

11-30-1984

Interview no. 736

Elizabeth Rodgers

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Interview with Elizabeth Rodgers by Pauline Dow, 1984, "Interview no. 736," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE:	<u>Elizabeth Rogers (1953 -)</u>
INTERVIEWER:	<u>Pauline Dow</u>
PROJECT:	<u>Women Attorneys of El Paso</u>
DATE OF INTERVIEW:	<u>November 30, 1984</u>
TERMS OF USE:	<u>Unrestricted</u>
TAPE NO.:	<u>736</u>
TRANSCRIPT NO.:	<u>736</u>
TRANSCRIBER:	<u>Pauline Dow</u>

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Attorney in El Paso.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Discussion of her law school experiences, hiring practices toward women attorneys, reacting to career choice by family and friends, reaction of clients to female lawyers, Women's Bar Association in El Paso, and Bar Banquet skits in the 1970's.

Length of Interview: 35 minutes Length of Transcript 36 pages

ELIZABETH ROGERS
by Pauline Dow
El Paso Texas
November 30, 1984

PD: This is Elizabeth Rogers on the 30th of November,
First National Bank Building.

Okay. Here we go. State your full name,
please.

ER: My full name is Elizabeth Rogers.

PD: Okay. Your date----the date and place of your
birth?

ER: I was born February the 20th, 1953 in Uvalde,
Texas.

PD: Your marital status?

ER: I'm single.

PD: Do you have any children?

ER: No, I've never been married.

PD: What law courses, if any, did you take to prepare
yourself for -- I mean, excuse me, college courses
did you take to prepare yourself for law school?

ER: I followed a Liberal Arts plan and I think about
my junior -- maybe the end of my sophomore year in
college I decided I was going to head towards law
school and so I know I took logic and that was some-
thing in my catalogue for pre-law that said you
should take. I was a Political Science major, but
I think, other than that, it was just for my degree
plan undergrad more than it was for law school.

PD: Okay. So you knew then when you were in college that you were going to attend law school?

ER: I was interested in it. I did not know, because I knew that I was going to have trouble getting in. And I went 2 years to junior college in Uvalde and I had a real high grade point. My junior year I transferred to Texas A & M and my grade point dropped real hard. And so I knew I was interested in going, but I didn't know how to go; I didn't know any lawyers and I knew that my -- you know, I knew it would depend on my LSAT which I took maybe not until my senior year, I really don't remember.

PD: Okay. When you finally decided to -- to apply to law school, what was your family's reaction to your decision?

ER: Oh, I think -- you know, people ask me about how -- why I decided to go, because my mother went to school, undergrad and graduate school after she had 5 kids and my oldest sister was working -- was a teacher and my mother taught school when I was about -- started teaching when I was a freshman in high school and I know I'm giving you a long answer to get to what you're asking--

PD: Do it.

ER: -- asking me. But my oldest sister taught school and I know that that's the only thing in the world I knew to be, was a teacher, and I think they were kind of getting real distressed with the public school system and didn't encourage me per se, because we didn't know you could be lawyers; no one knew that women could do that. No one -- I didn't have any role models. But one Christmas or one Easter season, my oldest sister taught school with a woman that had just graduated from the University of Texas Law School. She was teaching school while her husband finished law school and for a long time I really forgot about that and then one day it hit me that I know she was the person that made me say maybe I should do that; you know, that might be -- sounded neat what she was doing, although she was teaching school because she didn't have a job. So you asked me my family's reaction -- so I don't think that they discouraged it, I don't think they knew how to encourage it, because they didn't know how it could happen and I read a letter from my oldest sister to my brother one time that was not addressed to me and it was a little sentence in there that Liz thinks she wants to be a lawyer,

thinks she can cut it. And I think that that had a lot to do with me showing them that I could, because I couldn't believe that they knew every doubt that I could do exactly what I wanted.

PD: That you could cut it, yeah.

Okay. When you applied for law school then, did you encounter any problems with the administration?

ER: No, but my grades weren't because of my real -- I think I had a real average LSAT and I had above 3 point, but it wasn't -- it wasn't a 3.5 and I think in -- somewhere in between there -- I don't think it was -- at that time, I don't think it was because I was a woman; it's because I didn't have the grades that would get me into the big law schools. So, I was put on hold at a couple of them and then South Texas in Houston where I eventually went was the first to accept me. I don't think it was discriminatory on sex, although they weren't out recruiting women.--

PD: Okay.

ER: -- by any means, but I don't think other people -- I went to school with a lot of men that had to go beg the dean to let them in.

PD: Okay. Was there a quota system for women when you

were -- that you were aware of?

ER: My law school was doing about 10 percent and I suppose that was that at a quota. They were -- they were, you know, keeping a hold on that and by the time I graduated, I think we were at about 15 percent and then of course now across the nation, I think it's even above a third. But at least when I first started practicing, every law school in the nation had pretty well gone to a third --

PD: Okay.

ER: -- of their student body.

PD: Was there scholarship money available for women; are you aware of any?

ER: No, I'm not. I went to a private law school and just borrowed money and worked full time.

PD: Okay. When you were in law school, what was the reaction of the male students to the female students? Do you -- can you remember any of it?

ER: Oh, I have, you know, one or two little stories, but I'm sure it's nothing compared to what Ruth Kern or Janet Ruesch or those women that were 10 years ahead of me or more. I was in a study group with my first year and we were all scared and didn't know what to expect and I was with

men and we were all scared and didn't know what to expect and I was with a bunch of men and they would tease me about now Liz and I say tease because we were very close friends, so it didn't -- like they didn't sit down and say now Liz, really, you shouldn't be here. There was an underlying chance that I suppose had something to do with their real philosophy because their wives were working as secretaries to put them through law school. But they were the -- the immediate guys in my group, at least, certainly were not feminist in orientation, although I don't think I was when I first started law school. And they would say -- one of them I remember said to me, "Oh, it's okay if you want to be a lawyer, but don't go to the court house; that's for men." And that attitude was very much in place until 5 years ago. I'm sure even since I've been out of law school, before women had made a big move at the court house.

PD: Okay. So then there was some of this discouragement; women don't get into law in court --

ER: Yeah; I don't know -- it wasn't overt and I don't know that it was real subtle all the time. It

was there and, of course, interviewing in real life it was real there, because women did not go to be criminal defense lawyers. Women were starting to prosecute, going through the D.A.'s office at that time, but very few. Very few. But most every woman that had -- was recruited by big firms to do office practice: wills, estates. And at that time in Houston, Marian Rosen, who is very well known in Texas, had her own firm, but I mean she was like the only person that you had ever heard of, a woman that was a partner in her own firm.

PD: Okay. Put me in time, now. What year --

ER: I graduated from law school in '78, started in January of '76 and I went -- quick through.

PD: Okay. All right. I know that in law school they teach by using the Socratic method in that you were usually asked to stand up and recite. How did the professors react to women -- female students? Was there any difference?

ER: I don't think so. In my law school, we were not so Socratic. When -- my law school, I will say, had a problem with its status for a long time.

It chose to be a leader in the mock trial advocacy; it's one of the leaders in the nation at this time. And they emphasized very much us having jobs, clerking for law firms. At Harvard University of Texas, they never encouraged that and most people never see the inside of a law office until they're graduated, unless their fathers were lawyers. My law school was exactly the opposite; almost everybody there worked, so I was -- I was -- taken away from the pure Socratic method like you see on T.V. I had two or three classes in that regard, but not -- not so much emphasis with that Paper Chase kind of class; I had one that scared me to death and the ugliest -- the professor was as ugly to a guy that had polio and was going to graduate simultaneously from medical school and law school in the same year. And he misunderstood the assignment and came unprepared to class and if that professor would have ever done that to me, I would have quit that day. I never will forget and it was the ugliest thing I had ever seen. It was directed at a man and a very, very competent guy who was crippled and I -- so I don't -- I don't think that they --

there were some problems with professors that did,
but not all of them was a big problem --

PD: Okay. How many women in your class; do you remember, percentage-wise?

ER: No. I think 10 percent were not -- maybe 12 percent, 10 percent, something like that and also at that time women were already proving themselves we were generally better ^{students} proportionately. The top of the class had -- in Law Review, had a lot more women than 10 percent, you know. They were -- women write well and women do better in grades. So I think at that time women had demanded a lot more respect and I didn't have to fight those battles.

PD: So you feel then, as far as grading goes, that men and women were graded with equal fairness?

ER: I would even say in that regard we got bonus points. They don't have names on papers; they don't know who it is, but women generally write better and neater, and I would say that we get better grades because of that and just because we are more conscious--socialized to write neater --

PD: Right.

ER: -- and we generally have an easier time with English, I think, than men in general.

PD: Okay. Let's see. Okay. If you -- if you can just put yourself back then when you were going to law school, can you remember anyone who put an unnecessary roadblock in your path, whether it be, you know, a social relationship or a political situation in your job, maybe in school, just academically? Anything like that, any --

ER: Oh, no. Not -- I can remember things like I had a cousin that got killed in a car wreck and I didn't go home for the funeral because I was in finals. And I think that was hard; my parents didn't understand that. They never said anything to me, but I -- every one of my siblings was at home for that funeral and I think that I, at times, got frustrated that everybody was giving me credit that I was working full time and going to law school and had finals on me and I thought it was obviously they don't understand what this is all about. On the other hand, I lived a good life and had a great deal of fun in law school and I never was -- I never look back on it as a miserable time of my

life. I was one of the most awakening, you know, times, so I don't -- I don't think there were any -- you know, I was having more fun and learning more than I had ever learned in my life, so I don't think there was anybody -- I can't remember anybody saying that you -- you can't do this, forget it.

PD: Tell me about your job in law school. How did you get that; what did you do?

ER: My first semester right after I got there I started -- signed up with the Houston Independent School District to substitute teach which lots of freshman law students did, just we would get called on a daily basis to get a little income and I hated that; it was just miserable in those inner city schools with no one listening to me. They see a different face every day and I thought everybody would just stop and say, "Now tell us where you're from Miss Rogers and how did you come to Houston." You know, so it was miserable and I didn't do that very long and I got a job with Dresher Industries which is a big multinational world-wide corporation, through a girlfriend in

law school. And I started out as a clerk in their legal department, but it was not -- I wasn't any use to them legally. I filed things for them and then got offered a job as a secretary and took a full-time job as a legal secretary to a lawyer there who was a big influence on me and who I just loved working for and I just spent hours, I remember, in the office, because they let me -- if I wasn't busy, I had my law books, I typed my notes and so they were very supportive about all of that. I could leave to do this or that kind of thing. Plus I was getting paid more money than I'd ever seen in my life. I did that for quite a while, until I decided that my grades maybe were suffering ---if I didn't cut down on my full-time job which, I don't think, did; I think it makes you focus your time much better than when you don't have -- and then I clerked for a small criminal defense firm that, I think, had the biggest influence on me and is why I do what I do now, because I really -- really was exciting and they were real hot-shot lawyers and had big reputations for what they do and they were -- Ed Millet who I know Mike knows from Houston. And they also -- both of these people

always encouraged me on all sorts of bar activities, to get involved in that kind of stuff, which was different. And when I lived in El Paso, no one encouraged you to do that, because we're so far away.

PD: Right.

ER: So, I got -- I had those jobs when I was in law school.

PD: Once you finished law school, then, tell me about your experience with trying to get a job; what did you do?

ER: I took the bar in July and went to Europe on -- I'd better not make any admissions on tape -- I didn't have any money and I used a little college loans (laughing). And I stayed about 10 weeks and came back home to try to get my bar results. I clerked at that time for a firm, Haynes & Fulweiler who--Racehorse Haynes is partners with now------. I lived with his family in law school all the time and they were working on the Cullen Davis case and I just kind of -- what's the word -- transpose depositions -- summarized depositions for them and it was just holding out until I got my bar results to see if I passed. Fell

in love with a guy from Uvalde, my home town, and I was moving back there so we could get married and live happily ever after and I couldn't get a job. And I think that's when I first began to deal with -- even in my home town where my parents were very well respected and people were so nice to me and say, Liz, we just love your mother and daddy and all the word would trickle back to me, that they liked me a whole lot, but they don't think their ranching clients would talk to me and I was like -- I'm reared on a ranch. If there's anything in the world I can talk, it's ranching. I can't believe you're putting this obstacle and that's when I think -- I -- first felt the real barriers. I interviewed in Del Rio, Texas and in San Angelo. Del Rio had no women lawyers and Uvalde had one, in fact, but her father was like -- owned lots of property, was very wealthy and I've gone to a little school north of Uvalde..., maybe this is too long.

PD: No, no, it's not.

ER: And in San Angelo, I interviewed and was offered some kind of position, but not at a salary; an older man was going to share office expenses

and I -- because I borrowed a lot of money in law school and was real scared to do that; I still am. And I wanted a check that came every month.

So, then two friends out here, Terry Wyrick and Milton Wyrick, I had gone to law school with both of them and I knew I'd run into Terry -- I mean into Milton in Houston, he said Terry was here and I thought I like West Texas and I drove to Pecos to stay with a brother, called them and said I am going to come out and see about a job and they were wonderful. I stayed at their house and Terry introduced me to Chris Haynes and Jack Ratliff, who he was working with at the time. I had dinner at Chris and Mary Haynes's house and they said here's a list, here's who you should see and who you shouldn't see. And so they directed me to the City Attorney's office and I got a job there.

PD: Okay. Is that what you wanted?

ER: No. I had no idea what I wanted. I wanted a job. I didn't have any idea -- Municipal law I didn't have any idea in that direction. I interviewed with the gas company and in retrospect, I know -- I mean, it took me 5 years to get where I belonged, but I wanted a job; it didn't matter

what I did to do that. I just needed to start paying back and, you know, pay my way. I loved the City Attorney's office, but I -- that's not what my main interest is.

PD: Okay. So you stayed there; what did you do?
What happened?

ER: In fact, they interviewed me for a job that I thought I was going to get and I got back home and was waiting on a phone call from Wade Atkins who was the City Attorney at that time, and he called and said, well, Miss Rogers, we have hired Mr. McNabb for this position, but we have a Municipal Court Prosecutor position open and I was a little -- my feelings were a little hurt that this guy who is one of my very best friends now, you know, got the job and I said fine, and I took the Prosecutor, and I know that was the best position in town, because you get to meet every lawyer and they eventually will come through; most everybody will come through Municipal Court. So I did that for about 6 or 7 months and then they moved me up to the Litigation section of the City Attorney's office. And I was there a short time and Janet Ruesch was appointed to the bench and the court administration

was in and they wanted to fill her position with a woman and I got that job in the U.S. Attorney's Office. So it was over -- I was at the City Attorney about a year and 3 months. I jumped to the U.S. Attorney's office, I quit the day President Reagan was inaugurated and I went with the firm of Peticolas, Luscomb and Stevens that is now dissolved and I was there almost 3 years, I think, minus one month. And they dissolved and split up. I then went to Dallas with the Dallas County Public Defender's office last December a year ago today and stayed there only 4 months and this job opened up and I had to make a big decision because I just moved and taken it, but I wanted this job real bad and I don't have any regrets and I'm delighted that I got here, and so I moved back. ~~Some~~I had a lot of jobs in a short time.

PD: Okay. I'm a little confused about they wanted a woman to replace Ruesch's position.

ER: Well, that court had a lot of emphasis on affirmative action and keeping some women in high profile positions and they had a woman there and they were going to not lose that spot just because she achieved and went on the bench. So I appreciate Jaimie Boyd

filling it with a woman.

PD: So that was his, sort of --

ER: There are no women at that office right now, although the U.S. Attorney out of San Antonio is a woman and won it by right, but until she was there -- there -- and still, there are no women in El Paso in office now.

PD: Okay. All right, let's talk a little bit --

ER: Actually, let me correct that. There was -- Becky Westfall was also there, so there were two women in that office, but Janet's position they filled with another woman.

PD: All right. Okay. Let's see. While you were in private practice with Pensacola --

ER: Peticolas.

PD: Peticolas, right. What types of clients came to you?

ER: We all started out there with four partners and two other guys about my age. Morgan Broadus was hired ahead of me, I was in the middle, and then Eliot Shapleigh actually was hired ahead of either of us, but he was still in law school, so he came out fresh. We did a lot what they assigned us, all right, but eventually I worked -- I think I

did more criminal defense, which is what I wanted to do in the firm because of my experience -- you know, I had been around the court house a lot and I could -- knew people to get things done, and they let me do a lot of that and I think -- I cannot think of one moment in that firm that there was ever any discrimination. And I was the first woman they had ever hired, but there wasn't any -- it was a neat experience because I never once felt that they were relegating me to something less important or less offensive because I was a woman. Jack Luscomb is a long-time liberal and Peticolas has good politics and so does Grover Stevens. I don't have any problems at all with how I was treated at that firm.

PD: Okay. How did the clients react to you?

ER: Oh, a couple of things, like one of my first weeks -- I think maybe my first week with them, I knew from shifting from the government to a private, your duty was to get business and your duty was to make money for them and you wanted to, you know, set fees and stuff. Well, an Arab guy, somebody from the Middle East that the firm had represented,

that wanted one of the partners that was tied up and asked me to handle it and we would-had already talked about it when he came in. And he came into our office, kind of smaller, about like this one. I was sitting at my desk. He set where, you're sitting. And he started telling me how important he was and how well-connected he was to King Fiesal or something like and telling me how he hated people that only liked him for his money, but he was at the firm, he wanted to get some information about getting married, but he wanted to make sure if he got married that his wife couldn't get anything. And we were telling him this is a community property state and any kind of money he accrued after their marriage, she was going to get it -- I mean, she was going to be entitled to some of it and there wasn't anything we could do about that and -- nor did I care about doing anything about that; I just hated him for acting that way. Well, then Ed came in, who was busy, tied up with something else and he came in and so he sat here and they were in my office and I was at the desk and in a little bit -- not in a little bit -- immediately when the partner got

there, this client never once looked at me again, never gave me eye contact. It was like I was a piece of furniture. But he went on to explain to Ed that women were good, you know, for only two things: shopping and gossiping.

And so I wanted to jump over the desk and choke him. I hated the son-of-a-bitch. And I thought, now, I'm in private practice and you can't offend these people, you know, these are the finest clients and this guy has a lot of money and you know he's paying. And in fact Ed's teasing me forever; he just loved it, because he couldn't believe it, either, you know, and they immediately didn't make me have to put up with that guy at all, although he didn't fire him as a client, you know. But it -- I mean, he was real supportive and just had a lot of fun laughing about my reaction to that, because nobody could believe that that guy would sit in my office and come for legal advice and go on. He had pictures of his daddy with King Fiesal in case we didn't know how important he was. So he was just a horrible guy and I had, you know, those kinds of experiences.

PD: That's a good one.

ER: And then other than that, I guess I had some appointments and -- I don't know, I did a real -- I did a real big -- you know, from intervening in a rape-~~it~~ case because the firm's client to, you know, criminal defense that -- mostly that I got appointed on and some divorces from friends and stuff like that.

PD: And the clients -- you know, some of them reacted; some didn't?

ER: Oh, most of them didn't. In fact, it was a real -- at this time, people are looking out for what they want women lawyers on divorce cases; you know, they want you to get their wife and things like that. So I don't -- I can't think of any other occasions where they are just like, I don't want a woman and get me off of her. I made a lot of errors -- I mean, I am sure that people were like -- I wish that she would take, you know, I suppose that there had been people that had been unhappy; I don't think it would be basically for my sex.

PD: Okay. All right. How does your family react to your career, now?

ER: Oh, I don't -- I suppose they're proud of me, but all of like -- we're -- I'm one of five kids and we all do real different things and I think it's unfair that I get so many strokes than they do because they're more in more traditional -- one sister is a nurse, one's a teacher, one's a home economist. And no one ever gives them credit for what they do, because I'm in a kind of a -- what's once been a male profession, everybody's interested, you know, in what I do and, I don't know. I suppose my family, you know, is proud. You don't hear them -- I think they'd be a lot prouder if I'd get married and had children.

PD: You think so?

ER: Yeah. I don't think they -- they don't go -- I don't hear them going over any of us in that regard.

PD: Okay, then. Speaking about family, and I told you I'd ask this one question: Do you think then that marriage and the law, the profession, you being a lawyer unmarried or anybody -- just any lawyer -- do you think that those two are viable combinations?

ER: Certainly. Sure. And more and more, women are having children and they are -- firms are accommodating them, which was unheard of. And Ris

Gilbert, for example, at Grambling Mounce law firm said I don't want to be working 70-hour weeks. I know that's what you demand of me, and she worked a deal and was the first woman that I'm aware of and she still puts in lots of hours and does an excellent job and has an excellent reputation, but her agreement with them was that I'm not going to be up here on weekends and night; I'm newly married and I want to devote my time to my family and she has a baby now. And people like Kathleen Anderson, bringing their children to the office more and making arrangements with -- it's much more flexible. The big firms are all giving maternity leave, which was unheard of before. I think you get 9 months after the birth of your baby to be off and I don't know if in reality it affects your chances of partnership, but I don't think it does.

PD: That's good. Okay. Let's see. Okay. A couple of questions about what you aspire to in the future -- well, first about the present. Do you feel that you've been successful then; have you achieved some kind of personal goal??

ER: Yeah. I have now been real unhappy practicing law throughout this time in private practice and I just

wasn't doing what I should be doing. And I wasn't gung-ho and I wasn't jumping out of bed to come to work in the morning and I'm apologetic, you know, to my firm that was paying me a salary to -- I wasn't caught on fire, you know, I just didn't -- I knew it wasn't what I was interested in, I tried joining the Peace Corps where I was accepted but decided not to go; I was looking at the army at one time. I wanted to do anything other than what I was doing, because I just don't like private practice. And then after this job, I can't tell you how much -- how rosy the picture has gotten. At one year ago today, it was the worst period of my life and today it's, I think, the best.

PD: So you have been.

ER: Yeah, and I think I'm just delighted doing what I'm doing and not a lot of people get to choose and get to live the good life and get to do what they enjoy doing and so I'm delighted to be here.

PD: Sure. Okay. Do you (pause) do you feel that you've achieved a goal for your sex, or is this just -- do you ever think about it?

ER: I don't know. I was at UTEP this week at the Career

Counseling day, or whatever you call it, High School Career Day, and I suppose that I'm, like other women, a good role model for little girls that only think they can be cheerleaders, who only think that they have to play secondary roles, so I -- I suppose that I'm just another little cog in the wheel but, no, I don't -- I'm not generally a first in any of those things. I'm -- everybody -- everybody has been blazing that trail for me, making it so much easier for me.

I suppose each one of us, as we get to do something that's a little non-traditional, helps those behind us, but I don't think I'm any (pause), you know, record-setter, history-maker. You know, I mean I know I'm not just being modest; I know I'm not.

PD: Okay. All right. Let's see. Okay. Do you consider yourself a competitive person, I mean socially, politically?

ER: In describing myself, I don't think competitive would be high on my list. I think I use that for racquetball more. I just don't think I care that much. I don't think that would be near as descriptive an adjective as we can find in a lot

of other adjectives. I don't -- I really think my feminism -- I don't think I'm so competitive with other women. I really do think I like seeing women achieve, that it doesn't take away from my space that other women are doing great things, or for men, the same. So I don't think I would describe myself as real competitive.

PD: Okay. Do you have political aspirations; I mean, would you ever consider running for political office?

ER: No. I've been real involved in Democratic politics, I like -- I like that. That's probably what I was more excited about since I've moved to El Paso than practicing law. I've gotten to meet Vice President Mondale and Senator Benson and people that would never come by my little home town and it's been really exciting and I've loved every minute of that. I don't think I have tough enough skin to take the criticism that it requires to run for office and I'm saying I'd like to stay active in politics, which I can't with this job. We're under the Hatch Act and we -- we have our hands tied about what we can do and who we can

help. So, yeah, I'd like politics a lot, but to run for something, no. I don't aspire to do that.

PD: Okay. All right. I want to talk now about two things. The first thing I want to ask you is what your experiences have been with the Women's Bar in El Paso, the Women's Bar Association?

ER: I joined them when I first came to town. There were about 15 of us then and most of them -- every one of them are my closest friends. As we get bigger, it gets less close and I don't necessarily think that's sad; I think that's a result of us integrating into the Bar where people don't need such a female support system. I have my -- I have my women's support system through my closest friends and so I don't attend every Women's Bar meeting that comes along. But I'm very much proponent of it and I think it, like the Mexican-American Bar and like the Criminal Defense Bar, certainly serves a good purpose, because you need camaraderie and you need to know the new women coming into town so you can answer questions for them and make it pleasant to practice here.

PD: Okay. So you see that still functioning, then, as sort of the network in the field?

ER: Yeah, yeah, although not -- you know, I -- many women are not members now and the meetings are not attended probably by less than a third, maybe less than a quarter of the women that are practicing, but I don't necessarily think that that's a terrible thing, that every woman in town doesn't come to it, because it means that she's been accepted. And not that every women's bar we go and go talk about things that happened to us. Excuse me, but I love it, because it's a role model and Janet Ruesch you know, makes me know what women can do and I really love hearing Ruth Kern and I like those women. I mean, they're good people and I like them and I'm glad I know them and I think Women's Bar helped me to know them.

PD: Now how about -- what is your reaction to the El Paso Bar?

ER: I'm also a member of the El Paso Bar, always have been, and have been very -- fairly active in it. At one point, people would criticize it and say, we don't need all these little segment bar -- you know, the El Paso Bar can have everybody -- we'll only have one bar association and not all these little minority splinter groups

and I'm just the opposite and I think the minority splinter groups work for the groups that are interested in a certain area. I think there's plenty of reasons why a lot of people don't want to pay the \$45 and eat \$8 lunches to come to the El Paso Bar Association meetings. But as long as I can pay that, I'm glad to be affiliated with local people and it's just another place with interaction of people I don't see a lot. And they have generally, you know, excellent speakers and a lot of fun. One's like Jack Luscomb talked last week and I wouldn't miss it for anything. I just agree with that also, that many people don't care about going and they shouldn't. I'm glad it's not mandatory that they have to.

PD: Okay. All right. We're just about at the end here. The one other question I want to ask and this always sparks a little bit of enthusiasm, but I want to get your reaction. If you've attended, and I think that you have, but I want to get your reaction to the Annual Bar Banquet.

ER: (Pause) I was President of the El Paso Young Lawyers Association the year that they had a stripper. I was back stage and did not know it

was going to happen. I reacted very funny, contrary to most of my girlfriends, who were outraged. I argued for a long time I didn't -- I thought it was in -- I thought it was funny and it didn't offend me at all. Thereafter, I was one of the two or three women that was the brunt of one of the crudest, nastiest jokes that was in another year that was put on. I got an overwhelming amount of support from many male lawyers who, for instance, would not attend again. They were like embarrassed for me that people would make these kind of jokes. I kind of want to wash my hands of it. I argued with many of my girlfriends that that skit is a huge job to put on that the Young Lawyers have traditionally done and it's not -- it's a hard job; it really does take lots and lots of effort and lots and lots of meetings that I never was real gung-ho about committing to. I helped out when I first came to town. I know while I was president of Young Lawyers, I was off in Mexico and so the other officers ended up putting it together. I think the Young Lawyers hurt themselves by continuing to aim at women and they don't understand the

politics of that and they don't think that -- they just think that's good fun and that's how it's always been and that we, women, are ruining everything for them. But I supported my friends when they asked that the president of the Mexican-American Bar, Women's Bar and Young Lawyers have equal control over it. We took a lot of grief from that issue, from those that were involved in putting on the skit and got a lot of support from those that were not involved in putting on the skit for the ugliness that was aimed at us. I believe it was very sexist, in that every woman joke was about some anatomical portion and nothing about her ability to practice law or ~~her~~ jesting. It's been really about men in the past, but not sexually. You know, it's been making fun -- it's real racist-- Evalena Ortega in my office got tired of them talking poor English for every Mexican-American lawyer that they make fun of, referring to every one of them as being dumb. I don't think it'll get -- if they'll ever have the skit again.

PD:

So, in the past years, and just two or three years back, this is still happening?

ER: I was not here last year; I was moved to Dallas and I wasn't present at that, but I think last year was the first time that three bar associations were equally responsible and I think the Young Lawyers pretty well just walked out of it because they were -- had been defeated. I'm kind of disassociated with the Young Lawyers since my time as president, because it was the worst period of my life ever practicing law, ever, with the politics of that ridiculous little organization. I mean, it was not important in any way and yet I just took some personal abuse that I still feel a little bit hurt about. And -- but I argued against my more -- some of my closest girlfriends who were just appalled at the stripper that came and I -- I'm kind of -- on that issue of Vanessa Williams's, I'm sorry that people use it against them, but I think she was -- she was having a great time and got paid well to come do it and I just don't want to censure that. I don't want to say we cannot have this, we cannot have nudity, because women are here and women -- it offends women. The stripper was very much there as a sexual object and plaything, but I didn't -- I just know that it was such a surprise and I was

standing back stage with another woman that was on the board and it was just a funny thing to do and I later -- as the jokes got nastier against us, I didn't enjoy it; I just didn't think I -- I mean, I wasn't going to take them on and say now I really don't like you, you're making fun of me. You know, I don't think that was -- I only just said it's a big job to put on and you're going to offend some people and all around town for example they had a joke about Judge Pena's kid who got arrested for stealing silver up in Coronado and two people wouldn't come to the Bar's Banquet because they don't think you should make fun of other people's weaknesses or tragedies that are happening in their family. So it's got a long history of offending a lot of people. I think Judge Wood held a few people in contempt. It's just most recently been focused on the nastiness thing, as well.

PD: All right. That -- that's really all I have. If you have some great story you want to tell or just any other comments -- general comments that you want to make to wrap it up?

ER: No, I'm really -- I'm very interest in what you're

doing. I think that's neat and I'm glad Vicky directed you in this way or if you -- it was your idea, I suppose.

PD: Well, yeah, the paper and a friend of mine, another graduate student, Betty Sayers, had originally drawn up the plan, is going to graduate. She's doing her seminar papers and get out and it wasn't going to get done and I said if I -- can I modify it a little bit and do it myself.

ER: Yeah.

PD: And so really, I owe a lot of this to her.

ER: I'll say that in Dallas, it was really different because women in Dallas have been practicing for so long, there are a lot of Ruth Kerns in Dallas. I mean, there are really a lot of older women at the Bar Association meetings and, of course, they're just -- their Bar is about ten times bigger than ours, maybe more. And I just miss that camaraderie so much, because I went to a -- attended a Dallas Women's Lawyers meeting and no one even asked me; you know, they didn't speak to me at the table, because it's so big and

they're not -- they have a lot of new faces all the time. They're not worried about, well, whom they knew or finding out what you do. And it was just an interesting thing, because out here, I was kind of, you know, in the like second wave of women that started working and in Dallas, I was in about the 15th wave where there was no -- the women didn't care -- I don't mean that; that's a little harsh. But, you know, I mean one -- you go to a bar meeting it wasn't a lot of fun, nobody would say, welcome to El Paso, what do you do, and let us tell us what is a good thing to do. Here in El Paso, I hope that the Women's Bar -- I don't think we let people slip through like that.

PD: I see. So, you still have that sort of much more close relationship than the bigger cities.

ER: Yeah.

PD: Okay.

(END OF INTERVIEW)