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Interview no. 742

Janet Ruesch

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Janet Ruesch
INTERVIEWER: Pauline Dow
PROJECT: Women Attorneys of El Paso
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 28, 1984
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Attorney, U.S. Magistrate (El Paso)

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Discussion of her reasons for attending law school, experiences in law school, career developments, difficulty with residency requirements when taking the Texas Bar Exam, reactions of jurors, judges, and clients to females in law, beginnings of the Women's Bar Association in El Paso, Bar skits, and change in attitudes toward women lawyers and judges.

Length of Interview: 55 minutes Length of Transcript 22 pages

Janet Ruesch,
November 28, 1984
By Pauline Dow
Women Attorneys in El Paso

D: Okay, we're ready whenever you are. So I'll ask you some basic questions, really basic like the first one is if you could state your full name?

R: Okay. Janet Ruesch.

D: Okay, and the date and place of birth, please?

R: May 9, 1943 in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

D: Okay. Marital status?

R: Divorced.

D: Number of children, if any?

R: None.

D: Okay. When you were getting ready to go into law school, while you were in college, did you take any courses to prepare yourself for entrance into law school?

R: Well, do you want me to tell you how I stumbled onto becoming a lawyer? ...because it was a stumble. I was a political science major at Gettysburg College and I took a course in constitutional law and decided I really did like the study of law. I thought it was very stimulating. It covered so many topics, history and... It was in fact in my junior year and my first response was, "Well, what can I do in the way of a legal career?" I decided I'd be legal secretary and so I thought about going to secretarial school in New York after I graduated from college and I was planning on doing that and I guess it was in my senior year it kind of dawned on me, why not be a lawyer. But back then, let me put this in time for you. That was...I was in college from '61 to '65 so it

was about '63-'64 that I thought about being a legal secretary and of course back then also any time I'd talk about a career everyone said it had to be a schoolteacher, and not college or high school, but I mean elementary school is what it had to be. So that was quite a leap to decide that maybe I could be a lawyer and not just a secretary. Because of the advice of everyone that I needed to get my education courses so that I could always teach and have something good to do, I took a couple of education courses. Thought they were just awful but then I got married right after college and my husband was doing a Master's Degree at Western University in _____, West Virginia and I went there with him and I was teaching. I had sworn I'd never teach but I taught for two years in West Virginia and from the first day I started teaching I said, "I'm getting out of here. I'm not staying here." And so Tom, my ex-husband, and I applied at four different schools and I applied for a doctorate in political science and law school at a couple of places. One of the places was Indiana University. I was accepted in both the doctoral program and in law school and he was accepted also. So we were focusing on _____ University, Bloomington, Indiana and it was like, "Oh, hell," you know, I mean my decision was "Why not?" Just try it. Almost on a lark, just the thought was, "Well this has been in the back of my mind for a long, for at least two years, in fact three years by then and why not, just try it." I'm glad I did. But that's how I went to law school.

D: So then you really didn't take any courses to prepare yourself for law school per se because you just didn't know?

R: That's right. But I would say that anyone who wants to go to law school, I think the best preparation is a good liberal arts education. One thing

that I didn't take in college was math and I'm sorry about that and I didn't take physics or chemistry and I'm sorry about that. Otherwise, I think I had just as good as anyone else's background.

D: Well-rounded. What was your family's reaction to your decision?

R: My parents were always very supportive. As a matter of fact we were poor. Tom and I were rather poor during those three years and my father, the end of every month, sent \$25 in cash in the mail which just tided us over because by the 25th or so of the month we had run out of money. So they were very supportive. I didn't get any hassles from them at all but I think Tom's parents were a bit leery about it. They weren't very crazy about the idea.

D: Do you remember any comments or anything that maybe made you feel that way or...?

R: Just oblique comments like having children and working while he was in school. This is what I had been doing for three years when he was in school, when I taught in West Virginia. Mostly oblique comments, nothing direct. I mean it just washed off my shoulders 'cause I wasn't about to listen. I think comments about also "What are you going to do for money?" and, you know, "How are you going to manage?" and that sort of thing. His parents did not send us money. My father did.

D: So your husband then was supportive?

R: Yeah, he was I think. He was kind of proud of me. I think that would be accurate. He also, however, expected me still to be wife and clean the bathroom and cook and iron his shirts and do everything else.

D: So there was a double standard.

R: Oh yes. Oh, I mean everything else. We had a big fight one time about the fact that I was going to find someone to iron his shirts. [Inaudible

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section]

D: Okay. When you applied to law school, then, did you encounter any problems with the administration as far as getting in?

R: No.

D: None whatsoever. Was there a quota system for women then?

R: You know, I don't know. There were 250 students in the freshman class and out of that, six were women. That was in 1967. The class before ours had no women. The class before that had maybe one or two.

D: How did male students, as far as you can remember, react to women students? Encouraging, discouraging?

R: Hassles. (Chuckles) A number of them were friendly. I'm not trying to paint the picture that everyone was giving us a hassle.

D: Right.

R: I remember the first couple of classes I sat through in law school, these guys would sit down next to me and say, "Well, what are you doing here?" And I would say...I didn't know what to say. I just said, "I'm doing the same thing you're doing," you know. That was my only response but it happened, oh, I would say five or six times I said that. [Inaudible section]

D: What was your professors' response or reaction to women? I mean, you know, when you got up to recite, you know, I know some professors go up and down the rows and others pick. How did that work?

R: There wasn't much reaction to women in that regard except that, it was just the standard [practice] that in criminal law when we got to rape cases that women... [Inaudible section] We were all prepared, the three of us in my criminal law class huddled together that day. It was not me. It was the friend sitting next me, but we just knew that that

was a hurdle that we had to pass and that was one of the things but that's about the only thing.

The only other thing that happened, I mean there was a simple comment by a professor when I was on law journal and I was thinking about quitting law journal because I needed to work and I was a research assistant also for another prof and I needed to spend time working. [Inaudible section] This professor said to me, "Do not quit law journal." He said, "If you need money, go and be a hooker if you have to. Be a hooker if you have to, but do not quit law journal because nobody is going to take you as seriously as they take..." [Inaudible section]

D: Was he encouraging then most of the time or was he just neutral?

R: Yes, yes. He was very encouraging. The research prof that I worked for was always very encouraging. [Inaudible section]

D: Right.

R: But I heard it from students and not the profs.

D: Okay. Let me just backtrack a little. I forgot to ask this question. When you applied for law school, were you aware of any scholarship money available for women?

R: Not specifically for women, no.

D: Minorities?

[Inaudible section]

D: Okay. So in dealing with grading, do you feel that men and women were graded with equal fairness?

R: Yes. Yes, because we had a system [where they didn't use] names.

D: Social Security number or something like that.

R: Yeah and so the prof would have to study handwriting to figure out which

was which. He wouldn't necessarily know who was writing; he might see something that they associated with females. No, I don't think there was any difference in grading, I really don't.

D: During your career as a law student, can you think of anybody that put any obstacles in your path, I mean of any kind whether it be, you know, a friend, a family member, a prof, a student, just one particular situation where you found yourself sort of...

R: Well, I will give you one example of something. I believe it was my junior or senior year and the Board of Regents of the University had just passed a policy on discrimination based upon religion, ethnic origin, race. It said nothing about sex so a member of--I was probably the leader of the pack--but of those few females that were there, we decided that we needed to do something about that and talked to some of the profs about it. I'm trying to remember...but we thought about going to the law school first. I can't remember exactly why but... [Inaudible section] I think it was me, I was the one that was supposed to do it, go to a faculty meeting and present the case for including sex as one of the factors for discrimination policy. And it was as though, "Oh ho ho, isn't this going to be fun, watching her come here and make a fool out of herself and we'll give her such a hassle, being so good at it, us law profs, that this is going to be fun." I definitely got that feeling, definitely. What we did instead was we went and we spoke with the Chancellor of the University, and just briefly spoke to him. Within about a week or two, I mean very quickly, there was another meeting, and there's added sex to the University policy. And we had no hassles in getting it done.

D: And just to think they didn't take you seriously in the beginning.

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R: Well, the law school, see this is what's interesting. This was atypical of the profs in the law school because I hadn't gotten any kind of a response, similar response from them in the past. It was like "Oh ho, let's see them come in and make fools of themselves," but then we went to the university itself and had absolutely no trouble in getting sex put into the anti-discrimination policy.

D: Great.

R: You asked for stumbling blocks and this wasn't exactly...

D: Yeah, well still, but that's a good comment. I think that's very relevant. Talking now a little bit more just about the curriculum, did any faculty or administration member ever counsel you into one field or try to use your energy in one particular field, direct it?

R: No.

D: Did you ever get any formal counseling at all while you were in law school?

R: About the areas of [specialized] practice?

D: Right.

R: No, not that I can recall. I didn't know what I wanted to do as a matter of fact. I thought I wanted to maybe do research. I liked to do research. I had low sights. I didn't set my sights very high at all.

D: (Chuckles) And here you are!

R: Yeah...strange.

D: How do you become a law or a research assistant? How did you get that position?

R: Well, I had this professor named Julius _____ for labor law and I can't remember whether he had advertised or whether I just knew he was looking for someone. He was starting the research on a book that he

wrote about representation _____ and he needed help.
He needed students to help and we had this one male student ahead of me,
[Inaudible section]

D: Okay, did anyone ever try to discourage you, say, from courtroom law?
Was that ever discussed or did you encounter any problem there?

R: Later, yes. In law school, no.

D: Okay. No discouragement as far as courtroom law in law school. All
right. When you graduated, then, from law school, can you talk a little
bit about how you went about getting your first job and that kind of
thing.

R: Well, what happened in my senior year was the placement officer at the
law school was a woman and she was of course organizing interviews or
scheduling interviews for firms mostly in Indianapolis. She was quite
sure that this particular firm would never hire me, with some reason
behind it because we thought that she kind of mentioned to some of us
that maybe we ought to interview and see what happened. And there were
about three of us females who were the highest females in the class and
we said [Inaudible section]. Well, it ends up the firm was furious
because most of the time it had absolutely no intention of hiring a
female. I'm sure it's changed by now but at...

D: But you were interviewed by them?

R: Were interviewed and was asked questions like "What are you going to do
when you have children?" And if I said, "I didn't want to have
children," they didn't believe me. Or if I said, "Well, (inaudible) of
course it was just like, "Oh sure, sure," you know. I mean they just
didn't believe me. And of course, I got a lot of, "Where are you going
to go? Aren't you going to follow your husband?" But of course a part

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of me, I wasn't [hurt] by that, I didn't feel terribly bad about that because I was (inaudible) either. But if I remember correctly, then, I think that problem was prohibited because of the sex discrimination policy.

D: I was going to say.

R: I'm quite sure that that's what happened. I think that they were prohibited from...

D: At your university.

R: Um hm. There was a big to-do about it, I remember.

D: I've heard other stories like that from other women lawyers. Okay, so then you interviewed with this firm and...

R: Nothing, of course, but what happened was that I did follow my husband. He was going to New Mexico State to do his Ph.D. work and so we were here and one day I was mentioning to _____. He said talk to _____. Turns out he was an attorney who was born and raised in El Paso. He's from El Paso. And my corporation prof said, "Talk to [him], he's from El Paso. He'll give you some ideas." I had written letters to just about everybody who was in the attorney's office. [Inaudible section] I didn't even get courtesy letters saying, "No, thank you. We're not hiring." Nothing, zero.

D: Right. Okay. So then how long did you...

R: Okay, I graduated from law school in June of 1970, moved to Las Cruces in August of 1970, started working for _____ in September of 1970. So I started working in September of 1970.

D: What kind of work did you start out doing? What were you doing in the beginning?

R: Anything that a non-licensed lawyer could do. I drew up a lot of

conscientious objector, those were the days of C.O.'s, and that was going to be argued in federal court and I think it was in the summer and he obtained permission, special permission for me to argue the case. Harris is on the other side and I did a terribly poor job. I was so nervous. I had prepared and prepared but I didn't really know how to prepare and I was almost a blithering idiot. (Chuckles) Luckily, I don't think it affected the outcome. I was very nervous and... I had great difficulty in getting my ideas across.

D: Okay, so when were you licensed then?

R: That's another interesting story. Want to hear that?

D: Yes. Definitely.

R: I was living in Las Cruces and driving here everyday, here being El Paso, and when I made application to take the Bar exam, you know, you're supposed to be a Texas resident and when I mentioned [where I lived], they said, "Put this office address on," and I said, "Really? But I don't really live here," and they said, "Sure, sure." And I figured if a Texas attorney told me to do that, I do that. So it was 508 Southwest National Bank Building which is now the First City National Bank building and went to Austin, and about two days before the bar exam I got a message. They wanted to see me and they said to me, "Do you really live at 508 Southwest National Bank building?" I said, "No." They said, "Where do you really live?" I told them, "Las Cruces." They said at that time a woman's residence was with her husband. So they said, "In order for you..." They let me take the bar exam, but said, "Your husband has to live in Texas for you to get your _____ residency. So no other men who came from Harvard or wherever were getting their time for _____ residency while they are in Austin studying for the bar

exam. I came home and told him we had to move. He didn't like it. (Chuckles) And that means he had to drive to Las Cruces every day but he didn't like it but we moved. And I guess we moved in July and they said that they would hold up my test results until I had proof that I had moved, which I did. But you know, if I recall correctly, they didn't hold up my test results. Mine came in about the same time as everyone else's.

D: And it was a law then that you resided where your husband?

R: Exactly. Texas law said that my residence was with my husband, was in New Mexico. Therefore my residence couldn't be Texas and I had to get Texas residency to be licensed in Texas. Since then this been changed. I guess that was in 19-- , that was the summer, in September of 1971, '72 [or] '73.

D: Thank God. Are we still running? So when you got the license, then, what kind of work would you start to do then? I mean, where was your emphasis?

R: Okay, well, I was working for two private firms and so I represented... [Inaudible section] Also started trying some cases which was good practice because there wasn't a whole lot riding on it but over the years I think that maybe--I wasn't too conscious of it at first-- but I think after a while I just thought (Inaudible). Because I was always getting the dog cases and I wasn't winning them and I thought that was... My very first time in the courtroom was quite hilarious. I mean Malcolm told me not to prepare and I didn't prepare a whole lot. [Inaudible section]

D: So what was this, sort of training on the job?

R: Yeah. Malcolm was telling me what he did--which was not good advice for

me, fine advice for him but not for me--The only other time I can think of, if you want another story about discrimination...

D: Sure. Yes.

R: This is a few years later, and I was asking a typical question of a man: "Are you married? Does your wife work outside the home?" And two of the men on that jury panel said, "Not while she has been married to me, she hasn't." You know, just real aggressive and I put big X's beside their names. (Chuckles)

D: Of course.

R: That's true, you know. The only time I got a response from jurors like that, real kind of negative...

D: Okay. So you still practiced with Malcolm McGregor. When did that end? What happened?

R: Okay. Well, I stayed with him until February of 1978 when I went to the U.S. Attorney's Office. And during that period of time I did try a number of cases, did appellate work also, argued in front of the Texas Supreme Court, but mostly appellate work. I found myself specializing in cases with lots of [Inaudible section].

D: What was the judges' response, you know, when you were trying these cases back with Malcolm and through the years?

R: Oh, okay. Forgot to tell you some things about that. Early on there were a few things that happened, clients, judges and attorneys. Clients first, okay. A couple of clients, no actually I shouldn't say a couple, only one. The response I'd get was: "You look too young to be a lawyer."

Judges. There were a couple of judges here who used to call me by my first name all the time and I didn't think about it much. I didn't have

a chip on my shoulder so I really wasn't aware of what was happening. Judges did that. What I got most from attorneys was that we were going to be file attorneys. [Inaudible section]

D: Did they ever say why?

R: Oh yeah. They used to have arguments that were just intriguing. The basic assumption was that trial attorneys were a tough [group], hard work, long hours, takes lots of mental ability and women don't have any of those things and therefore a woman in the courtroom is not going to do as well as a man. So one line of the argument was the jurors will see the woman not doing as well and therefore will side with the man and therefore no firms will want to hire the female. The firm won't want to hire the female because she's going to lose all her cases. I'd get other arguments. Started with the same premises and that is a woman cannot do as well as a man in the courtroom. The other assumption, we get a kicker here with both assumptions about the jurors' response to the woman. This assumption was that the jurors will feel sorry for her and side with her and therefore she'll always win her cases and therefore what man wants to go into a courtroom against a woman. Well, what's so interesting about those arguments, what's so interesting about them is [Inaudible section]. So many assumptions about a woman's capabilities.

D: Okay. Let me ask you this question. When you were up against a male attorney and both of you, one on one side and one on the other, and you're up there with the judge, I understand that judges sometimes can be very harsh, talk harshly to lawyers. Do you feel that you were treated the same way as the male lawyers by the judges?

R: On the whole, yes. I think what happens is some judges tend to like you and some judges tend to not like you and you have those that like you and

you have those that didn't like you. I just think some were more friendly, some were...

D: Do you feel like maybe some judges spoke softer to you than to men because you're a woman?

R: Yes, at least two. I think that's possible, I think that's possible, yeah. I think these two particular judges... And I think that's possible, yeah. There were some who were sweeter in tone, maybe.

D: Right. Okay, let's move a little bit to a social part. This is probably one of the more personal questions I'll ask. Do you feel that your career, this career of law, is a viable combination with that of marriage?

R: Well, I think so for a lot of people but what happened was that my marriage ended because my ex-husband moved. [Inaudible section]

D: But do you feel, though, that just, you know, looking at your friends and sort of just knowing what you know about the law and stress that comes with it that it is a viable combination?

R: I think so because you will find attorneys in town, there are a number of them married. There are a number of them also married to lawyers and a number of them have children. That's fairly recent. But I think obviously those that are doing it, appear to me to be doing it well, so I think it's possible.

D: Do you feel that you are well on your way to achieving your personal goal, if you've set a personal goal?

R: Well, my personal goal was to try and be a good private attorney and I think I did that. I never had any aspirations to a judicial career but this one...it's made a quite satisfying career.

D: That you have been successful.

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R: Feeling that I have accomplished something.

D: Do you consider yourself a competitive person socially, politically?

R: In my work, yeah.

D: Okay. This next part then, this final part, goes in politics. Do you have any political aspirations?

R: No.

D: Would you ever consider running for a political office?

R: Well, I think in the past I did. [Inaudible section]

D: Being a feminist myself, of course the definition of that, you know, who knows what that is, but sometimes when I accomplish something I feel like I've accomplished something for my sex. Do you feel that way? Do you associate that...?

R: Very definitely. [Inaudible section] I think that the attitudes have changed and I think by and large there's still pockets, you know, still [those] who prefer not to have a woman in these places...

[Inaudible section]

D: Well, speaking of those first few and those first few, I understand that there was a women's bar association founded by some of these.

R: That's right.

D: You can tell me a little bit about the founding of that?

R: Okay. That was in 1973, 1974, 1975. [Inaudible] I wrote letters to presidents and vice presidents (Chuckles), finding out how to go about doing things at that time but pushing. Basically that was where the impetus was for starting a women's bar and we just got together and we created the bar and that was our first project.

D: To talk about those matters?

R: Oh yeah.

D: And I understand that it started off as sort of a lunch and it gradually grew.

R: That's right. My idea at the beginning was that I thought it was very important for female attorneys to get together and hopefully so that we wouldn't carry forward the typical pattern that was very much expected and that was: that we wouldn't like each other; we'd be back biting and very critical of each other, very petty with each other and I thought it was terribly [important]. Let's just get together for lunch like men do and talk about what we're doing, see what's going on with each other and what really is happening because a lot of us are very good friends.

D: I can see that. Let me check this just for a second and... Yeah, okay there's a little bit left. There's one other thing I'd like to touch on and that is the annual bar banquet. Now I've interviewed several women attorneys and this always seems to come out. And so I'd like to kind of piece it together, kind of find out what your feelings are on that? How you feel that's discrimination, or is it?

R: Well, I think it must have been, you know, it used to be all male. [Inaudible section] Took the money and got the tickets. And I couldn't remember, I won't say names, I don't want to slander anybody, but somebody called some of them in and said... [Inaudible] But I was the only woman there and then they also couldn't believe... And then the next time that I remember is the time that all of... [Pause] I think the break in the barrier statement may be more in retrospect. I think that time I just felt was a member of the Bar Association, I was a lawyer, why couldn't I go, just like everybody else. That I think was really what was on my mind.

D: Okay. And the main reason then for not staying for the banquet?

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R: I didn't know what to expect in the way of program. I'd heard things about having nude women jump out of cakes, you know, over the years. I guess, to a certain extent, I didn't want to. I think it was both ways. I thought my presence there at the program part, the skit part, might make them uncomfortable and I might be uncomfortable. And I just wanted to be able to go as long as I wanted to go and actually over the years I found the skits just, I mean I had great fun.

D: Okay.

R: I participated in one as a matter of fact. (Chuckles)

D: All right. So when you finally did go with Kitty and you stayed for it, what was the reaction of the men? I'm always interested to know that.

R: Not bad. I mean and not negative really. There was, oh, when the sex comments or something like that were made during the skit, the men at the table would be the protective, you know. But Kitty, if I remember correctly, threw the finger at somebody. Did she tell you about that?

D: She said she made some comment or something.

R: Yeah, she did. And she just screamed back at somebody, you know, and we just got into the spirit of things and I think that made a difference also because it made those men who were concerned about our response less apprehensive and we just became a part of the group. But I can't really say there was any confrontation. Being present no one ever said, "What are you doing here?" or got aggressive like that.

[PAUSE]

R: ...or got aggressive about that.

D: Right.

R: Or maybe somebody might have made some joking comment about women being

there, but you know what I found by and large and men still say it a lot today, not all of them, but some of them: "We're really glad that you're here because maybe they'll clean up the skit."

D: And have they?

R: Had for years and these last, what two, three--I don't think it's four, maybe three--years, guys in charge of the Young Lawyers' Association would bring on a skit, had just done some rather crude things, I thought. Had a woman stripper one year and then all the comments. I think it was last year, the year before, all the comments made about female attorneys including myself and I go there to take my medicine, I mean I'm a judge, I figure I'm fair game for sure now as a judge, not as a woman. All the comments that were made about women were based on their sex.

D: And how about the ones (Inaudible)?

R: Some are but most of them are not. My argument was and has always been, if a group of gynecologists or a group of lawyers, and if you want to say, make fun of me, please do that. I'm fair game, I'm fair game as a lawyer or as a judge, but don't put it on the basis of sex, you know. If, for example, I had done something outrageous in my personal sexual life that was public, then, yeah, that might be appropriate, that's what they do with men, tease them about other women or something like. And those, you know, it's usually fairly accurate. I mean it has some measure of truth in it, you know. And that's appropriate too. That's fine. But not just totally about my sex, about the sex of the other woman, just because we are a woman and that's what we've been getting. And so there has been quite a dispute about that over the years and do you hear what the upshot has been now?

D: No.

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R: The Bar skit, rather than being planned by the--actually this change occurred last year during Royal Furgeson's administration as president of the Bar Association--the Bar Association itself was putting on the skit rather than having it in the hands of Young Lawyers. Chris Kelso at the time that this all happened, at the time this happened last year Chris Kelso was president of the Women's Bar Association and she really fought battle in the Board of Directors meetings. One proposal was that while the little bars like the Mexican American Bar and the Women's Bar and the Young Lawyers get together and put on a skit. The other alternative was just to have a Bar Association committee do it and it turned out that the Young Lawyers said they wouldn't share with anyone else the skit, the production of a skit, and so it came to be a Bar Association committee. That happened last year...

D: I think someone else did mention that.

R: Yeah.

D: It's over now?

R: Um hm.

D: Well, that's one solution to it. Okay. Just one other comment and then I'll let you say if you have any other comments to make. If you look at the Women's Bar Association today and, you know, I don't know if any networking existed. I would assume that networking existed. I'm sure networking existed then with at least the five lawyers, the women lawyers, who started it back in 1975 or whatever, because there are many more members now in this women's...

R: Right, about '74 or '75.

D: Right. How has it changed?

R: The Women's Bar Association?

J. Ruesch

D: Uh huh.

R: Maybe it's not the close-knit little group that it used to be but I think it still serves a similar function and that is to get to know the female attorneys, to spread word about new jobs, about particularly when somebody comes into town, that's a way she can meet some of the other female attorneys in a smaller setting rather than in the big Bar Association. I still think it serves a very important function for us still to know each other and see each other, be friends if possible and by and large it is possible. I think we're all quite friendly. And the networking aspect of helping each other with knowledge about jobs.

D: So it has changed then in sort of the emphasis. It's not so much of a...? I'm trying to see the change.

R: Yes.

D: It was sort of that close-knit, luncheon type, you know; we have a project, maybe we do, maybe we don't, and so now it's grown into this larger [group] of 70 members and it's not that close-knit but the networking still exists, is that what you're saying?

R: Um hm. Um hm. Yes, the networking still exists. I mean I would say it's close-knit in the sense that I like to go to Women's Bar luncheons because that's sometimes the only time I see some of the women because we work in different places and I just don't get to see many people anymore. And I like to go and catch up on what they're all doing. We do have programs now more than we used to. But in my life it's a very important organization. I don't know how else I can explain it. Changes. I think I still feel kind of the same about it.

D: Right. It's just a general question I'm wanting to ask because I think that's an important aspect of... That's really all the general questions

I have. If you have any other little, anything else you'd like to add or mention.

R: Well, maybe I will at this caveat. I think the male attorneys who made comments and who gave me and others a hassle in years gone by, I don't blame them. They were doing what was coming naturally, what was acceptable in our society. What has been neat, though, is the change that has come about in their attitudes, that they have been willing to change, and that they have been open to the lessons from experience and so I don't blame anybody.

D: All right. And so you do see this change then? That there's definite change in the way that women are treated?

R: Yes, I think so. I mean, as I say, when I first came here certain law firms weren't hiring females. You heard the story about the Scott-Hulse firm? Richard Munzinger went down to Austin to interview, interview the woman and told her flatly. Richard and I were always good friends. He told me that, he said, "I thought I was being truthful. I wasn't going to waste her time. I told her that my firm wasn't going to hire women, blacks, Jews or Mexicans," and that hit the papers and his firm was banned from interviewing in Austin for a while. I don't remember how long. But, yeah, you see that firm has one female, has had three. I can't think of any place--have you come across any place who hasn't hired any females?--City Attorney's and the District Attorney's Office have by now, County Attorney's Office and all the big firms.

D: Right.

R: Some small firms. A number of women in private practice on their own.

D: Right.

R: Which is just marvelous. I mean just very, very gutsy thing to do.

J. Ruesch

D: And Taffy Bagley, isn't she even a partner?

R: That's right and I think Yvonne Puig is a partner. Taffy was the first female hired by a law firm in this town.

D: Right. I'm going to interview her, too.

R: Yeah. So things have changed drastically and indeed it has flipped a little bit because by the time Taffy was coming out of law school, each one of the three large firms wanted her. (Chuckles) And check with her on the year. That was the mid-70's, someplace, maybe '76. All of them came to me, someone from each firm, I was friends with all of them. They said we have this wonderful woman and every single one of them wanted to hire her and it was as though that just all of a sudden broke and then it became very much in vogue to have a female attorney and to hire female attorneys. So it's been real good for us. That's not to say that there aren't areas that can be proved yet but the attitudes have changed rather drastically.

D: Okay. Great.

END OF INTERVIEW