976 — by the time it was finally resolved it was 1980, we had $170,000 worth of damages which was a big thing back then. You couldn't get that kind of money in federal court, you couldn't sue for those kinds of damages under federal law, so I sort of concentrated in Michigan and I think Michigan was a leader nationally. I remember getting a letter from UAW from a woman, Edie Van Horn, who was very active in the Coalition of Labor Union Women who, saying Faye Nale — who was my client in the case — has been — was with the bravest women of the world and I must feel ten feet tall — She (Edie Van Horn) was so proud that this case had come out from Michigan and she was forwarding the material to Gloria, which — Gloria Steinem.

What was interesting about it is how everyone wherever they were in the country sort of supported everybody else. Gloria Steinem, G-d bless her, she would come in — she came in for the opening of the Feminist Federal Credit Union. She was at this one. She was such a fabulous person in terms of giving her time and there were other national figures, Margaret Sloan from in the Black Feminist Coalition came and spoke at places. We just, we just... it was just a…oh G-d it was such a wonderful sisterhood!!!

Abortion, I haven't even touched on abortion. That was not my focus, there were other people who totally concentrated on that. I did some work in that area. I went to demonstrations, but I didn't work on legislation for that, other people had, and I guess I don't know if Michigan was a spearhead of that but I remember having a Black feminist and a poor feminist so important to our (abortion) movement, because people tried to make abortion a racist and class issue and we were able to have people step forward and say, "No that's not true."

And we had feminists who were married. I was married. I was one of the married ones and we had people like Gloria Steinem who looked good to those observing the NOW committees and they weren't threatening in terms of their looks, and luckily we had Patricia Burnett, who was actually a Republican, who was active and she wore like fluffy angora sweaters and heavy jewelry, good jewelry, but we were considered subversive. That was what we were considered. There was a time when I was there — one time — I was with two other women, one became a high ranking woman at Ford Motor Company, I was a lawyer, and the other woman became a judge – and myself we were expected to speak at Wayne State University (Law School Women's Group) on the issue of "what it's like going to law school and being a mother and balancing act" — it was called "Mothers in Law" and later on…it came to pass that I discovered that the state of Michigan had been collecting files on people who they thought were subversive — someone filed a lawsuit to get those files

released. They were released and I surprisingly had a file, because I really wasn't so subversive, and one other thing in that file was a report that someone had written who was in attendance at that small meeting at Wayne State University and I was just furious that my tax dollars were going to pay to have someone sit in at just a talk about, you know, balancing things for children. They thought we were subversive, but you know, maybe looking back women's movement was very subversive. It did change a lot of things in the country, but — but I don't know if I answered your question. It was so, it was a wonderful experience — really felt we were making progress. We had people in power nationally, people in power locally. We had federal courts and local courts that were ready to accept social change and incorporate it into the fabric of their opinions and unfortunately that's not now the case for most instances. We now at least have a Democratic governor in Michigan, but the Republican governor was gleefully looking forward to cutting back in all sorts of rights, abortion and otherwise, in Michigan — of workers, and women, whatever. So times have changed.

Interviewer: **Who were you main supportive — supporters of your activism? Did your family, your husband and children, support you, and did you have any organizational allies or opponents? People who tried to block your efforts?**

A. Ravitz: Well, in terms of supportive husbands. My first husband and I divorced while I was in law school and I didn't get any alimony so he didn't support me. But he considered himself to be a radical, but a lot of the leftist men's groups still didn't get it. Feminism and women's rights was probably going to be the largest movement if you wanted to do organizing, and they were very much into prisoners' rights or Black Panthers and I would attend these meetings and I would keep pushing in areas of women's rights and it was like, "Later for that." So, eventually I left the National Lawyers Guild and concentrated on women's issue because I figured that there were very competent people handling all those important issues but it was only women who were going to focus on the women's issues. And so we did that.

We also started a Michigan women's campaign fund to raised money for women candidates. So, in terms of support my kids were very supportive. They marched with me and it was wonderful for them, I think. They look back at those times as really interesting, good times. I remember one march in Washington that was incredible with all the women in white coming on subways and everything onto Washington. It looked like there were millions there. It was just an amazing experience. My children supported, my friends of course were supportive — my friends were mostly people from the women's movement, although not all of them, but my family in terms of my sister — she was never much in the feminist movement but her heart was there and, my mother/father just wanted me to get married. It was very exciting. I had that support. There were groups that wanted to block us: there was a Phyllis Schlafly in Michigan who was the evil one, and there were Donald Lobsinger

who — I don't know if people spoken about him, but he was a right wing person who would come. He was considered a pro-Nazi and he would come and he would show up and try to disrupt demonstrations or outside meetings, and of course the press would give him a disproportionate amount of press — and those were some of the people that opposed things. Of course there were people in the legislature that opposed things, but we had the majority that at some point were really afraid of women and their power and we didn't want to disabuse them of that with our numbers (of actual activists). But I felt very supportive and supported and we had all these groups — what were they called? I can't remember the name now — they were women support groups.

Interviewer: **Not the consciousness —**

A. Ravitz: Yeah consciousness-raising.

Interviewer: **Were they organized by NOW?**

A. Ravitz: No I think they just sort of sprung up, but it was wonderful sharing things. Just learning about orgasms and learning — people did crazy things. I remember one woman started syphoning out her menstrual period. There was a group that did that so they didn't have to worry about her menstrual period anymore. That was a bit radical for a lot of us. We didn't have the equipment to do something like that at home but whatever. But it was it was a fabulous time it was so wonderful.

Interviewer: **Sounds like you had a lot of fun. In addition to it being your career —**

A. Ravitz: Yeah.

Interviewer: **You had fun? Is that correct?**

A. Ravitz: Oh yeah. It was so incredible getting those laws passed, credit laws, your housing laws, sexual harassment and retaliation, and getting tough meaty laws that did some good. Companies would, you know, eventually succumb or at least suffered from not having a correct policy. Even the, even the unions were not really supportive at first. Even some of the women in the union, "No one never sexually harassed me," but there were other women in the union who were supportive — Millie Jeffrey, Edie Van Horn, were some of the women — I can't think off hand.

It was wonderful for my practice. I spent a lot of time speaking. I had more cases then I could handle. I wound up taking only cases that I thought were really intriguing that I thought might push the law further — if I was overburdened with cases I would be extra selective. But people became coming out of…you heard the most horrible stories. You heard stories from someone who had a baby (by a supervisor) and needed to go back to work and didn't

want to have another baby at her place of employment. I represented hundreds and hundreds of steel workers who had to leave their jobs at the end of the month…when they…the first time they knew they were pregnant they had to tell their employer and at the end of the month of that telling to the employer they had to leave their jobs and they lost their health benefits. We had people that were sleeping in cars, had no income coming in and a lot of women ended up having abortions and some of the women really regretted it. Me, I was never pro-abortion. I was always pro-choice. There were some women (steelworkers) that had abortions and , you know, regretted it. There were women who had children and regretted it because of what they had to put their families through - the second time around, (they) did have abortions. It was a huge lawsuit and it was kind of — people would hide them (their pregnancies): there was one woman who was walking up on these huge catwalks above cauldrons, seven or eight months pregnant hiding it. Of course you would be fired if they found out. They were tough women, they were good women and you know they suffered because of discrimination. There was just, it was everywhere. I'm glad it became a good area of practice to entice good lawyers, and an area of practice that could earn someone a living. That wouldn't have been possible without significant damage provisions (in the laws).

Interviewer: **That must have been really nice to be able to married your political and personal emotions with your work.**

A. Ravitz: It was, it really was.

Interviewer: **The next set of questions has to do with your reflections upon second wave feminism and the first one is: what's your definition of feminism and has it changed throughout the years?**

A. Ravitz: Well, I have very crude definition. It's just basically: a feminist is a person that believes that women should be able to do whatever they want to do, regardless of their sex, if they could do it. Here it is, and that's always been my definition and it's my definition now and it's a definition that people, that I see most feminists do have and it's not women's rights above another. And I think the issue became blurred at some point with National Organization of Women, when (ending) sexual preference became one of the key goals of the National Organization of Women. Sexual preference is a whole different area of discrimination and that was very divisive of the women's movement. There was a split, a fight in that the side prevailed wanting to incorporate (freedom from discrimination for) sex preference as a goal that the National Organization of Women should become intrinsically involved in. But, it was (damaging for us) with the general public.

That's my definition of feminism and they're always trying to characterize us as being against men. I remember once speaking at a labor union meeting someplace in upstate Michigan and guys were complaining women were

keeping their jobs while men with more years of seniority were being dismissed because of the discrimination laws and I kept telling them, "I understand where you're coming from," and tried to explain to them, "Why this happened is the company has found a way to make you pay for their prior acts of discrimination. They should be paying for it another way. They should have more shifts or whatever. You shouldn't be fired. There should be another alternative. This is the way that they choose and it is a way that divides laborers."

Interviewer: **Do you think that the press accurately reflected the movement in which you participated?**

A. Ravitz: Not for the most part. I think the press enjoyed the bra-burning thing that never died down. At some point the more responsible press began to come around. I remember during the second trial in the Fayette Nale case — Cathy Guisewite is it? — the one that writes the cartoons, she writes the cartoon "Cathy" — had, coincidental with the weeks that we were in trial, a cartoon running about Cathy having problems at work with sexual harassment. So, it was not quite mainstream but it was getting mainstream with people like that popularizing it correctly. But, the press likes to, you know, focus on what will sell and what's sexy or exciting in the news. A lot of stuff was covered from a bias — a slant, but I don't think that's entirely true — that's my basic reaction.

Interviewer: **I'm going to stop the tape right now and put in a different one because this one is almost over.**

[TAPE 2]

Okay and that's great, and we're recording again. So, I know there are some more things you wanted to talk about but why don't we go through the rest of the questions on reflections of feminism and then we can go back to the other things you wanted to say about your sex discrimination cases.

A. Ravitz: Okay, and the law in general.

Interviewer: **And the law in general. Exactly. The next question is: what do you see as the main achievements of your wave of feminism? And then do you consider anything a failure? I know you had talked about the ERA but perhaps something else. So the main achievements?**

A. Ravitz: Well, the main achievements: I think a lot of the main achievements were legal achievements. 'Cause that really made people change that didn't want to change. And I don't think that in terms of admissions to schools — certainly Title IX, women in sports, granting of credit, job discrimination, all of that — I mean none of that would have changed without the laws, and we were lucky,

just really lucky that we had legislatures and courts that were in our favor, and presidents and governors. I mean to try and do that thing today, I think it would totally fail. I mean unless you have an executive that's going to veto. It's scary. It's scary because the agenda is changed so and people have total control and I don't — at least it was sort of balanced when we were around. It wasn't total control of legislatures and the courts, there was some mixture. There was some cooperation. But now there is no need to cooperate and people have a more reactionary or conservative agenda and they don't have to be kind, even share information anymore. It's so — I just hope that our laws can remain intact until we get a different legislature. It's going to take so much time and effort to get back on track.

The worst thing that has happened with all the conservative presidents has been the court system. That's going to be the longest thing to change back and you are going to have Clarence Thomas on that court. He's a young man and watching his hearing at the Anita Hill hearing was so awful. To watch people testify that, "He didn't sexually harass me," as a defense to whether or not she was sexually harassed drove me up the wall, as a person and as a lawyer. I mean do you have a murderer trial with other people saying, "Hey he didn't murder me"? The other thing was very strange about the Anita Hill case. I remember going to parties where I was asked questions about it. People said, "Yeah, well why did she come forward now after all these years?" and there was testimony, supported testimony that she hadn't chosen to come forward. In her case someone had outed her in terms of this event, and having been asked the questions she then came forward and told them. But it wasn't that she chose to expose him at this time in her life and not before. She was never going to expose him except for the fact that someone she had confided in came forward. But you could tell that to people all day long and they would still come back with the same thing trying to, you know, infer some sort of motive on her part.

But anyway, I think our achievement was our laws, but how long that achievement is going to stand who knows, and it scares me that these young women today, and I saw it in a law school when I did go back, they are not involved. They could care less. They think that what they have is going to be around forever. Abortion rights. That could be so devastating in terms of being taken back. I mean the rich will still be able to go to other countries or have their doctors say it's a D&C, whatever way they did in the past. But for those that don't have access to the alternatives it's going to be chancy and death and just the very idea that we don't have control over our bodies anymore. It's offensive, and they are starting to cut back on that. They've already. And they're cutting back on things like breast examinations — how often you can have them and have insurance companies pay for them. It's just a different world, and I just wish we'd had the troops. I really don't want to get back involved. I'm happy now doing what I do. I'm on a lake. I have enjoyed my life. I do work with animal rights and stuff like that I — you know I'm not that anxious to be — I don't think I have the energy to do what I did before.

Although, this whole thing (Veteran Feminists of America project) has been pretty energizing. But, maybe we just have to do it. And, certainly those of us that lived through it, tell our grandchildren. If we haven't done a good enough job with our children we've got to pass it on to our grandchildren. But they just are — people take it all for granted. So, I think that the best achievements were the legal ones.

Interviewer: **And failures?**

A. Ravitz: Well, it wasn't a failure, I mean of the women's movement, but I think in retrospect pushing for the ERA was a tactical mistake and that hurt the movement, and I think making sexual preference a part of the women's movement hurt the National Organization of Women. Although it's definitely an issue that affected women and I'm totally in support of that and I've contributed to that, in terms of what was defined as "the women's movement" at the time, it broke up the momentum — a lot of people pulled away from it. Not so much because they didn't support sexual preference rights, but it was a different issue entirely. I think maybe it was a combination. Maybe it was timing — was both. Maybe that all happened around the same time where the ERA failed and different groups gained control. This might be very radical what I'm saying here. I do think it (the placing of sexual preference discrimination on the women's rights agenda) definitely had an impact on the women's movement and what it was able to accomplish mainstream by adding another issue that people could focus on as a reason to discount the movement — that it was a gay rights movement. So I think mixing those two up was wrong and I think most people(feminists) would have supported both issues, but they should have kept them separate.

Interviewer: **Some analysts of second wave feminism described it as overwhelmingly middle class and racist in its concerns, do you agree with this assessment? And does it reflect the women whom you worked with?**

A. Ravitz: Well, I don't agree with the assessment because the movement affected jobs from the lowest paying job to the highest paying job and being able to buy a home or rent a place.

[Doorbell ringing]

A. Ravitz: Will you excuse me, I'm sorry.

[Pause]

Interviewer: **Okay you were talking about the assessment of the feminist movement.**

A. Ravitz: It being middle class, I think the things it directed itself to, like abortion rights, affected women of all classes too. So, it wasn't middle class in its concerns. It

was universal. It is true that a lot of the women who were able to devote a lot of time and energy to this were women who were not carrying three jobs or were single heads of household. So, a lot of the burden was picked up by women who had time and ability to do that sort of stuff. There were some minority women that were here that had key visible roles locally, but predominantly it was white.

Interviewer: **You talked earlier about the civil rights movement — what connection do you make between that and the feminist movement — anti-racism movements, and the feminist movement?**

A. Ravitz: Well, it's the same kind of thing, just wanting equal opportunity under the law. And if there is no law to have it under, then to make a law to have equal opportunity under the new law. I think that in ways the feminist movement probably had some more support because men had daughters and wives — white men with power, white judges. So that in the power structure there were more people who had direct family members who would be affected by the law and I think that was a help to the women's movement. Most of the women that I know that were active in the women's movement were also active in the civil rights movement. So things were seen both ways and I don't know if it was as reciprocal but it was like, I think, my decision to leave the male liberal organization. I knew it was in good hands and I knew there were some areas that no one was going to be putting first, prioritizing, and so I left the group dealing with issues other than women to concentrate on that. And I think a lot of, well I want to say a lot of Black women but I don't know, that's a tough one.

In Detroit it seems to me — I mean there were the groups like DARE, which was a sort of leftist labor group and Black labor group and was struggling against the white leadership in the UAW, or the Black Panthers. But the NAACP was the main group and it was, by that time it was the key group as opposed to other groups such as Stokely Carmichael's group, stuff like that. So, they were predominately not considered radical and I think maybe that was sort of true of both the major organizations in the women's movement and civil rights movement — I mean I think we were pretty mainstream. There may have been a radical element. But, basically both groups tried to go about their way lawfully and do what they had to do. I think the Black movement, the civil rights movement, the black community has run into the same problems too with black women, young Black students going into the corporate mainstream, not looking back, not pulling up their neighbors, their neighborhoods, and concentrating on their own path and I think that's what is happening in the women's movement too where women are not reaching back to make sure that everyone's on board. Success. That's the price of success in these movements and we may all pay for it now

Interviewer: **Thinking about the next generation of feminists, what do you see are the**

outstanding issues that they are going to have to deal with?

A. Ravitz: The same ones that we've dealt with, because all of those are going to be under attack and I worry about that. Hopefully they can draw on our experiences and not do that whole learning curve. With the Internet, I mean, there are so much easier ways to organize, to get information about demonstrations, about calling your legislators on bills. I mean there are tools available now that weren't available then. It may take fewer people to do what it took a lot of other people to do in terms of organizing effort. I think the important thing is running for office. We have to get power. I mean even now there is just a handful of women in the Senate. It's the most bizarre thing to look at the Senate chamber and see how few women there are with considering we are the majority of the population. Even in those group meetings before the microphone of congress people when a new bill is passed presents a picture where you look and just see men, men, men, men and, occasionally, a woman and maybe she'll be wearing a red suit. But it's just, they (the next generation) have their work cut out for them and I think for the most part they are going to be blind-sided because they don't see it coming down the road and I do and it really really scares me and I hope someone somewhere is doing something about it and I will help. Mostly those of us that are above sixty are called upon to help with money, which is fine cause movements need money. But these young women that think they have it made are walking on very tenuous ground.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else you wanted to add?

A. Ravitz: Well, just a couple of things in terms of I wanted to address. The fact of what I learned representing women and men in discrimination suits be it sex, race, age, whatever. Every single person, every single person I represented was most concerned about having a verdict in their favor so that they would be vindicated. So that the company would be told, "You treated this person badly, unlawfully, you were wrong." That to them was always worth more than the money and I used to lecture business groups and human resources groups and I'm saying, "You could save yourself millions, millions if you would just say to your people 'I am so sorry we passed you over, you are right. You should have gotten that position. This is what we're going to do: we are going to pay you a differential and when the next job opens it's yours.'" None of them, none of the people I ever represented would have chosen to go ahead with a lawsuit and lose their friends, be betrayed by their friends who were afraid of losing their jobs and had lapses of memory, having to leave their social venue and for many of them their job, having the aggravation and expense of litigation. I mean no one would choose that. None of the ones I represented were in it for the money. It was the apology. The blind refusal, the stubbornness of the company to admit they were wrong. They still miss the boat on that and no one has guts. What happens is people take the position "Let's draw all our wagons in a circle and let's keep to a party line." I never lost a discrimination case and the reason is the truth always came out. You take enough depositions and you get the chink

in the armor and someone doesn't have the "story" right and occasionally, G-d bless them, there will be some person who uses being under oath as a vehicle to tell the truth and that's their out. And I used to begin depositions by telling people, "Do you realize that there is a law in Michigan that protects you if there is any retaliation because you assisted in a hearing in any way and participated in a hearing" And I shoved the law at them . I mean it's something. Thank G-d for the retaliation section of the Michigan Act. I said that was one thing I wanted to say about the — in fact, as Fayette Nale said as she won the lawsuit: "I'm happy," said Ms. Nale. "All I cared about was to have the jury rule in favor of Fayette Nale. It's just good to be vindicated from the whole thing." And that's just typical. The other thing I wanted to point out was how the federal law came about and when it came about, in case people didn't know.

Interviewer: **What federal law is this?**

A. Ravitz: The Civil Rights Act, ultimately called the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But in February of 1964 while the bill was being debated on the House floor, Howard Smith of Virginia, chairman of the Rules Committee and staunch opponent of all civil rights legislation rose up and offered a one-word amendment to Title VII, which was — which prohibited employment discrimination. He proposed to add "sex "to the title of the bill in order to prevent discrimination against other groups — the women — and people have said that he did it as a joke and to be an obstructionist but, what turned out, lo and behold, after debate and everything, the thing was passed. And then Johnson became President and there was concern about whether or not he was going to want to pass it or not. You know support it. That became an issue. Kennedy of course had supported it but when it was finally passed Johnson realized — I mean in terms of the backlash and the way times had changed — he wound up coming down and supporting it too. So, the bill was passed. But it wasn't part of it originally it just got in as a fluke. So, I thought that was an interesting thing to point out.

Interviewer: **I think so too. Any other things you wanted to talk about?**

A. Ravitz: Well, I think the issue of daycare was interesting. I learned in the process of doing daycare that during World War II there were daycares at every elementary school and whatever. So everyone was able to accommodate women with daycare. It was considered in the best interest of society. And learning that, it just was amazing that there was such a fight to offer that kind of help again to women. Because it's such an issue in terms of a women's ability to work and make a living, the cost of daycare is so high, and I think that's an issue that still needs to be addressed in our society. The amount of money that's spent. Now they're trying to cut back on Head Start. So, there are issues in terms of children that have to be addressed. And, I don't know what the answer to getting rid of discrimination is. I've thought about it. I thought maybe the thing is to force people to live together in totally diverse communities so that kids go to school together and grow up knowing each other, so that there's total

diversity. That there be no ghettos of any kind, either wealthy or poor. And of course that may be unrealistic. I think trying to correct past acts of discrimination at the college level isn't necessarily the answer. I've seen people accepted to college being tutored in their first year and then being dropped and just not having the background, the early education skills and whatever, to be able to assist them and draw upon at the college level. So that their "failure" is even worse. It's a terrible thing. I mean it's hard to follow through at that point. I was going to say something else. Let me think. Can you stop the tape for just a second?

Interviewer: **More so can we get some still shots of you. So if you'll look at me and smile. That's nice, okay. One more. Okay great. Thank you so much. That was great.**

[END]