

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF BARBARA MEE  
ORAL HISTORY 2014-19 PART 1  
AUGUST 13, 2014  
TED STEVENS PAPERS PROJECT JUKEBOX

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. Today is August 13, 2014 and this is Karen Brewster here with Barb Mee. And we are also joined by Elsie Eckman and Barb's husband Vince Mee over in the background. And this is an interview for the Ted Stevens Archives Papers Project. Barb, thank you for coming to visit us today. We appreciate your time.

BARBARA MEE: We are just very pleased to be here again. We were here a couple years ago and you are progressing just wonderfully and we are very pleased and proud of what you are doing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Great. Well to get us started, we know you worked for Senator Stevens for a long time, but before we get there we would like to know a little bit about you and where you came from and when and where you were born and some of your family background.

BARBARA MEE: Okay. We -- I was born and raised in South Dakota -- the good Midwest. I always tell people I know a lot more about cold weather than Alaska does. The Midwest is pretty cold back there. Came up in 1960, April of 1960 with two little small boys and my ex-husband and went to work for the State Division of Aviation in June of 1960. It was difficult to find jobs in Alaska at that time because they didn't want to hire new -- new women in town. They figured they weren't going to stay and they hired military wives, but not us, you know, just appearing on the scene. But I went to work for the State Division of Aviation. That was really a good background for Alaska cause I worked for the Engineering Department and they were building bush airstrips all over Alaska and it was very, very interesting.

But I worked there a year and a half and I had come to Alaska -- I had been a legal secretary in South Dakota and so naturally I was looking for a job with a lawyer and senator or Ted Stevens at the time his secretary was leaving cause she was going to have a baby. And so someone steered me in that direction and I applied and I always tell the story I didn't -- I didn't respond to Ted Stevens directly because he was so gruff on the phone. I thought, oh, I don't want to work for him. And so anyway he called and said are you going to come for the interview or not? And said, oh, well, I will be there.

So anyway I went to work for the senator in '61 -- '62 -- January of '62 and was with him in the law office for seven years and then when he was appointed to take the Bob Bartlett senate seat, I went -- I did not go to DC because my boys were still very young. And so I chose to stay in Anchorage and open up the state office for the senator and, of course, never regretted that at all.

The -- the, of course, you know all the elections or people know all the elections that Senator Stevens went through. He -- he was running in '60 when I went to work for him and he did not win or '62. He did not win that election and Ernest Gruening, of course, was the successful candidate. So then the senator ran for the state house in '64 and again in '66 and then when the seat came open again in '68, Stevens ran for it, but was defeated in the primary by Elmer Rasmuson and then when Bob Bartlett, our senior senator for Alaska died in December, Governor Wally Hickel had the option to appoint who would

fill that seat and he chose sena -- or he chose Ted Stevens. Because Wally was going to be facing a battle with the senate in getting confirmed as the Secretary of Interior under Nixon and Wally Hickel knew Senator Stevens' abilities and that kind of wrangling. So he appointed Stevens and the rest is history. He won a lot of elections after that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes, he did. So your family background growing up in South Dakota can you talk about you?

BARBARA MEE: I am very proud of my mother. My mother came from Norway when she was -- she was like only about nineteen, I think, nineteen or twenty when she came to South Dakota from Oslo, Norway. She and her brother and I think it is the typical, you know, when they talk about immigration today it must have been a lot different when my mom came over in the early 20's I would assume. She and her brother both came to South Dakota. And they had thought that my -- that her brother was going to be a doctor. I don't know that he succeeded or not, but mom got -- my mother got a job -- housekeeping jobs in Madison. And this was, you know, just pre-depression days and -- but anyway I was -- I had four siblings, three sisters and a brother. And eventually we all -- we went to -- all of us came to Alaska I think by 1960. All of us had migrated up to Alaska and my mom always said that it was -- it reminded her so much of Norway and she had come up to visit one of my sisters who had come up during the Korean War with her husband. And mom said oh, I just got to move to Alaska. Well then, of course, you know my mother moved to Alaska and I am like 21 or whatever, you know. I got to go where my momma had gone. So we came up as well. So eventually the only one that didn't stay in Alaska was my brother and he moved back to South Dakota. He was in a banking business, but like I said, eventually we all -- all generated here to Alaska.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, interesting that you were all drawn here.

BARBARA MEE: Yeah, it -- it -- and we still tell people that to this day that, you know, it is great if both the husband and the wife like Alaska cause if one of them doesn't, you know, they are going to draw the other one back to wherever the relatives are from, but we have been retired now Vince and I for several years, and -- but we come back every summer because it is just, you know, you can't break the tie. Can't break it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, well, sounds like your mother was very influential in your life.

BARBARA MEE: She really was. It is a term of endearment, but we always called her a tough little old Norwegian broad because actually what she was and I am five foot and I think my mom was probably all of that as well. And I am not saying that my dad was weak, but my mom was so much stronger I think and she started up several restaurants in South Dakota. She wanted to be her own boss and I found that very difficult. I never really wanted to work for myself. I always wanted to work for somebody else. Security I suppose it was, but mom was a great cook and started up two different restaurants in two small towns in South Dakota. But, yeah, she was very tough and then they moved to Alaska and mom ended up working down at Glennallen in Roseannt's Roadhouse. I don't know if many people remember that, but Bill and Eleanor Roseannt owned the roadhouse there. I know it is still there, but it is not the Roseannt's, And mom cooked there and knew an awful lot of the truck drivers and, of course, knew a lot of them that were killed in the earthquake down in Valdez, you know. She knew them from traveling back and forth on the road. But, yeah, my mom was a tough gal, super gal.

KAREN BREWSTER: So can you talk about opening the senator's first office here in Alaska when he became senator?

BARBARA MEE: It was a great experience. You know, I had never -- politics, you know, I had been a little on the side line in his elections and so on, but I really didn't know what a US senate office did. I can remember when the senator was going back I said well, what will your address be and he said, Barbara, there is only 100 of us, you know, just senate -- Senator Ted Stevens, Washington, DC and it will get there and, of course, it did. But I loved to tell the story that it was like, you know, in January and I don't know if people remember but we used to have the borough had property tax on boats and planes and things like that. And I was getting a lot of calls and I would say, you know, this is Senator Stevens' office. Of course, when people are upset, they don't really listen to who you are and this one guy just was going on and on and on about, you know, the unfair taxes and he only owned this little boat for however long it was and he just went on and on. I said, well, I really don't know, but I would be happy to, you know, to give the information to the senator and see what we can do about it. And he said what? And I said, well, this is Senator Stevens' office. And he said, well, I was calling the borough tax office and our phone number was one digit off and that is why I had been getting all the irate tax calls. But anyway, we -- communications was so different in those days and I am sure you gals understand that from the business you are in now. But we had what we called the Watts Line or the FTS Lines and we could only use so many minutes a day and it had to be like after two o'clock in the afternoon or some such. And, of course, remember in those days I think it was a five hour time change between Alaska and DC. Now it is four, but in those days I think it was five. So we -- we really -- the senator's crew in DC kept long hours too, but we did in Anchorage as well because we, you know, and we had to be available for them on the phone. But we did so much on the telephone. This was before -- I can't even explain to some people today because, you know, we have instant communications and iPhone's and what have you, but they would call me from DC. The press people would call and they would dictate press releases to me and I would take them and I would type them up, run them off on the Xerox machine and hand deliver them to the radio stations and the two or three TV stations we had in those days and the newspapers. And, yeah, I used to laugh at the kids over at The Times. It was like I would come running in with, you know, hot off the press type thing, but that is how we did it. Yeah, we would do three or four press releases a day. Now you think about that, you know, I mean I -- I am sure, you know, my shorthand was pretty good in those days, but that was kind of a round about way of doing it.

And we used to do what we call the news synopsis and I would take the paper and, you know, type up the little blurbs on the stories as they were in the paper and then type them up and we would fax that to Washington. Fax mind you now, not computer, but fax them. And, you know, by the time I left, of course, we were in the computer age and so, you know, that had all gone by the wayside, but we did an awful lot of -- awful lot of things like that.

I tell the story -- you mentioned that I did write a book about the senator, but the senator loved gadgets and he loved, you know, when the computers came in. He -- he had represented IBM in the early days in the law office so he was very familiar with computers, but they were probably as big as this table as you can imagine, but we -- we

had delivered from AT&T or whichever communication it was, the teletype machine and I am sure you have probably have heard of a teletype, but it has the sprockets on the yellow tape and they just kind of, you know, go through the thing. But the boss had come home on that weekend and he said, oh, good, it has been delivered. And I said, you know, please don't touch it because I haven't had lessons on it yet and I don't know exactly how to operate it. Oh, he says there is nothing to it. So he sat down and push some buttons and started typing. I said, oh, please don't do that. So anyway he finally says, all right, and he got up and walked away. When I came in on Monday after the senator had gone back to DC, I walked into the office and it was just filled with reams of this yellow sprocket paper because he had left the gadget on and, you know, anyway. The people from AT&T or Alascom, whichever it was, just thought that was very funny. But, of course, it scared the bejeebes out of me. I though, you know, I guess we are going to be charged for every minute that that paper went through.

So anyway, we, we did a lot in communications and, of course, you know that ended up being one of Senator Stevens' loves was communications and instant communication. And telemedicine and, you know, we always tell the story how he, you know, he would say to Vince, you know, just picture this you know. There is a community health aide in Bethel and she takes a picture of something and she sends it to Wash or to Anchorage and they can diagnose it down there and the patient doesn't even have to come in from the bush. And, you know, we really -- we really thought the senator, yeah, how did he know all that, you know. Was he -- where was he -- where was he getting all that information, but he was. He was way ahead of his time and I know you people are familiar with Red Boucher as well. And, of course, when Red and Ted got together and started talking about communications, you know, it was just something to behold because they were both, you know, ahead of their time when it came to that.

KAREN BREWSTER: So if you would talk a little about the work you did in the law office because that is the part of Stevens' career that not so much is known about. You know, we have these papers here on his senate career.

BARBARA MEE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: But working in his law office.

BARBARA MEE: And keep in mind when the senator, you know, he lost that first election, but then when he ran in '62, he would be down in Juneau and I would be in Anchorage and communications weren't any better in those days than they were when I was just explaining. But he always had a partner in Anchorage whether it was Jack Roderick in the early days and then Russ Holland because, you know, he would start lawsuits and so on and then somebody had to be there when he was in Juneau, you know, with the legislature. But he -- somebody always said that the senator would never really make any money at practicing law because, you know, he just was -- he wanted to help everybody and probably never charged enough, you know, in those days when you think now what lawyers make it is horrendous. But he would do things like, you know, wills and divorces. All lawyers hated to handle divorces. They really did, but the senator also did a lot of real estate work and he had represented Mobil Oil and they have what you call the oil companies would hire a lawyer to do an abstract of title and then lawyers would have to go and research the land that the oil companies wanted to invest in and, you know, any liens on that property or anything that they had to know. And you really put your life on

the line on that, you know, when you are talking about an oil company wanting to make sure. So he did a lot of that. And, like I said, I -- he loved the law, but I think politics came first, you know, so but I did a lot -- a lot of work with divorces and wills and real estate and matters like that.

But I was telling somebody just the other day I think her grandmother was Virginia Darling from Seward and Ted -- senator -- Ted Stevens -- lawyer Ted Stevens represented Virginia Darling who owned the Brown and Hawkins Store in Seward. And Virginia Darling was a very classy lady, just wonderful and another one, you know, ahead of her time, but she would always be dressed to the nine's and she would go to Seattle and go on buying trips and so on, but when the senator got appointed to go to DC, she came in and she was really devastated. She didn't want to lose him as a lawyer, but she said, you know, they are just going eat you up back there, Ted. She said, you know, you are too honest. You are just too honest, you know, you will never make it back there. She was happy that he got to go, of course, but.

But his clients really loved him and one of his clients was Gloria McCutcheon and I don't mind using her name because she ended up going back to DC with the senator as his first receptionist or meeter greeter as Gloria always used to like to call herself. Gloria's husband had died, Ken Britt had died, and the senator handled Ken Britt's estate and that is how he met Gloria. He knew her other, but anyway he was handling the estate. So then when he was appointed and, of course, Gloria had become a recent widow and she was just the appropriate person to take back to DC and be his front desk person so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so in his law office you were his legal secretary and typed up all the briefs and all that kind of thing?

BARBARA MEE: I still laugh about that because when I -- when I was hired on, that is why I said this whole thing of even working for Stevens it is a miracle that I ever, you know, really got the job because I -- number one, he was gruff on the phone. I thought oh that would be something. And then number two, he -- they had a gal working for -- he and Roderick, had this -- Jack Roderick -- had this gal working for them and I always said this older woman, I suppose she was 50, you know. But, you know, the thing was is she - - I think she wanted to retire, but, you know, the senator and Jack or Jack, well, they would keep her on until I really felt comfortable in doing the work. Well, you know, I knew about that much. It is not rocket science for crying out loud. And, but I said to the senator well, let's do it this for -- or Ted, I said let's do it this way and let's give each other six weeks. And if I am not doing the job, you can let me go and if I don't think I've got the job or I am doing the job, I will quit. Well six weeks came and they hadn't said anything and I finally went to him, you know, cause they were giving most of the work to the other gal. And I was just kind of bored, you know. And so I went to Senator Stevens and I said, you know, obviously you are not -- I am not doing the job or I am not, you know, I am not getting all the work cause you keep giving it to Marie. Well, Nettle bar the door, you know. She quit. She wanted to quit and she quit and I got it all.

So I mean I did all the work for both of them and then they got a young legal aide in -- not an intern, but he hadn't passed the bar yet. Bill Bailey was his name from Texas, a great young boy -- young man. So I did the work for all of them, but I really was quite fast in my early days. When senator got the first magnetic tape Selectric typewriter, which it is a computer. But it could type -- it would type back -- replay at 500 words a

minute or 200 words a minute, whichever it was. But anyway I could type almost as fast as the computer could and so I mean I was pretty quick in my old age or my young age rather and didn't mind and didn't mind the workload.

So, but yeah, but in those days it is so difficult. When you talk about filing briefs and so on in those days, my golly, you know, everything had to be done on matrix system and so on cause you were filing an appeal brief and so on and it had to be just letter perfect. And if you made a mistake or they wanted to add a sentence or something, you had to go back and start all over again because, you know, now on computers you know you just insert, exert, what have you. In those days it was really, you know, that was a lot of work so. And I can remember we had -- we were in a building where lawyer Harold Butcher owned the building and he was on the top story and his secretary was Kay Paulson -- Parsons. And I had taken something over to the Superior Court to file one day and they had refused to file it for some reason and I can remember coming back to the office I was just in tears cause, you know, it was a deadline and so on. And Kay Parsons said you take that back and you tell them they have to file a sheet of toilet paper if you take it over there cause she knew the rules and regulations. So anyway I got quite an education there, but yeah we were -- had two or three different law offices and had some great law clerks working for us. Harold Stringer was a lawyer in those days that did a lot of real estate.

One thing I like to remember is that I must have been fairly good at my work because we did a lot of real estate work, you know, for real estate companies and a man in town -- in Anchorage Carl Renchare (phonetic) who owned an insurance and real estate agency we did a lot of work for Carl. And he had offered me when senator was appointed senator and I started at the office over there. Carl had offered me to go to work for him in his real estate office for a thousand dollars a month and I had never heard of -- this was the day I had never heard of such a high salary. But I said, no, I thought I would stick it out with Ted Stevens, you know, and, of course, never regretted that, but.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what was it about Ted Stevens that was so appealing to work for him that you stayed for 35 years?

BARBARA MEE: He had a great sense of humor, smart, loyal. I mean it sounds like a dog, but he -- he really did. He -- he had looked at the bigger picture all the time whether it was in the law office or when he ran for the state house in those early years and we are talking about in the 60's. I think we had two TV stations. I think it is even before Channel 13 came on. Senator was so savvy and the bigger picture type things as I said and he would get all the Republican candidates together and they would, you know, do their commercials and what have you and he was always for let's, you know, the team effort. Let's get us all going and, you know, those were days when you would campaign where it might cost you a hundred dollars or two hundred dollars to run, you know. It is not the millions and billions they talk about now. But he really and I would imagine everybody that you talk to would talk about his integrity. I always say, you know, that integrity is like natural curly hair. You either got it or you don't and the senator had it. And he -- such a -- such a brilliant mind. I also tell other people the stories that when he would come home -- this is Anchorage I am talking about, when he would come back to the Anchorage office on practically every weekend if not every other weekend in the early years. And he would have an aide with him and they would talk about so many different subjects from the time they got off at the airport to the time they got down to the federal

building. And I said to him one time I said, huh, isn't your brain just going to explode, you know, with all that information? He said, Barbara, it doesn't work that way, you know, but it doesn't work that way. There is always room for more and he did -- he kept on learning. I was so pleased when we were looking at the pictures up in the Stevens Paper Room -- Papers Room to see -- to be reminded once again of all the people that he interacted with. I mean kings and prime ministers and, you know, as I have said in the story that all Ted Stevens ever wanted to be was a US senator, you know. And he said that when he lost that election, you know, in '68. So then when he was appointed, it was just -- it was just a dream come true.

KAREN BREWSTER: So what was your job title once he became senator when you set up that office in 1969?

BARBARA MEE: We called me the Anchorage Office Manager and there were things that -- you have professional staff and you have legislative staff and certain people can make so much money and certain people can make the other amount. And so I was, you know, I was a GS employee. We didn't get -- we didn't get, you know, the GS cost of living, but -- because we were under the senate, but we were covered under the Civil Service System. But anyway, that was my title -- Anchorage Office Manager and we had one gal that worked half days in the morning and that was Edie Opinski and her husband was a Postmaster and Edie had small children so it, you know, all my children were small at the time too and then Gloria McCutcheon when she came back from Washington, DC. After a couple years she left down there and married Steve McCutcheon and came back to Alaska. Then she worked in the afternoon. So there was -- there was always two of us in the office, two in the morning, two in the afternoon and, of course, I worked all day. It was, you know, I always tell people that I didn't do substance. I only did fluff and I don't mean that, you know, that I wasn't proud of the work that I did. In fact, I said to the senator one time, gee, if I would have known I was going to be with you so long, I would have, you know, really thought more about just making it a career. And he said don't say that. This is a career, you know. I was not a lawyer. I was not a legislative person, but we kept a lot of balls in the air doing the scheduling and getting him all over different places. When he came to town on the weekends, there were so many people that wanted to see him. There were so many events going on. There was always, you know, plenty of things to do. I can remember when the federal employees were really complaining because they were going to lose -- there was a chance they were going to lose their cost of living allowance and the senator was on that committee. And so he says, well, Barb, tell them I will meet with them on Saturday morning -- this was on Memorial Day weekend. And he says tell them I will meet with them on, you know, ten o'clock on Saturday morning. And would you believe it the Civil Service workers came back and said, well, that is a weekend. We can't take off -- we can't meet with him then because that is, you know, that is our vacation time. So anyway, he -- should I keep going?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

BARBARA MEE: It was funny because he would meet all day long and have special events to go to, you know, at lunch time and banquets in the evening time and then get back on the plane sometimes that very same night and go back to DC. So, you know, it was full days and I -- we did -- we did the constituent services in the Anchorage office. Like I say, we didn't do legislation. That is what all the, you know, the AA's and the LA's and what

have you in DC handled, but we handled constituent services. And I was always very proud of that and actually Edie in the morning and Gloria in the afternoon probably did more constituent things than I did, but I did a lot of the scheduling and chambers and rotaries and meetings like that.

But I -- we had -- we had a young man in our office at one time and he -- yeah, reporters always think that there is a guy sitting in the office, he must be in charge, right? So, anyway, they went in to interview him and we heard him talking and then he said, oh, yeah, we have a pretty good success rate with our constituent problems. He said probably about fifty-five percent. Well, the gals and I just (noise), you know, couldn't believe that. We probably had closer to ninety or ninety-five successful when anybody needed, you know, a Civil Service problem or Social Security or any of the matters, VA problems in those days. Everything was handled by mail. We would mail things back and forth if you can imagine. No wonder some people didn't get their retirement. You know, you retire and then the Civil Service would say well, it might be two months before you would receive your retirement check. Well, you know, a lot of people couldn't really handle that. So they would come to us and we would try to expedite it so that those things would, you know, they would get their money sooner. But the thing is, is like I said, it was handled by phone calls when we had the FTS line and we could, you know, call up and talk for so many minutes a day. Otherwise, things had to be sent back and forth in the mail. The pouch as we called it. We would pouch mail to DC and they would pouch mail back up to us. Just unfathomable now how you can even think how we operated in those days.

KAREN BREWSTER: Do you have examples of other things that are constituent services for people who might not know what that means and what you guys did?

BARBARA MEE: Well, I have to tell you one story that changed kind of the whole way we did things. Military matters, you know, if someone had, you know, a hardship case or needed to go home to mama and daddy or whatever, we could work that than the Red Cross could. I mean the military has an avenue to help these people, but if they couldn't be helped quick enough, they would come to the senator and see what could be done.

And this one gal came in the office and I handled this one and never forget that. And she just was crying because her husband Donnie was in Okinawa in the Air Force and wouldn't send him home and oh, she was having so much trouble and couldn't we please get Donnie home. And so we wrote a letter to whoever it was asking that Donnie be transferred back home because his wife and children or whatever it was. Well, Nellie bar the door, Donnie came into the office and he was just furious because he didn't want to come home. And the minute he got home his wife divorced him and that is why she wanted Donnie to come home. So anyway, from that time on everything had to be signed. If we were to help a constituent, the constituent had to sign the piece of paper saying Senator Stevens, please look into this for me or I need help with so and so and they had to, you know, specifically tell us what it was they wanted. And it is funny we, you know, we didn't have a lot of problems I am sure, but that one was very specific and we made sure that we had a consent form before we did anything after that.

We also handled, in addition to constituent things, it was a pleasure to handle the academy appointments for Senator Stevens and because we got into a mode where we were all Republican at one time later on after Gravel, but we would -- the Anchorage

delegation offices would work together so we could get more bang for the buck and get more kids appointed to the academies and that was a very successful program. And we went from the primary alternate method to the competitive method which meant we could -- we could each nominate 10 boys or girls to the Navy and 10 to the Air Force and you know it on -- Army and then but I mean so with all working together we could actually nominate 30 kids and then the military -- the military academies would, you know, do the testing and they would make the choices as to who qualified and down the line. So that was a very successful thing and I know all of us really -- we loved -- all the local offices enjoyed doing that.

KAREN BREWSTER: I didn't realize for military academies that they can appointed. They don't apply to them like you would to a college?

BARBARA MEE: There are several different ways that they can apply to the military academies.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay.

BARBARA MEE: One avenue is to get a congressional appointment and that is where they would apply to us and, of course, we always try to tell, you know, the youngsters to start thinking about it like when they were freshman or sophomore because, you know, the -- it is quite difficult to pass the grade to get in and you have to be well rounded.

KAREN BREWSTER: Very competitive?

BARBARA MEE: Very competitive and they want -- they want well-rounded kids. They want kids that have worked a part-time job after school and so on. But anyway that is one avenue and then there is a, you know, like if your father was in or father was killed in the military that was an avenue that they could get in. I think there is presidential appointments and so on. But, yeah, that is just one of the avenues. We were one of the avenues that they could get in.

KAREN BREWSTER: That is interesting. I didn't know that --

BARBARA MEE: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Was --

BARBARA MEE: I am sure it is still the same way, but, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, you said you had this great success rate with solving these constituent issues. What about constituents who would call your office who were not seeking help, but were upset about issues?

BARBARA MEE: Yeah, well, what we would do, of course, is we would, you know, keep running tattle -- running tallies. They were mainly calling, you know, whether it was the Panama Canal in those days or, you know, Native land claims or any of those issues if they had an opinion and we would keep our yellow pads and, you know, and if they wanted to give us their name and address and wanted a comment back, we would do that. If they just wanted a yes or no column, you know, we did that too. And we were really -- we took a lot of the phone calls because of the time change and the cost. People just didn't want to pick up the phone and call DC.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

BARBARA MEE: But I have to tell you this one story cause I can remember I was really upset with the senator. They used to put out newsletters and they would put them out like once a month or every few weeks or whatever and the senator had asked the question if I could only afford to, you know, keep my Anchorage open or if I could come back he could

make so many trips back home. Which would the constituents prefer -- him coming home or having a local office? And they overwhelmingly wanted a local office. We really felt vindicated by that because we were able to deal with these people and help them if they had a constituent problem or to pass on their cares and concerns and get answers for them that way.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, certainly as you say in those early days, the 60's and 70's, it was much easier for somebody in Alaska to contact Anchorage than to contact DC and you were here.

BARBARA MEE: We were here and/or if they were in town shopping or something they could come up, you know, and talk and that is always easier if you could explain your problem, you know, in person. A lot of people lived out with the written word all of our lives, but a lot of people have a real hard time putting things in writing. And that is where the mobile office the senator started was very popular because the mobile office would -- they had a schedule and they would go out to Talkeetna and Clear and whatever and then they would go in Fairbanks and different areas, you know, down the Seward Peninsula. And, you know, two staff people would go on that and visit with people and take their written complaints or take their verbal complaints and pass them on to the senator. The senator loved that mobile office. I, you know, we used to disagree about a couple things and I always said here we are going out looking for work when we can barely keep up with the work that comes in. People never hesitated to call us if they -- if they were mad about something or happy about something or needed our help or just wanted to say thanks for something. People never hesitated calling the delegation offices. I know they didn't -- didn't stop calling our office.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how do you handle somebody who called who was irate about something? I am sure it must have happened.

BARBARA MEE: It did and, you know, the senator always said that we didn't have to put up with verbal abuse on the phone and, you know, I love Alaskans and sometimes they would get just a little verbal, you know. And you can talk to them for a while, but then there were times you would have to say, you know, really I know what your problem is and I will pass it on, but the senator doesn't pay enough to sit and take verbal abuse. And, you know, and we would do that. Sometimes you would just have to do that, not very many times I am sure, but, you know, but there were -- the senator never -- never expected us to sit there and be verbally abused like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: So how did you handle -- we were talking about when he would come into town on a weekend and how busy that would be and you were a young mother --

BARBARA MEE: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: At the time. How did you handle that? It sounds like a very busy schedule for you.

BARBARA MEE: We used to laugh about that because we would say we couldn't take off during the week because they were in Washington, DC and we couldn't take off on the weekend because he was here. And he used to tell the story that he was -- I don't know how many times, you know, he was here, but he said that one time he arrived at the airport and I wasn't there to pick him up and this would usually be at, you know, nine, ten o'clock at night cause he would work all day and then fly up here.

KAREN BREWSTER: So your job was to go pick him up?

BARBARA MEE: Oh, yeah, yeah. I would pick him up and that is why I say I did a lot of those things and thank God I had a case worker sitting in the office, but, yeah, I did -- I did, you know, the picking up and the schlepping of bags and so on. But he said that one time he told people that he had arrived in Anchorage and Barbara wasn't there and so he called me and Barbara said you are not supposed to be here this weekend. And he said so I am going to Kenai fishing. He says I won't tell anybody if you don't and that was one of his greatest stories. I don't know that it really happened, but, you know, we rewrite history a lot. But he had a good time with that, but, yeah, and that -- my husband will tell you that same story. When Vince and I were going together and we picked the senator up once. I think it was early in the morning and we took him -- we had it arranged so that -- cause we had so many appointments set up that I had Vince drive kind of like the drive-by shooting, you know. And we would jump off, you know, at this appointment and that appointment and then we would go to lunch. And, you know, that I didn't have to find a parking place cause otherwise I would have to let him off and that was kind of dangerous because you never know who is going to stop him between the car and the Captain Cook, you know and then he would be late for getting in there. So it was great this one time and Vince was doing the driving and I am hustling him around and then he went to, you know, television interviews, paper interviews, you know, a cocktail party and a banquet and then he went to the hotel and changed clothes and we took him back to the airport, you know, like at 11:30 that night. And I know that Vince Mee really learned what a senator does when he came to Anchorage.

And every trip, of course, wasn't like that and it was wonderful when he -- when he could take the time to go down on the Kenai and go fishing or, you know, when he bought the house out at Girdwood. He just loved that house out at Girdwood and he -- my late husband and I before, you know, you can't give anybody anything now, but we gave Ted a chainsaw that he could -- cause he would go out there and chop down trees and just had a great time. I am sure it was good for his psychic, you know, to be able to get out there and just not have to think about everything. And I know Girdwood really liked him and they -- they would leave him alone when he went out there. You know, they never bothered him when he was at the Double Muskie or getting a bowl of soup or something. They let him have his home there so.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you were raising two children at this time in the early days.

BARBARA MEE: Oh, my goodness. I --

KAREN BREWSTER: How did you do that?

BARBARA MEE: Well, I had good husbands. I'll put it this way. This -- I say in my book I have had 1, had 2, had 3 and husband at the time is what I call that. And had number 2 was very good about that. My kids were like, you know, just preteen and then teen and there was one time I just really wondered if the mother police didn't come and get me, but I was doing for Stevens the thing pick and delivery and what have you and I had a call from my oldest son who was about thirteen at the time and he said, you know, his brother had done something kind of stupid. He wondered what would happen if he held the teakettle spout down while he was boiling and he did that and, of course, the teakettle exploded and blasted him like down the front. But my oldest boy was a Boy Scout, you know, Cub Scout and he knew what to do, bless his heart. Put cold wet towels on him and so my husband at the time and I got home at the same time and it really -- it did not look

bad at all. I mean, you know, because it had been taken care of. And I said well I have got to go to the airport and meet the senator and I can remember my husband saying, really Barbara, don't you think we better go to the hospital and check out so we did that and I called somebody else to go and meet the senator. But, yeah, there were a lot of times like that that I probably micromanaged when I didn't have to. But I always found it easier to know where he was, you know. I wanted to make sure that he got to where he was supposed to go and I'd, you know, I'd had a couple of bad experiences where I had assigned it to, you know, an intern or somebody else and they overslept and who got the call. I got the call. Yeah, aren't I supposed to be some place and I would, yeah, so I just found it easier and that is why I said I know I am a micromanager and anybody can tell you that. But I just found it easier, but it was a lot of fun and a lot of experience and I met a lot of wonderful people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah I was going to ask you. You mentioned the senator's ability to interact with the dignitaries and all these people, but you interacted with all those same people and helped bring them to Alaska and schedule trips for them all and everything, right?

BARBARA MEE: Yeah and it was really great. When he got, you know, staff that could come up and advance a trip for him like during the D-2 days and what have you that is when we were -- we -- he would -- the senator was bringing a lot of visiting delegates up so that they could see Alaska first hand, you know. It was hard to explain to people that we didn't have to lock up the total, you know, state of Alaska. You know and tried to explain that the pipeline was just like a piece of, you know, thread going across the carpet. So when he would get these people to come to Alaska and it was great when he, like I said, would have staff from DC that were working the issue as we call it and they could come up and they would do the real advance out, you know, take them up to the pipeline -- North Slope and Prudhoe and show them things up there. But yeah, you are right. You still had to get them in to town and then get him and the staffers into their hotel rooms and stuff. And we did meet a lot of interesting people. A lot of senators came up, you know, like when the Pope came up and visited Alaska in the 80's. Oh, goodness, you know, they had a whole -- whole load full of senators that came up, you know, to be here for that. So we did meet an awful lot of interesting people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Didn't President Nixon come up at some point also?

BARBARA MEE: Nixon may have come through. I don't recall -- wait a second, pardon me, yes, he did come up in the early -- Nixon and Hirohito. Your memory is really good. Nixon and Hirohito came and they had the event out at Elmendorf. In fact, they still had the chairs in ALCOM office that Nixon and Hirohito had sat in. And, but, they had the events out at the hangar which was wonderful because the military could really handle crowd control and what have you. We were involved in getting, you know, the parade route set up. I was so naïve I thought that crowds just happened, you know, when you see it on TV I just thought those crowds just appeared. Well, they don't and what you do is you get groups of people, you know, you call the Ladies Aid and you call the Rotary and everybody, you know, you stand on the street corner. And Shirley Woodrow is the gal who -- who had run Senator Stevens' campaign -- campaigns in the early years and she really knew how to get these things set up and we did. We had all these people that would, you know, be responsible for calling groups of -- their groups to get out on the

line. And I can remember, like I said, we had the thing out at hangar 1 or 5 -- it is a -- 1, biggest hangar on Elmendorf and how long ago this was in '72 or whatever it was. And I can remember Perry and Gloria Green from If You Don't Know Furs, Know Your Furrier and all their children were so little and they were all sitting in front of us and they all had little warm parkas on. And I thought uh-huh, nice, that would be because it was colder than blazes, you know, in that hangar. But that was very, yes, that was, I am sorry that I had forgotten when Nixon was here.

We were talking just the other day when President Ford came through and Vince recalls that he was coming through to go to Fairbanks. I thought he was going on a foreign trip. But he came through at a time when we were -- we used to have the Stevens' birthday parties. We were having them like every year, every other year and the senator finally, you know, when he turned 65 he said enough. Don't have any more birthday parties. But Ford was coming through at one of these times and so that was a really big deal because President Ford and his wife and Henry Kissinger, that's why I think it was a foreign affair. They were -- they all agreed that they would come down to the hotel for Ted's birthday party -- the senator's birthday party and it was, you know, we had Dean Berg, I think it was, from KAKM Public Television down there and they said well, let's film this. Let's do it like, you know, really gala that they have back in the big cities. And so he did the television what have you and I did the commentary, you know. Betty is beautiful in blue and what have you because I knew who these people were and Dean didn't. But it was really fantastic. I got some great pictures of that. But, yeah, that -- we -- I was involved with some of the interviews and somebody had said that Stevens had these fundraising birthday parties. Well, they really weren't fundraisers. They were fun. They were just fun events. I was able to look at some pictures the other day that you have in the archives. It reminded me just how much fun we did have.

KAREN BREWSTER: So this -- tell us more about these birthday parties. It was a public party or it was just for the senator's family and staff.

BARBARA MEE: Well, we sold tickets, you know, and however many the Hilton or the Cook or whatever, you know, could hold and I think they might have some up here in Fairbanks as well. But we printed up tickets and when the tickets were gone that was it because -- and they sold really quickly -- really quickly. I was mentioning the other day that somebody was just a little upset, you know, they had come because I -- we hadn't saved tickets for them. Well, we knew they were going to be there. Well, you know, first come first serve. But anyway they sold out very quickly and there was usually a theme, you know, and back in the days we all had the bouffant hair and, you know, they were great times. And they got into one -- one session where they had pictures where they blew them up and I don't know you might have some here I'm not sure. I know I have a couple and they were just, you know, early days of photography type -- I mean, you know, big blowing up pictures like that. And they were just surrounding the ballroom. And I was saying to the gal at the archives people love to see themselves in pictures. They really do. Oh, wow, there look at -- there I was, you know. And it was a lot of fun and there was always, you know, we did the Can Can dance, you know. Everything was the same song, the same music, you know, Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay and then Gloria McCutcheon and Gloria Mariachi Elm would write the words to it, you know, to befit the

occasion whether it was a birthday party or an anniversary or whatever and then they would dance the Can Can.

We did one at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the senator and that was at the Egan Center and that was really a big, big blow-out. That is where we had the famous senate bean soup and, you know, people thought well, I am going to a fancy thing like that and all they serve you is a soup and a salad or whatever, but it was kind of a historical thing. And they interviewed a lot of people there at that time too. I don't know where those tapes ever went to, but at that event we had seven -- seven generals or five generals with seven stars, whatever it was, but anyway we got them up there. I got to write the music for that one. That was fun. And General Ralston was our leading general and Tom Case, several others, but the senator just sat there. He just said, ah, he said, you are ruining their careers. You are ruining, you know, (laughter). But, they got up there in full dress and did the Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay and had a good time. That is when -- they were fun events you know. They were just fun events.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of --

BARBARA MEE: Of the senator being in the senate.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the senate, okay.

BARBARA MEE: Right. Yeah and like I said, that was at the Egan Center and, yeah, it was a fun occasion. We did one a couple years after that and it was at the Fourth Avenue Theater and we -- we had businessmen up there dancing the Macarena. That was great. That was, you know, could imagine Perry Green and Bill Tovin and people like that up there dancing the Macarena, but we always managed to have fun. But we didn't do them as fundraisers. People came because they wanted to be there because it was the place to be.

KAREN BREWSTER: Okay. Well, it sounds like it fits with Senator Stevens' sense of humor.

BARBARA MEE: It did.

KAREN BREWSTER: He liked to have fun.

BARBARA MEE: He did like to have fun and sometimes, you know, people would think he was so serious, but -- and, of course, he had to be very serious. He had a very serious job and we used to pull -- pull his chain every now and then. I love to tell the story that Edie Opinski was working in the morning and I had gone to pick up the senator. And we came in so it must have been in the morning and the senator and I walked into the office and he says to Edie and Edie Opinski is one of the sweetest women you would ever want to meet, and he said to her how are we doing Edie? And she said we are just doing our best to make you look good, senator. And he said and that is a real tough job, isn't it? You know, we all just cracked up, yeah, but that is what we were there for. We were there to make him look good and it was easy to do because people loved -- they knew they could count on Senator Stevens to just -- to do whatever he could do for them. And it was fun to be associated with that, you know, with a winner as it is. It was a lot of fun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I was going to ask you why you stayed working there so long.

BARBARA MEE: Well, you know --

KAREN BREWSTER: What it meant to you to be there working?

BARBARA MEE: That is the thing, you know. Vince tried to tell me, you know, after a certain, you know, after you have put so much money into Social Security or whatever, you know, then you really you are just working for nothing. But, you know, I never looked at

it that way and I didn't make as much money as they did in DC and/or as a lot of other politicians may have paid their people. I never did it for the money. I never had to worry about where my next meal was coming from because Ted and his first wife Ann always saw to that when I was between husbands and, but money was never really a big deal and it was never the end all. That isn't why I was working and, but, you know, it is like my -- my youngest son who was in the Navy for 24 and a half years, you know, I said why don't you stay for 30. And he said, well, you know, when it quits being fun or you know it is you know it is time to go that it is time to go.

And Vince and I had gotten married in '95 and the senator really thought I ought to be out playing golf and doing whatever and why did I want to hang around and what have you. And yeah, the more I got to thinking about it, you know. It was such big business by then. I mean we gone through so many issues and communications was such that it, you know, it was a lot easier for the staff in Washington to handle things directly. I don't know. I didn't regret quitting, but there is a doctor, Dr. Seuss quote that I like, you know, "Don't cry because it is over, but just smile because it happened" and that is how we all should really look at.

KAREN BREWSTER: And you -- you -- I will call it retired.

BARBARA MEE: Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: In 1997?

BARBARA MEE: Yes. Yeah. We got married in '95 and I retired in '97 and Vince was still working for the municipality and then he retired and then George Rich was elected and asked him if he would come back and be his snow tsar and so we came, you know, we were still here and then I did a year and a half or so with the Joint Armed Services Committee which is the state committee that Eldon Mulder, Representative Eldon Mulder at the time had asked me if I would please work with him on that. And that was -- it was kind of the same thing that I had been doing with Stevens as far as, you know, the contact between the military and civilians and trying to remind them just how important the military is to your community and to let the military know that the civilians are there to help you. Communities are there to help you. Fairbanks has now just gotten, probably will get the F-35's and we are just really pleased to hear that.

That is the kind of thing that Stevens worked so hard on and he worked hard on that one - - this very issue even so it was that many years ago that they started the struggle to get the F-35's here. And that, you know, that is the thing too, you know, Fairbanks and Anchorage -- I was saying to Suzanne the other day that, you know, we get a little parochial and Fairbanks wants it and Anchorage wants it and so on. But what they have to realize is that the military is good for the whole state. You know, the jobs might be here but it keeps, you know, the economy vibrant and that is awfully important for all of us.

KAREN BREWSTER: I am glad you mentioned the military. It was one of my questions to ask you about cause I know you went to many, many, many military events.

BARBARA MEE: I did.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so I wanted to ask you about your connected -- why you got involved with that and you represented Senator Stevens at many of those events, did you not?

BARBARA MEE: I did and I enjoyed it. I really did. I can remember the first one -- when I first started doing it, I was out at Elmendorf with Frank Reed who was a banker in Anchorage and I didn't, you know, I couldn't tell -- I couldn't tell, you know, a private from a corporal from a, you know, officer or whatever. And Frank Reed always told me he says you can't go wrong if you call them all sir. They will let you know if they don't want to be called sir, but just call them all sir. Just, you know, be polite to all of them and I kind of did that. I -- I just enjoyed it cause my youngest son had joined the Navy also right out of high school so that would have been like in '78 and so I felt, you know, kind of connected that way. He joined the Navy in the submarine service and I also, you know, I joined Navy League and organizations, Armed Services, YMCA that were connected with the military. But it is very important we found that out that for the senators or for the congressional delegation to have access to the military and let the military know that you are here locally. That they don't have to call DC. That you will be happy to pass on the messages. So you know the generals are going to call directly that is always going to happen, but to let them to know that you are there and that you -- you are glad to be of service if there is anything you can do. And I just thoroughly enjoyed it and I really -- I got a lot of friends in the military and, you know, the protocol -- the protocol office is where I kind of had a great time because that is kind of what I was doing on the civilian sector you know. What protocol does for the generals and colonels and stuff out on base. And it is -- it was just -- it was a good fit I think. And then, of course, I ended up married a Chief, Vincent retired in '92 and we got married in '97, but '95, pardon me, 18 years -- 18 years next week.

But no, I enjoyed it and with the connections that I got, wow, you know, and with Chamber. I was on the Chamber Military Committee and I am really proud one of the things that my friend who ran the Armed Services YMCA Tom Morgan and I actually started the military appreciation lunch that the Chamber now runs and the picnic and so on. And, you know, in those days we didn't have -- we didn't have a lot of, you know, show up at, you know, but now it is a really big deal. And so we were instrumental in starting that, just as our way of showing the military we appreciate you. And then, of course, you know, Fur Rendezvous they always have the military people down and the parades and so on so. Yeah, I really enjoyed that fix. Like I said, I got -- I was really fortunate that when General Hugh Cameron was here. He was the Wing Commander and he let Tom Morgan from the Y and myself have F-15 rides and one of the most exciting things in my life. Very exciting to be up in an F-15. We have had a couple of carrier landings out in the middle of the ocean, not on an F-15 but on a COD flight. I got that through military connections. I, with Sean O'Keefe who worked for the senator who was in the plane crash, survived the plane crash that killed the senator. Sean was Secretary of the Navy. He had worked for us -- for the senator in DC doing military work and then he in his many other jobs he was -- he was President of LSU and he was Secretary of the Navy. And when he was Secretary of the Navy, he honored me with becoming a ship's sponsor. Now that is a job that only women get, you know, and I got to be the sponsor of a little patrol coastal vessel, the USS Zephyr. And I said the reason they gave me this cause I figured I was full of hot air just like the Zephyr.

KAREN BREWSTER: I need to change tape.