“The Problem Without a Name”: Was it Such a Problem? An Oral History of Women in the 1950s

Interviewer: Amy Helms
Interviewee: Rosalie Iadarola

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this oral history project is to gain a more complete history of life for women in the 1950s, through an interview of Rosalie Iadarola. This oral history addresses work, education, suburbia, the Cold War, McCarthyism, marriage, and motherhood. Ms. Iadarola verifies and refutes our existing understanding of the 1950s and provides emotion that allows for a more complete picture of life for women in the 1950s.

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BIOGRAPHY

Rosalie Iadarola was born in 1921 in Manhattan to Italian immigrants. She lived in a tenement home with her extended family and her two brothers—Anthony and Earnest. She attended the all girls, public Wadley High School. She graduated from high school in 1935 and attended business school for two years. Then, she spent many years working as a secretary.

After repeated requests, she married her childhood friend from her neighborhood. During World War II, her husband was stationed in Egypt. They had five children in the late 40s and early 50s. They lived in an apartment community in Washington, D.C., where her husband worked for the government with the Coastal Geodetic Survey. They later moved with the droves of other young families to the suburbs, to a community on McArthur Boulevard.

In the late 50s and 60s she campaigned heavily for the rights of the mentally retarded. She and other concerned parents formed an action group that sought tuition grants for handicapped students who were not taking a place in public school so that they could send their children to private institutions.

In 1985, she returned to school to get a degree in drama from Catholic University. She then had a career as a professional actress performing at local theaters and in public service announcements. She is now a proud grandmother and still lives in Washington, D.C.

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"THE PROBLEM WITHOUT A NAME"— HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

Hula-hoops, appliances, automobiles, suburbs, baby boom, communism, Rock'n'Roll, ten-gallon hats, bomb shelters, Disneyland, shopping malls, "going steady," The Kinsey Report, Hollywood, television, and Barbie are all images that represent what historian Michael Elliot calls America's "golden age." But where were women in the "golden age"? In a world of fearful insecurity one thing was certain—the majority of American women were in the home. After World War II, Americans were ready to get married, spend money, and have babies and that is exactly what they did. The country was filled with optimism and the desire for the "American Dream." After a four-year war, femininity was back. American women were sexy, caring, nurturing, cheerful, and subservient. They were the backbone of the American moral force against communism in the world—the family unit. The image of the loving mother dutifully attending to husband and children pervaded the media. Despite this image, thirty-five percent of adult women worked. A woman working was acceptable as long as she was "helping out," supplementing the male role as breadwinner. Only thirty-five percent of young women were enrolled in college in 1958[1]. Higher education for women was useless and could become "frustrating" to women because they would never need it in their inevitable lives as wives and mothers. "Functional" classes in marriage and homemaking were stressed. Dr. Alfred Kinsey's 1953 report that fifty percent of women had sex before marriage dumbfounded Americans who were of the opinion "that sex outside of marriage was wrong, and that nice girls didn't do it" (Harvey 5). Reliable contraception was nonexistent, abortions were unheard of, and if possible, very dangerous. There were women that broke social barriers and stepped into male domains. The majority, however, were bombarded with the unattainable cultural ideals of how a woman was to be. What Betty Friedan called "The problem without a name" was the social domain of women that denied them of their expression and their sexuality.

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[1] This was a dramatic decrease from the forty-seven percent of women who worked in 1920.

Since Abigail Adams said "remember the ladies" in a letter to her husband, John Adams, in 1776 American women throughout history have suffered adversity to attain their desired equality. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared, in the Declaration of Sentiments, that "all men and women were created equal." Throughout the 1800s women focused their energy on one goal—suffrage. In 1920, with the passage of the 19th Amendment women gained the right to vote. Women in World War I (1914-1918) were working and getting higher education for the first time. The "Roaring Twenties" flapper was independent and sexual. Careers and education were encouraged. The twenties also give rise to the nuclear family—the consumer housewife who bought and prepared everything without the help of extended family or servants and The Great Depression forced women to work outside the home. In some cases, the mother was the sole breadwinner of the family. Work in the Depression was characterized by long hours, sexual discrimination, bad conditions, low wages, and little hope for advancement. World War II (1941-1945) created an opportunity for women to work. Women replaced men defending the country at all positions in war-related and business jobs. The image of "Rosie the Riveter" doing her patriotic duty and enjoying her new found independence redefined the realm of possibility for the American woman. How then does one explain the return to domesticity in the 1950s?

Some historians call the 1950s the "Long Decade," beginning in 1945 with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II. Not only did it begin the decade, historian Howard Zinn says, in *A People's History of the United States*, that it began the Cold War. The nation supported the use of atomic weapons in future conflicts. In 1951, a poll showed that fifty-one percent of Americans supported the use of the bomb on "military targets" (Layman 186). In 1949, the Soviet Union tested its first atomic weapon successfully; thus beginning the arms race. Throughout the fifties, the Americans and the Soviets created hundreds of weapons, including the hydrogen bomb. In President Eisenhower's "New Look Policy" (1953), government military spending favored atomic weapons over troops. On October 4, 1957 when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik* successfully, America was no longer militarily and scientifically superior.

After facing two world wars in a twenty-five year period most Americans felt they had seen the last war. However, on June 25, 1950 Communist North Korea invaded South Korea. President Truman declared that America would fight to contain communism. Under Gen. Douglas MacArthur American forces came to the aid of South Korea. Americans were concerned about the new, world conflict—the democratic West versus the communist East. Hours after America's decision to aid South Korea, the United Nations resolved to support the United States. American forces arrived in Korea on July 4. They did not fair much better agianst the North Koreans than the South Koreans had. On September 15, MacArthur was successful at the port of Inchon and North Korean forces retreated back across the 38th parallel[2]. United States forces under the ambitious Gen. MacArthur crossed into North Korea. The Chinese entered the war, defending North Korea. The war was a stalemate. With no one a victor, and an armistice was declared on July 27, 1953.

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[2] The 38th parallel is the dividing line between North and South Korea. The North Koreans crossed in 1950 when they invaded South Korea.

Americans were not only fighting communism abroad, but also here at home. On February 9, 1950 Sen. Joseph McCarthy charged that 205 members of the State Department were communists. McCarthy was chairman of the Permanent Investigations Sub-Committee on Government Operations. On April 5, 1951 Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sentenced to death for giving atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. In 1954, McCarthy began his televised hearings to investigate suspected communists in the military. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated American citizens suspected of being communists. The Committee distributed pamphlets to the American public called "One Hundred Things You Should Know About Communism." Under Truman, the Justice Department prosecuted the leaders of the Communist Party[3].

Domestically the nation remained in a prosperous wartime economy. In 1954, racial discrimination in public schools was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in Brown v. the Board of Education. In 1955, Elvis emerged as a superstar. In 1956, Dr. Jonas Salk developed the vaccine for polio and the Federal Highway Act was signed to begin work on federal highways for the ever-popular automobile. In 1958, the first domestic passenger jet flew from Miami to New York and the first U.S. satellite, the Explorer, orbited the earth.

Throughout the turmoil and fear Americans chose to look inward and strive for the "American Dream"—which was defined in the fifties by a happy family living comfortably in a home. In *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were*, historians Douglas

Miller and Marion Nowak said "People turned away from thinking about harsh realities. They turned instead to a nostalgic vision: the happy family huddling together against the visceral terror of modern times" (152). *The Woman's Guide To Better Living* stressed the importance of the family unit, "the family is the unit to which you must genuinely belong…The family is the center of your living. If it isn't you've gone far astray" (qtd. in Miller and Nowak 152). Women were the moral protectors of the family, and in turn the American way of life. In 1952, President Eisenhower said that women were the "guardians of government morality" (Rowbotham 313). It was believed that women were the traditional nurturers and consequently natural protectors. Therefore, Americans began creating "Happy Home Corporation[s]" with the husband as the head and his wife as the executive vice president[4] (Rowbotham 314).

This national desire for families and the droves of returning veterans who wanted to get married led to the boom of marriages and babies in the 1950s. In 1955, it was estimated that ninety-two percent of all Americans were or had been married. Not only were they marrying more than ever, but also younger than ever. The average marrying age in 1950 was 22.0 for men and 20.3 for women (Miller and Nowak, 147). Women had a clearly defined role within marriage. Talcott Parsons, a professor at Radcliffe University said, "The woman's fundamental status is of her husband's wife, the mother of his children" (qtd. in Kaledin 43). In *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, Farnham and Lundberg suggest that the woman is the base of the domestic and sexual pyramid and in order to preserve social order women must submit. This idea played into the minds of Americans who were paralyzed by fear of anarchy and communism fostered by the government and the media. Sara Evans wrote, in *Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America*, "in their proper place women symbolized safety and security not only for families but also for the globe" (245).

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[3] They were prosecuted under the Smith Act which made it illegal to be a part of any group that supported

In marriage women were to stimulate the ambitions of men. Mrs. Dale Carnegie, the wife of one of the nation's leading experts on how to be likeable, wrote in a 1955 article for *Better Homes and Gardens*, "The two big steps a woman must take are to help their husbands decide where they are going and use their pretty heads to help them get there" (qtd. in Halberstam, *The Fifties* 591-592). A Harvard man said, speaking about his wife in 1955, "She can be independent on little things but the big decisions have to go my way. The marriage must be the most important thing that ever happened to her" (qtd. in Evans 261). A woman was only "complete" through marriage. She could be many professions in one—a doctor, nurse, chef, chauffeur, mistress, laundress, maid, and decorator. Paul Landis believed it was evidence to the "20th century democratizing of the American home," that there was an increased sharing of household duties. In actuality, a 1953 study showed that only three out of eighteen household tasks were habitually done by men: locking up at night, fixing things, and yardwork. Landis conceded to the greater amount of work being placed on the woman by calling it a balance—although she does most of the work, she is not a slave (Miller and Nowak 156). Industry fed on the domestic woman. All advertisements for household items were aimed at women. Each new wife and mother was a potential buyer for household goods (Halberstam, *The Fifties* 589).

Those who did not marry, and did not submit to "the great fifties American Dream—Mom as the homemaker, Dad as the breadwinner, smiling determinedly in their traditional roles," were tortured by social ridicule and humiliation (Miller and Nowak 152). Paul Landis wrote in *Plain Talk for Women Under Twenty One*, "Except for the

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"the overthrow of the government by force and violence" (Zinn, 307).

[4] From the 1958 bestseller by Pat Boone called 'Twix Twelve and Twenty.

sick, the badly crippled, the badly deformed, the emotionally warped, and the mentally defective, almost everyone has an opportunity to marry" (qtd. in Miller and Nowak154). Unmarried women were even suspected of being communists (Rowbotham 312). In *Modern Woman* Farnham and Lundberg said that single women should undergo psychotherapy and not be teachers because students look up to them as role models and they "cannot be an adequate model of a complete woman" (qtd. in Miller and Nowak 154).

"Of the accomplishments of the American woman, the one she brings off with the most spectacular success is having babies," proclaimed a special issue of *Life* magazine devoted to "The American Woman" (1956). Agnes E. Meyer wrote in an *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled "Women Aren't Men," "women have many careers but only one vocation—motherhood…It is for woman as mother, actual or vicarious, to restore security in our insecure world" (qtd. in Evans 244). Between 1948 and 1953, more babies were born than in the prior thirty years combined, the greatest population increase to date (Layman 364). With the baby boom, came new schools of thought on child rearing. In 1946, Dr. Benjamin Spock wrote his bestseller, the *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. Spock's methods became widely accepted among mothers. He insisted that mothers should devote themselves entirely to raising children. He felt that any type of job or hobby could be destructive to a delicate child. Spock asserted that anything that went wrong with the child was wholly the fault of the mother. Femininity was confirmed in having children. Anyone that did not or could not have children was "emotionally disturbed" and must want to be a man, claimed Farnham and Lundberg in *Modern Woman* (Miller and Nowak 155).

The 1950s were "an economy of abundance" according to historian David Halberstam author of The Fifties. *Fortune* magazine recorded that 1.1 million families were moving up into the middle class every year. Suburbia, to many Americans, represented the "American Dream," which was in the reach of many because of the post-war economy. Seventy percent of American families wanted "green lawns, Bermuda pink interiors, and a tamed nature" (Rowbotham 327). "Being able to own a home frequently did bestow a measure of dignity on people who enjoyed working to keep it" (Kaledin 11). Twenty-seven million Americans left farms and cities to go to the suburbs (Smoler 60). Five million homes were needed after the war and the government gave the job to private industry. Levittown is the most well-known of these suburban communities. *Time* magazine reported in 1950, Abraham Levitt and his two sons created Levittown, thirty miles east of New York City, in 1948. It comprised 10,600 houses and 40,000 people, mostly young families. Each house had an identical floorplan and Levitt contracted crews to specialize in a particular trade. He could mass-produce homes because workers became skilled in their particular part of the process. A new house was completed every fifteen minutes, and cost an affordable 7,900 dollars.

To women, the suburbs represented something quite different. In her 1987 novel *The Night,* Alice McDermott writes:

> They were bedroom communities, incubators, where the stop lights and traffic lights and soothing repetition of similar homes all helped convey a sense of order and security and smug predictability. And yet it seems to me now that those of us who lived there then lived nevertheless with a vague and persistent notion, a premonition of doom. (qtd. in Rowbotham 330)

For women, suburbia meant isolation. Now in the suburbs, those who may have had the opportunity to work in the city were now confined to their 25 by 32 foot rectangle (Halberstam, *The Fifties* 589).

Public opinion placed women in the home, not in the classroom. Higher education for women was viewed as harmful, irrelevant, and frustrating. The harmfulness of education for women was illustrated by Paul Landis when he wrote that if women "placed too high a value" on getting an education they might "miss the boat" on marriage. He said that educating women would create cold, hostile shrews (Miller and Nowak 161). The New York Department Store, Gimbel's, for campus clothing said in 1952, "What's college? That's where girls who are above cooking and sewing go to meet a man so they can spend their lives cooking and sewing" (qtd. in Miller and Nowak, 160). In 1957, Margret Mead wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* about the educational dilemma of American women's education:

> Women were often educated like men, she noted, but then denied the right to dedicate themselves to any task other than homemaking. They were expected to regard homemaking as the ultimate career and the needs of a husband and a few children sufficient for the most gifted and ambitious among them (qtd. in Kaledin 59).

Lynn White, Jr., president of Mills College, wrote in *Educating Our Daughters*, that women should not study any field that employs men so that women did not threaten male livelihood. In addition, under the GI Bill[5], veterans were able to attend college with the help of the government. Colleges began accepting veterans and not women. White proposed “functional classes”—in housekeeping, cooking, child development, and interior decoration (Miller and Nowak 160). Women were essentially earning “Mrs.” degrees. Only thirty-seven percent of women who started college completed it. Many dropped out to get married. In fact, some schools outlawed married women.

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[5] The GI Bill was made law under Roosevelt on June 22, 1944. It gave veterans five hundred dollars to go toward their education, as well as a monthly compensation and benefits on things like home loans.

Women in the 1950s were leaving the classroom just as fast as they were leaving the workplace. During World War II, eight million women were working. They replaced men in business and defense jobs. Even jobs viewed as unfeminine were open to women because of the labor shortage. At the end of the war, 800,000 women had lost their jobs, and two years after the war, two million women had been fired to make room for returning veterans. Women who did work, worked harder and longer with less pay and little hope for advancement (Halberstam, *The Fifties* 588-589). The pay inequities were staggering, a man with a high school diploma made on average 4,429 dollars, and a woman with a college degree made only 3,758 dollars in 1959. Only six percent of women had executive positions (Miller and Nowak 163). Most women had service jobs that were thought tailored to their nurturing attitudes, such as clerical work, lower level jobs in education, housekeeping, airline stewardess, sales clerks, and nurses (Evans 253). Many suburban women were “demonstrators” for household products. They would go to different homes and show other women how to use their new appliances (Miller and Nowak 163). Any woman who was remotely pretty, it was assumed, would soon get married and have children, and therefore, there was no need for her advancement in the workplace (Halberstam, *The Fifties* 589). Society denied the economic and psychological benefits of work for women (Evans 255). If women had to work, it was acceptable for them to work in low prestige jobs, but a pursuit of a career was unfeminine according to Farnham and Lundberg in *Modern Woman* (Miller and Nowak 162). Paul Landis wrote that working women were in competition with their husbands (Miller and Nowak 164). A poll of men and women of the time posed the question, "Do you approve of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?" Eighty-two percent did not approve (Halberstam, "Discovering Sex" 56). Working women were portrayed as unfulfilled, unhappy and neglectful to their families (Halberstam, *The Fifties* 590). It was believed that the children of working mothers would become juvenile delinquents, atheists, communists, or worse (Miller and Nowak 164). Lawyer Reka Hoff said of working women in 1956:

> If unmarried their career is designed to "substitute" for marriage; if married, their career is designed to "substitute" for motherhood; if a mother, their career brands them as selfish and neglectful (qtd. in Rowbotham 321).

Women were working in the 1950s. The irony was that the booming economy really depended on the female labor force. In fact, a woman's income that supplemented her husband's allowed many families to move into the middle class (Evans 252).

A woman in the 1950s was obligated "to make herself infinitely sexually desirable—but finally approachable only in legal marriage[6]" (Layman 272). Women were entirely responsible for controlling sexual situations (Harvey 5). The 1950s were a sexual transition from Victorian prudism to the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies. Sex was heterosexual and only within marriage. However, Alfred Kinsey's 1953 release of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*[7] proved that there was a strong variation in what society wanted to be going on, and what was actually occurring in backseats and bedrooms across America. Kinsey exclaimed, “God, what a gap between social front and reality!” (Halberstam, “Discovering Sex” 40). Kinsey reported that half of American women were not virgins when they got married. Among married women, one-forth had committed adultery by the age of forty. Kinsey wrote that he thought it would be counterproductive to teach girls to stay virgins until they were married. He suggested that society encourage limited sexual experience before marriage. The controversy created by his book was astounding. Although the book was an immediate best-seller, critics were angered that he did not condemn his findings (Halberstam, “Discovering Sex” 42). Religious revivalist Billy Graham said, “it is impossible to estimate the damage this book will do” (Layman 273). Others criticized the limited samplings of women interviewed for the report. Clyde Kluckhohn wrote in a New York Times book review, “the honest title would have been: ‘Some Aspects of the Sexual Behavior in Human Females (Primarily Educated, Protestant, Regionally Localized, Adolescent through Middle-Aged).’” Not only were women pressured to preserve their reputations and remain virgins until they were married, an unsatisfying sexual relationship was the woman’s fault (Miller and Nowak 157).

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[6] Quote taken from *The American Sexual Tragedy* written by Albert Ellis in 1954.
[7] Kinsey conduced 5,940 interviews of female volunteers for the basis of his book.

Surely, there were women who found happiness and comfort in their roles as wife and mother, those who appreciated the security of their husband’s paycheck. There were also women who broke social barriers and stepped into a male dominated world: Rosa Parks became “the mother of the civil rights movement,” by refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man; Athea Gibson was the first African American to play in the U.S. Nationals in tennis, and won the tournament in 1957 and 1958; Lucille Ball was a hit on “I love Lucy;” and Jacqueline Cochran became the first woman to break the sound barrier. But for those who felt trapped and confined in the isolation and drudgery of domesticity there was little escape. Betty Friedan describes it best in The Feminine Mystique[8]:

> The problem that has no name…lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It is a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid even to ask herself the silent question—"Is this all?" (Friedan 11).

1960 marked the end of an era. In that year, the birth control pill came out, John F. Kennedy was elected president, and 24,000 women responded to an article called "Why mothers feel trapped" in *Redbook* magazine. The National Organization of Women (NOW) was formed in 1966. The feminist revolution had begun. From then on American women campaigned for choice and equality in education, work, sports, and their bodies. In the midst of hoola-hoops, communism, and Rock'n'Roll perhaps the growth of American women got left behind and put in the kitchen, later to emerge as strong individuals prepared to play the dual role—devoted wife and mother, strong woman and individual.

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[8] The Feminine Mystique was published in 1963. It was originally a story about Friedan's graduating class from Smith College. She asked questions, such as, "What difficulties have you found in working out your role as a woman?" What are your frustrations?" How do you feel about getting older?" It was going to be

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewee: Rosalie Iadarola
Interviewer: Amy Helms
Dates: December 22, 2001
December 27, 2001
Location: Washington, DC

Amy Helms: What was it like growing up in Manhattan during the 1920s and the Great Depression?

Rosalie Iadarola: Wow! [*laughs*] I was born in 1921, so I was a little baby. The one thing that remains vivid about that period in the Depression was that my father, who used to tune pianos and repair them, was out of a job ‘cause nobody had money to do that kind of thing during the Depression. We really were starving, in a way, I mean, we were down there. He took the test to become a fireman, to become a policeman, and for the sanitation department. He didn’t have much education because he came over with his parents, he was six, I believe, and had to help support the family, I think he went to either the forth or the sixth grade, that was about it. He loved arithmetic [*laughs*], he used to sit and do addition and subtraction, multiplication and division, but the first application that came through, as you could guess was the sanitation department. So, much to his Italian machoism, he took the job, because he had to pay the rent and feed his family. I often think, that it was very, what should I say, courageous of him, to do that because it was a great humiliation for him to take that job. But, he quit it as soon as he could, twenty-five years you could retire and he retired on the first day that he could [*laughs*]. We were able to, you know, take care of the essentials of life because of his job. And I always remember my mother, she was always very frugal, counting every penny, watching every penny, carefully. I remember going to the market, pushcart market, on the East Side of New York, 115th Street on 1st Avenue, men, they were all men, would line up with their pushcarts and they would have vegetables and fruit. My mother, would want to buy

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titled “The Togetherness Woman,” after being rejected at three woman’s magazines, the project became what many call one of the first feminist works (Halberstam b, 57).

spinach, and let's say it was nine cents a pound, and she'd say the guy down the street is selling it for eight cents a pound. So the man would say, go to the man down the street. It was fun going shopping with her. What else? Going to school during that time. Clothing, we had to be very careful. We bought very little, all of us we made do with what we had. But, I had fun. We lived in a tenement, five stories high, and there were about thirty-five kids in that tenement. I always had a playmate, if it was raining I would knock on Janie's door or Jenny's door, if she wasn't there, I'd knock on Annie's door, I'd find somebody to play with. It was very congenial. My grandmother and grandfather lived in the apartment below us. I don't remember too much about that, my father had four brothers who lived with them and I adored them, and they adored me. I was the first child in the family. I remember holidays. We never wanted to have all the accoutrements of what was considered a holiday meal. But I can remember my mother buying a beef heart for forty-nine cents, and I think we ate on it for three days because a beef heart is pretty big. She cooked it in a very delicious way. I think they called it soufflite and it was so good. But you could do that then, I mean, up until about fifteen years ago you could. With five children, I had to watch everything. I cooked my big chuck roasts for sixty-nine cents a pound, you can't do that anymore. Being a child during that period, all I remember is going to school, having friends to play with, and being with my grandma. My grandmother spoke only Italian. I spoke with her. I was down in her kitchen all the time and when she died I was devastated. I was eight years old. I can't remember anything about my grandfather dying. But I do remember my grandmother. I cried for three days. I tell you, I think because of that I couldn't cry at any other person's death including my husband's. I don't cry. I cried myself out at my grandma's death. That's what I think anyway.

AH: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

RI: I had, yeah that's another thing, I had a brother who was twenty-two months younger than I, Anthony. Eight years after I was born, and Anthony, my brother Earnest was born, and he was born with retardation. He is still alive today. It required a lot of attention on my mother's part. I remember Earnest when he was three years old sitting up in the barber's chair downstairs. On either side of the tenement house, in the middle you would walk in and go up the stairs. On either side, one side had a barbershop and one side had a jewelry store. I remember borrowing a chair from the barber, putting it outside, sitting my brother Earnest on it, and taking his picture. It is the most delightful picture, he's got blond, platinum blond hair. I don't know. Some of the things that are coming to my mind are things like we had no heat in the tenement house, no hot water, no bathrooms. The toilet was, there was one toilet at the end of each floor, each story, we were on the second floor, in the back of the second floor. Each of us was responsible for keeping it clean. It was always clean because everybody took pride in being clean. But it was cold in the winter, freezing! We would take a bath once a week and my mother and father would put this big aluminum tub, big thing. We had a combined gas stove with four burners. At the other end of it was a coal stove. We heated the only place that really got warm and comfortable was the kitchen so we always lived in the kitchen. The coal was kept downstairs in the basement. Every person had their own mini place where their coal would be stored. You've seen these aluminum, these metal covers in New York mainly, you walk over them, they open up, and they were there so that the coal trucks would put a shoot down them and the coal would go down the shoot and it would land right there. If it was your coal you would have to laboriously take it pail by pail to your spot. I remember my dad getting up at, oh gosh, four thirty or five o'clock in the morning and putting coal in the coal stove so that we could get dressed in the kitchen and we wouldn't freeze to death. Then, going down to the basement and getting more coal when we ran out. We had two pails and he would fill up and bring up the stairs. So, we really lived in the kitchen. We didn't have any fancy furniture. Then, they were called railroad rooms for a reason. The entrance would be by the kitchen, and to the right of the kitchen would be the front windows to the street and that would usually be like a dining room. Italians would have company, you know their relatives. Eating together was important. To the left, would be the bedrooms. I always had the first bedroom and everybody had to walk through my bedroom to get to their bedroom. I forgot to be modest after a while. I said, oh, the dickens with it [*laughing*] I'm not gonna bother with it, somebody pops in I'm not going to worry about it. We just were very, very careful. I remember my father working so hard, in the snow and the cold weather. My mother, washing his uniform. She worked so hard. Washing the sheets, just think about this, washing sheets on a washboard. You know when they're wet how heavy they are and then you'd have to rinse them, ring them out, rinse them again, and hang them up. She wouldn't even spend the ten cents, I think it was ten cents a sheet or a load I can't remember. You could get them wet washed, I remember, the laundry would wash them and you would pick them up wet, like wet-dry, and then you would hang them. That would have saved her a lot of work, but she wouldn't do it, she wouldn't spend the money. There were some families who did, they were just as poor, I guess it's, you know, whatever your priorities are. There were no luxuries. We never went out to eat. I didn't go out to eat until I was a working girl, never went to a restaurant, never! Our entertainment, never went to the, well, when I got a little older, once in a while I would be allowed to go to the ten cent Saturday morning movie for children, you know, young people. We would bring our lunch [*laughs*].

AH: As a child, how were the opportunities for women presented? [*Iadarola exclaims*]

RI: Uh! For me? Well, nobody in my family in all of the people around me. My mother graduated from high school, which was unusual. She grew up in Korona, New York. I don't know how that happened but she did. Women got married, had babies, and did all the housework and the cooking. There was no mention of going to college. Actually, I always wanted to be a teacher or go into biological research, where I got that idea form God only knows, I don't know. But, the teacher was prominent in my desires. I did go to an academic high school. It was called Wadley High School, and it was only girls. It was a public school. The year I graduated, which I think was 1935, I'm not sure, it became the school of music and arts and I think Linda Bernstein went there. I couldn't go to Hunter College, which was a free college for women in New York City, still there but it's coed now. You had to take a regents exam in math, English, and I think a language. I did very well. I never did well in math. I did very well. You had to get eighty-six on each of the tests. I made eighty-two, I think, in the math. There was nobody to guide you, no counselors, nothing like that. I felt like I was a failure. I didn't meet the standards. I couldn't go to Hunter. You just don't know, you're ignorant, you don’t know how to proceed. The door was closed that’s all I knew. I didn’t explore, ask for help, nothing. But I did reach out and go to NYU and registered there. I think, that one semester was something like one hundred and sixteen dollars. I remember sitting on the stairs, I even remember the coat I was wearing, and I was crying and I don’t know why I was crying. When I went home and showed my mother and my father everything they said that I couldn’t go because they couldn’t afford it. So, but I see, they were very limited in their thinking. Because, I don’t know this to be a fact, but maybe they saw four years without any income. Is that a product of the Depression? I bet it is. But, they paid for me to go to business school. Paying for the business school might have probably covered two years of college. I don’t know. Those things were not clear to me. I just did as I was told. So, I went to business school. I graduated when I was eighteen, in a year. It was a private school, there was no other way to do it. I’m glad they gave me a skill. I had a skill. I went to work for about seven or eight years. Then I got married. [*laughing*] But, I didn’t realize how much I hated the work I was doing until I stopped doing it. But, I always wanted that degree, always. I finally got it, in 1985. I went to Catholic University. I had a family then and I took two courses a semester. They were very, very, what should I say, cooperative and welcoming. Here I was this old woman in a group of young kids. I had been exposed to drama as a child in the settlement house. That’s another thing, the settlement house was very important to use.

AH: What was that [the settlement house] like?

RI: It was a building set aside for, for instance during the…see here’s s part of the Depression—WPA (Works Progress Administration). [It] was in full force. When I was about ten, eleven, nine, during the Depression. Professionals had no way of earning a living, artists of all kinds. The settlement house served the community in many ways. The visiting nurse worked out of there. They had recreation classes. I took drama there. There was a very famous woman, Evelyn Barnes Pierce, who was a director on Broadway. I didn’t know these things when I was doing that. I realized them as I got older. Mr. Fisher, this little man, with a big nose, who was tap dancer, great dancer. I took tap dancing and I was in the plays there. So, when I went back to school, and when

I got married I did some little theatre work. When I wanted to go back to school, I debated whether I wanted to go into take literature or drama. So, I graduated, and I didn't realize this 'till the last week, and do you know how old I was when I graduated? Sixty-four. I couldn't believe it myself. I didn't think of it like that. But it took me took me seven years to do because I couldn't do it full time and I was like on a seesaw trying to decide whether to go to AU, I investigated the curriculum there in the English department or take drama at Catholic U. I just…I really was on a seesaw and one night I had a dream and I don't know if you know about Father Hartke , he founded the Hartke Theatre, he founded actually the drama courses at CU. He was a drama enthusiast and he was an actor, I believe, before he became a priest and he was so active in that department that the theatre they built was named after him. He died about six or seven years ago. And I dreamt that I was at church, and I was at mass, and it was communion time and I was the last one to go up to the alter and Fr. Hartke was handing out the Eucharist and I…

AH: He was the drama teacher, he's not a priest?

RI: Yes, he's both. He was in his full white regalia—a long, oh I don't know, cassock, whatever you want to call it, very regal looking. He's got the host, he's going to hand me the host, and we have a little talk, what the talk was about I don't know. I was about ready to go back to my seat and he says, "Oh, you haven't said Amen." I said, "Oh, O.K., Amen," and he gives me the host, I take it, he kissed me on the cheek, and I turned around and went back. The next morning I woke up and said I'm going to CU [*laughs*] which I did. I was so naïve, little did I know what I was getting into. But, the first two years you take regular, prescribed courses toward your Bachelor of Arts degree. Then you a audition in your junior year to get into the department, which I did, and they accepted me. I was very surprised because I was older. I felt a little guilty too because there were all these young hopefuls, you know, and the department is quite well known and a lot of people apply to that department. But, anyway, it was quite an experience. And I did graduate in '85. So the Depression had many, you know, repercussions. I remember my, I can't remember who owned this little house in Corona, oh, it was my mother's father, whom I knew very little about. He came, all my relatives came, from southern Italy. They themselves must have come over because they were starving. But this little house, my father could have bought it for $3000 and he wouldn't do it, he was afraid to do it because so many people had lost their homes, they were foreclosed upon during the Depression because payments couldn't be made. He wouldn't do it, he was afraid even though he had the job with the sanitation department. There were many ways that the Depression infiltrated our lives for a long time. Consider my not being able to go to school. Oh, I remember saying that I wouldn't marry any man unless he was making $75 a week. Can you believe that? That's an old perspective. That was a lot of money. And I wasn't going to marry anybody from the neighborhood [*laughs*]. Which I did. My husband, the man I married, lived on the first floor. His family and my family were very good friends and he did go to college which impressed me, but I wasn't in love with him at all. He pursued me for quite a long time, must have asked me to marry him, oh I don't know, eighty times, [*laughs*] but I kept saying no. But finally he came to work in Washington, DC with the Coastal Geodetic Survey. He was a geodetic engineer. And I missed him and he would come home weekends to see me and finally I decided I would marry him. One of the reasons for that decision was that I was going to get away from New York. I liked New York, but I didn't want to have children growing up in New York City. And so I said, "Yes". I thought his jaw was going to drop to his knees [*laughs*]. But then the war enters in and he volunteered. He wanted to be in the Air Corps and fly a plane, but because of his mapping knowledge they decided he was going to do something else. We decided we weren't going to get married until he came back from the army. He never went overseas, he kept staying in the States so we finally got married and 2 months after we got married off he goes and he was stationed in Egypt with two other men and they would go out into the desert taking control points from the sky in order for map information to be sent back to the United States. And I don't know too much about it. I wonder if it had something to do with Rommel and the war in the desert? When he came back he looked around in NY for a job, but I really kind of pushed to get back to Washington, or to get into Washington so he took his old job back and that is how we landed here.

AH: How did you feel about women working during World War II? Were you working?

RI: Ahh, well, how did I feel about it? I didn't see anything wrong with it. It wasn't anything new. Lot's of women had to work during the Depression. They used to run sewing machines and I remember next door to me--Mary and Gracie. Two women, Mary was the mother and Gracie was the daughter. And they had this horrible son, ugh, a horrible violent temper, I don't know where the husband was, they never mentioned a husband and what happened to him, these were all grown children, grown in their 30s and they paid their rent and for their food, they were very poor. They used to embroider dresses with beads in the 1930s, late 1920s, there were sequins and beaded dresses, if you remember the flapper age. They had this frame and on this frame would be panels of material and they had these needles that would go in and out, in and out with the beads on it. And I remember they would give me beads to play with. Why did I bring them up? Oh, working. I saw women working. I fact I think my mother, this very vague in my mind, I think during that period when my father couldn't find a job I think she did work for about 6-7 months with a sewing machine in a factory. That's what they did. There were a few teachers, the teachers were always women. I remember Mrs. Benjamin who came from the visiting nurse association. She was tall, lean and she taught many of the women about nutrition. She would come to the home and she gathered some of the women, most of whom did not speak much English and she would teach them about good nutrition, healthy meals. My mother did pretty well at that but she was grateful for some of the knowledge that she received from Mrs. Benjamin. And Mrs. Benjamin became a friend of my mother's. So she worked, so I would see women working.

AH: So while your husband was away you weren't working?

RI: Yeah, I worked as a secretary.

AH: And that was a job that women were…

RI: Yeah, yeah most women were…there was no man that I knew that was a secretary. I never knew anybody in a profession, any woman, personally, unless you want to call

Mrs. Benjamin a professional. My brother, Ernest, who had been born retarded never had any schooling of any kind. And my mother went…they told her there was an ungraded class in the elementary school in our neighborhood and maybe Ernest could be registered there. Now this class was ungraded and it had different levels of retarded children in it and all different age groups. My brother by that time was 16. This teacher was like, she just didn't know, she had no help, no, she couldn't even go to the bathroom, she had no relief. My mother would come for an hour every day so she could have a little time to herself, but my mother was grateful that her son was in sort of a structured environment. He couldn't learn too much, very little, but he was there and again this woman became a friend to my mother. I think maybe because my mother spoke good English she had graduated and they could communicate. A lot of the women couldn't speak the language, couldn't speak English very well, spoke Italian. And then of course when I went to work as a secretary all the big jobs men had them. I don't remember any women being in business.

AH: Following World War II, the Cold War.

RI: The Cold War? Give me the year frame that was around…

AH: The early 50s…you can date it from the dropping the atomic bomb in 1945 through the 1960s.

RI: What I remember is the McCarthy days…yeech…horrible. We lived in an apartment in Southeast. A very fine apartment then, now, you wouldn't want a dog to live there, you really wouldn't. A very nice apartment, three exposures, and almost all of the families that lived on, in that whole development, it went around four blocks, in a circle, and in the middle was a playground, a big playground. A lot of them came from New York. They had no relatives here and we became relatives to each other. Living downstairs, were the Steinbergs, the Steins or the Steinbergs, I can't remember, they fought for the Rosenbergs. And there were supposedly communist cells where we were living. In fact, they were mentioned in the Congressional records. That was our, what should I say, this was one of our main topics of conversation, you know. I was really frightened with the McCarthy thing because you were guilty by association. And we had all our friends there some of whom probably were communists. In fact one of our friends was mentioned in the Congressional records. I didn't know what to do. My husband worked for the government and I felt like I shouldn't see them anymore. But, I was honest about it. I told her that I was afraid. I wasn't brave. I lacked the courage to continue the friendship with her. I wasn't a deep friendship. But, you know, still. But, we were family to each other then. Fifties. Fifties. How old was I then? Lets see, 21 from fifties is how much? I was in my thirties. 39. The Last child I had was during the fifties.

AH: 29.

RI: No. I was already married and had kids. Wait a minute, give me a pen. 21 from 51, let's say. 30.

AH: O.K. 30

RI: In '47 I had my first child. In '51 I had my second child. In '54 I had my third child. In '57 I had my forth child. And in '60 I had my fifth child.

AH: So, what was that like raising children at that time?

RI: For me it was fine because we lived in this apartment community and there were lots of kids to play with and it was a community, it really was, we made all our friends there. It was fine. Then, people began to move to the suburbs. Nobody had five kids like we did. They all had two, mainly. They began to want more room and that was the exodus to the suburbs. Slowly, began to buy homes. We were the last ones to buy anything at all because we couldn't save the money for a down payment. We finally got, I don't know, fifteen hundred dollars together and put it down on a house on McArthur Boulevard, a semi-detached house on McArthur Boulevard, which was a great neighborhood. We moved there when Mary, right after Mary was born in the sixties. I remember coming home from the hospital with her. I remember Robert, my fourth child, was born with some retardation, sitting in the armchair giving her the bottle. Now what else did you want to know about the 50s? It was fine. I was active in little theatre. The 50s wait a minute. We moved to, I don't know if this is germane, we moved to the Bureau of Standards grounds because after my husband came home from the Army we couldn't find--that was what '48? Terry was born in '47 so that was about '46, the end of '45. We couldn't find an apartment. There were no apartments to be had in this area because everybody was working for the Army and the war effort and we found this ad in the paper which asked for free rent for services exchanged and it was on the Bureau of Standards grounds which now holds all those embassies and things, I don't know if you've passed it on Reno Road. But it was a whole estate, it used to be the home of the director David Condin and the house was a grand place, huge rooms and attached to it was a smaller house but it was a house where you and I would rent. It had two bedrooms and a bath and a living room, dining room, it was a whole house. We looked at it and talked to Mrs. Condin and what we had to do was once a month take her to the market. She used to buy things in huge quantities so that she didn't have to go shopping all the time. And I would cook supper. So we said OK. We had the rent free and we had the whole house. We had all these grounds. They would plow the ground for us and we had a garden. It was great and we were right there on Van Ness Street, walked down the hill and there was Howard Johnsons. I could walk along Connecticut Ave. Made a couple of good friends with little kids there and then here goes the 50s with, what's his name, our "dear" McCarthy. He brings up Edward Condin up for suspicions of being a communist. If he was a communist, I was a communist. The house was open there was nothing secretive about it.

AH: Edward Condin was a friend of yours?

RI: Edward Condin lived in the mansion and I lived in the little house that was attached to it. Right? He wanted to face his accusers and they wouldn't let him do that. Finally, he had to leave the Bureau of Standards because it was a sensitive job and he went to work for Corning Glass up in Corning, NY. So there is another thing that McCarthy did in the 50s. You know, unbelievable. He ruined so many lives in the film industry, in the writing industry, everything, it touched everybody. So then what, where are we?

AH: Are you familiar with historian, David Halberstam?

RI: Oh, yeah. In fact I've got him on my list to read some of his stuff.

AH: He calls the 50s, for women, a "ten year PTA meeting".

RI: Yeah, that's all we did. Yeah, I had five different PTA meetings I had to go to at one time with my children the way they were spaced. Yeah. Everything was, I was a den mother for Paul, girl scout leader for my daughter, yeah that's what you oriented yourself around. Your children and your husband.

AH: What was your marriage like?

RI: Very good. We got along well. We had no secrets from each other. We had no different religions to overcome. My husband was not that religious, not formal religion, traditional. He was a good person, we had a good marriage. It was secure. I felt secure with each other. I think the kids felt secure too. At least he had a steady job. You know this is funny. He was a GS-13 when he died and Terry, my first daughter, started working for the government when she was quite young, 17-18. She took the PACE exam and got a very high mark and was hired. So she had been in the government quite a number of years and she was a GS-13 when my husband died. We raised five children on less than that. You go up the ladder, GS-9, 11, 13. But I always think about that. I never felt deprived. I always felt challenged by making things work out, never bitter, never wanting things that I, we didn't want a lot. I just went along, bubbling over with life [*laughs*].

AH: What do you feel are the stereotypes of women in the 1950s?

RI: Well, I can only answer that question by thinking about the women around me. Which was when all three of my children were born. They were all attached to their families, every single one. [*pause*]. My dear friend Elsa, was the only one I knew that had gone to college and I remember her saying to me, that she went to law school. I said, well, why aren't you a lawyer? She said, well I never took the bar exam. I said, well why not? She says, well I had all those children, she had five children, I didn't have the time. I just gave it up. I said, well to me, see, not having gone to college and wanting so desperately to go, to have gone. I couldn't understand that. I said to her, well, what is the bar exam? Can you take it now? She said, yeah, I would have to go to bar review and have to study for six weeks, take the exam hoping I pass it. Then, I would become a lawyer. I said, well, why don't you do it? Well, oh, I don't know, what am I going to do with my children? Her husband at that point had gone to Alaska for two years and she wouldn't go with him because she had the children all situated in different, like mine, they were all at different sections, different times in school, and she wouldn't take them out. It wasn't a good marriage anyway. So I said, well, she had two children who were my youngest Mary's age, and Robert's age, and they couldn't take care of themselves. I said, well you go ahead, I'll take care of the two little ones during the day, for six weeks. I don't know what it was nine to three, something like that. So, Meggie and Kristin stayed with me during that period, during the week, they played together, and it was fine. She took the exam, she passed it, and she kicked her husband out [*laughs*]. She did. She was able to sustain herself. She became a judge. I believe, with the Office of Economic Opportunity. She put her children through college. She had a lot of guts I'll tell you. So, I, you know, most women were with their children and their families that I knew in the fifties.

AH: Are you familiar with Dr. Spock's Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care?

RI: Oh yeah, it was my bible. There was also a guy called Gesell. He had a whole, I forgot what his first name was, Andrew? I'm not sure. But, he did a lot of research on child development. And it was quite the thing. I bought two or three of his books and I started with number one. This was when Terry was little. She was born in ’47. Right? What I found myself doing was comparing what she was doing to what was expected, expecting her to be doing what was happening in the book. This went on for a year or two. And I finally said, hey, wait a minute, this is going to drive me crazy. I threw the book out and I never looked at another book except Spock’s when they got sick or something, which was very common, very, very helpful, extremely so. That’s all you need. Maybe people think that your instincts aren’t enough, but they were for me because I went by my judgement, my good sense. Ya, I did some reading but that Gesell thing I didn’t want to have anything more to do with. I think, it saved me when I threw it out.

AH: In Spock’s book he says that any problem with the child is the fault of the mother.

RI: Argh. I don’t agree with that. There were certainly plenty of mothers who were at fault. I can think of one very old friend of ours. But I won’t go into that. Unless you want me to.

AH: Well do you think it’s relevent?

RI: I don’t know, if you think it is. She did, she ruined her child. He’s now forty-one, weighs 320 pounds, has all kinds of sicknesses, is mentally and physically ill, and I know from his upbringing that it was his mother’s handling of him. I know it, I was there from when he was in her womb, before he was born. She was threatened by him, in some way. I don’t know how, but she was threatened by him. Everything went wrong after he was born. O.K.

AH: I have an excerpt from a high school home economics textbook. I want to know what you think about it? (See Appendix I)

RI: I need my eyeglasses. I think if you have to do all these things on a conscious level, say good-bye to your marriage. If you can’t relax and use your common sense for making a good environment at home then forget it. After all that's your main job, that was your main job then. So you automatically took into consideration certain things. You would always have dinner, after all your children were also hungry. You would try to have a congenial atmosphere at the dinner table. We always ate dinner together. You know, that was mainly it but dear God, use common sense, "don't complain if he's late for dinner, arrange his clothes, offer to take off his shoes." He can do that himself!" Speak in a low, soft, soothing and pleasant voice," now that is real stupid. I did listen to him, yes that was important. "Never complain if he does not take you out to dinner or other pleasant entertainment," I wouldn't even think about doing those things. We had no money. [*laughs*] Oh this is really wild, "you wash the children's hair because they are God's creatures and he would like to see them playing the part." Who wrote this? [*laughs*]

AH: A high school textbook.

RI: Oh, and this was addressed to women only. What about the men that read this thing? Didn't they take home economics? I guess they didn't. I took home economics.

AH: Were there boys in your class?

RI: Remember I went to an all girls school. But there were coed high schools in NY and I don't know whether the boys took. My husband went to a coed school. I just think this is very laughable, most of it is.

AH: Are you familiar with Alfred Kinsley's Sexual Behavior in the Human Female?

RI: A little bit, not too much.

AH: Can you remember the reaction of the public?

RI: The Kinsey's report, is that the one? Yeah, it was quite shocking. I never read it. I don't know why. I read things about it, but I was busy. I was so busy taking care of everything. [*laughs*] I just knew these things in passing. I would read about them or hear about them on the radio but I didn't have time to go into depth on anything.

AH: Do you agree with historian Michael Elliot's interpretation of the 1950s as America's "golden age"?

RI: No, I don't know. Any age is golden if there is peace reigning and most people have jobs and can sustain themselves. In the 40s there was the war and people were coming back from the war, in the 50s they were adjusting to coming back from the war, making a life for themselves. What's wrong with the 60s? Well, that whole revolution of the young people. I guess if you want to call it that, but it certainly was like a plateau. The 50s was like a plateau between the 40s and the 60s. Yeah, it was a plateau.

AH: Speaking of the 60s, are you familiar with Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique?

RI: As I said, I never read any of these things for myself though I knew about them.

AH: This is an excerpt. (See Appendix II)

RI: I didn't have, I told you I was very busy. I never felt cheated, I was happy during caring for my children's needs, my husband's needs. And, of course in the 60s I got very involved with starting in '66 with because my son Robert was retarded and my husband and I had to pay for private school for him from the time he was four years old and we had four other children to educate. I was very uneasy with that public school system. They all went to elementary school, and then past that I really had misgivings about sending them to public schools so they went to parochial school in the neighborhood. I am really glad that I did that. It wasn't really for religious purposes, but I knew that they were educated properly and with some discipline, curriculum wise and behaviorally. But because of all those expenses which at that time were not like they are today but still for us were, it was you know a challenge to handle. The thought came to me that if my son Robert was normal he would be occupying a seat in the public school. So I went to the Department of Special Education in District and asked them to pay me that amount that it cost them to keep a child in school. I was told by Dr. Stanley Jackson who was head of the department of special ed. then that they only paid tuition grants, he called it a tuition grant, for blind, deaf and severely emotionally disturbed. So I went home and pondered that and I felt a great sense of injustice invade my body and it kept getting stronger and stronger and I became angry that I was being cheated, my son was being cheated out of every citizen's right to an education, a public education. I had gone to see him the end of a term, school was going to close the end of May or something like that, come September I get a call. I didn't know what to do I simmered all that summer, I simmered. Stanley Jackson called me in September and said that a parent wanting approximately what I had asked him for was going to make a presentation in front of the Board of Education would I like to come and stand up and bring some other.

December 27, 2001

RI: Yeah, Stanley called up because [he was a parent, he was a father] his son had died. Had a child, a girl, in Forest Haven, which was the district's institution for the mentally retarded. It was an infamous place, I believe it's closed totally now. It took a few years for that to happen, but it's closed. He felt that his daughter instead of sitting there doing nothing should be entitled to whatever education might enlarge her potential. So that is what he asked for in this little paragraph, a heavily accented tone, he had a very heavy accent, Romanian, something like that, Bulgarian. You couldn't understand what he was saying. Dr. Jackson asked if I would like to stand up while he made this presentation to the Board of Education and if I could have other parents present which I did do because at St. John's, about six, I think, I'd have to think about the sequence. We were about six parents and we stood up. Well, nobody could understand what he said. That's what put the germ in my head to maybe start, what's the word, making a noise [*laughs*] before the Board of Education about changing the tuition grant policy. Unbenounced to me, in the same school, at St. John's, there was a parent, Rosemary Stearns, who has a child, a son, Stephen, going there and they lived in the neighborhood. It was so wonderful to find someone who had the same problem. No two problems are the same in retardation but you have, you know, a basis for becoming friends and we did. And her husband had always been involved as an advocate since the time their young son was born with retardation. He became my mentor. And Bob and I went at it with the Board of Education, beginning with them, with the DC Council, it went on and on, it snowballed, and went to Congress and we fought for very specific things as we learned what the needs were, we didn't know ourselves. They claimed to have education for the retarded. They also claimed that there were no retarded children in the District of Columbia school system. They had two trainable classes, but the educable retarded classification was not represented by any special approaches or programs in the school system. Tuition grants was a dirty word in the District of Columbia because it smacked of preference for white people. Only white people could afford tuition. But we fought for the inclusion of everyone if they didn't have a program in the public school system. And that emerged into a regular procedure. When you requested a tuition grant, you had to have proof, medical proof of your child's condition. You had to determine that there was no program in the public school system, which was an easy thing to do. Several other things, you could have a lawyer with you. But that system still prevails today. You had to fight, in other words, for a tuition grant knowing that the program in the public school system did not fit your child. And the Board of Education finally changed tuition grant policy to include any child, for whom they did not have, a special education child, for whom they did not have a program in the school system. We also got the Department of Special Education to be funded under its own budget. Prior to that it had been funded under the elementary school budget which was limited. Dr. Stanley Jackson became a whole department under its own budget. They also changed the system in pupil personnel on testing all kinds of things. And then, I mean, it was a long time and a consuming job. Two other parents joined us who were very effective. Peggy Gorham, who is dead now. Bob Bostick who has Aheimers. Wonderful people, and really, almost single-handedly the four of us achieved all these changes. I don't know if this fits, but it is kind of interesting. At one point, I was going around to the different private schools which supposedly had special ed. programs. And there weren't that many around. I was at the

Kennedy Institute telling them about how they should get up on their horses and start getting publicly founded programs for their children. Because all of them were paying tuition in private schools and, you know, it adds up. Low and behold, after the meeting I'm approached by this man who says he wants to help. He had a young girl, a daughter, in Kennedy, and it turns out to be Jim McCord who was in the lead the Watergate group in the infamous, you know, what did they do, they broke into the Democratic party, right? But he generated more papers then anybody I ever met. It became evident that we just couldn't fight for the retarded, we had to fight for the handicapped in general. So we had changed our title from, I forget what the heck the first title was, but the second one was Concerned Citizens for Exceptional Children. We really made fantastic gains, but with all gains there are repercussions. I guess I still see them today. But, we did make some specific, important changes. For a long time, around I would say the seventies it was almost like a spontaneous phenomenon. All over the United States, parents were beginning to feel what I had felt a few years before that, that their handicapped children had rights. It really was a phenomenon because there was a groundswell all across the United States of demand for programs which resulted in a few years into federal legislation. The Education Act for the Handicapped, oh gosh you think I would never forget, I forget some of these but there are about 4 or 5 laws dealing with the needs of the handicapped in the United States which made a big difference. I did mention didn't I about President Kennedy being influential when he was president because of his sister he had been exposed to the problem. He waived the tests for the retarded to work for the federal government, to gain employment in the federal government. There's a new schedule, Schedule A, whereby if you are retarded you don't have to take a written exam. You are judged according to your performance level physically and therefore many, many hundreds I would even say thousands of retarded individuals are now employed by the government. Unfortunately Robert did not have enough academic ability to do the kind of work that was required like in the mailroom. Steven my son-in-law did try to get him a 3-month position in the government but he couldn't follow the instructions. Jobs almost have to be tailor made. You have to have someone in charge knowing how to train this person and I'm sure if Robert had had someone repeatedly, repeatedly show him what to do he would have done it. I know it. But nobody, there wasn't enough guidance. That period of my life lasted from about 66 or 65 til about 78. My husband died in 78. I started a respite care program in the district which finally was incorporated in the Maryland Association for Retarded Citizens. The District wouldn't take it from me. It was funded through the Public Welfare Association, public welfare foundation and the Cafritz Foundation. I won't go into detail but it was very helpful to parents who had no relatives and have a retarded or handicapped child never can get away and this made it virtually a volunteer program because the fee charged was $1 an hour. We gave them some training, St. John's helped me to set up a training program for the volunteers and finally my friend Peggy Gorham got it incorporated into the Maryland Association for Retarded Citizens and then into the Montgomery County social services committee. It is still there. But between my father's illness and my husband's illness, they died within 3 weeks of each other. I had to get out. I had to stop. I had to cut all my activities out completely like you cut out a cancer. That's the point at which I decided to go back to school to start at Catholic University. During the 50s when my children were being raised there was a rumor yes, but I think a lot of people who felt like this about the Vietnam War. We really didn't know what it was all about. It wasn't clear cut about what was going on over there. We used to listen and read, when you have four little children in your charge and there are so many things you have to do everyday that are more important than anything else. And it's true, they are more important so I am not surprised your questions don't bring that in more.

AH: Well the Vietnam War was a bit later, but I want to go back to what you were saying about the infamous institute in Washington DC, I wanted to know what was that like?

RI: Forest haven. It was way out in Maryland somewhere, now I can't remember, and it was very badly staffed. They had one room in which not only were the clients retarded they were physically handicapped in fetus positions and had to be diapered and fed. Not an easy job for anyone and it was so far out in Maryland I don't know who wanted to work there. It was just ill conceived and it had been there many years. In fact, there is still a suit. Howard Evans and his wife Betty who were part of my group by the way, I worked with Bob Stearns, Robert Bosdick, and Peggy Gorham. We got a group of over 200 parents together, united, in our area. Howard and Betty had a daughter at Forest Haven and they fought to have changes instituted and they have a suit going way back I'm sure to the 60s if not the early 70s and it still has not been settled. Their daughter was damaged and I also know another little boy who was burned almost to death with 3rd degree burns by being put under a hot shower. Lots of things, it was just terrible, a terrible place, terrible. That's another thing. Deinstitutionalization was another act that was passed federally. Many institutions, I won't say most, are closed now and that was the beginning of group homes. Different methods of housing and caring for the retarded took place after that. They had to have some place to go. It's always argued that those handicapped individuals that are so, so badly defective that they have to be in diapers and fed they need institutions, but I don't agree with that. Although group homes can become small institutions, parents always have to be on guard. If a child doesn't have parents who care, that's very sad. Because nobody really takes good care of them, not very often. I know several young, they are not young anymore, people who came out of Forest Haven and are now in an apartment. Some are in group homes, but the ones I know are in an apartment. It's Summit Hills near my son who has his own apartment there. They live down the hall. Barbara is 66. She was in Forest Haven almost since the day she was born. She's quite retarded, but she is so happy. Several others, there is a dance every Christmas and every spring which takes place and the first time that Robert was in this apartment at Summit Hills we became friendly with Barbara and the other two girls that lived in the apartment. They have supervision with Kennedy Institute. I invited Barbara to go to the dance with us and she said, "oh, I have no money" she doesn't speak too properly. I said that's alright, it's not very much I'll pay for you and so she came. She had a great time. The second time there was a dance I invited her again and she said, " oh, oh, I have the money. I'm working now." You know what she does? She works three mornings a week, she puts the paper things on the McDonald's trays, the little whatever you call them mats, and then she fills the children's box with the toy. And she loves it. Oh, she loves it. She runs down the hall and brings me the three dollars, so proud. She was just wonderful. When I first met her I said, how do you like being in the apartment. Oh, Oh, she says, so much better than Forest Haven, I love it! I love it! [*laughs*]. She's so cute. She gets good care, she happens to have a wonderful counselor. So, the movement itself produced a lot of changes and then because group homes are so expensive the apartment concept came into being, which is where my son is with supports form his family and from the Kennedy Institute and because he lives in Maryland. Living in the district as far as social services are concerned, just give up, that's all. To work in the district for any change is like climbing Mount Everest four times, you do it, you do it. In Montgomery County you might have to climb Mount Everest one and a half times. In fact, there was a headline today and I didn't even half to read it to know what it was going to say. I just know it. Metro. It says, helping, no. Well I'll find it, but I saw it. I knew what was happening. They are not doing their jobs. [*looks for the article*]

AH: The other question I had, was that you mentioned the repercussions of some of the work that you did. What…

RI: Well, well the one main thing that happened was the District public school system was not about to hand out two thousand dollar tuition grants or whatever the amount might be. Although they did, at the insistence of the parents, each one had to make it their own fight. And we helped them, coached them, and went to the meetings of the Board of Education with them. Congress, I must say, was always very receptive to our presentations for money in the budget for the district schools, special ed. They were quite helpful. But, the district claimed to institute programs that were appropriate, but again they had to be challenged and they were. And that hat takes time and parents are still challenging the district if their child is placed in a public school program that is not adequate and they feel that there child is not… there is a process that you can go through that is better than what it was. They can't say that they have something if they don't have it. So they're being challenged all the time. I'm surprised to hear that that's still going on, but that's what you can expect from the district. If Robert…What other repercussions were there? I can't remember. But that's the main one. Also, you know, special ed.'s budget swelled as the years went on and people are complaining about that they think that the funds are being siphoned from regular education and there's another fight that's going on. I don't know what happened with testing. I know it changed. But I have no idea where it is today. There was something I wanted to say, what was I saying before that. I think I finished but I can't remember anything else about that. What did you ask me?

AH: The follow-up question was what are the repercussions?

RI: All that legislation. Would you call it a repercussion or a development, a part of the outcome of the movement, but it was a repercussion because no one paid attention to the needs of the, before that, churches, were trying to do a job. But they couldn't, they couldn't, they were so ill-prepared. And private schools you had to pay for them and they were not as evident as they could have been and should have been. We had five children, and to pay out fourteen hundred dollars a year for Robert from the time he was four was a lot of money for us. But, I know what it was I wanted to say. I'm glad that Robert is situated in Maryland because we were talking about Mount Everest because he is funded partially by an act that came through Developmental Disabilities Administration. It helps to fund living expenses for the retarded, and I guess physically handicapped individuals who are trying to live independently, but with supports, like Robert in his apartment. He receives help with his rent. Help with a percent of his utilities. He has a fund for job supportive employment if anything happens to him, somebody comes on in and either helps find him another job or straighten out what is going on which is very important. Robert doesn't need that so much, but others do. They need to be trained in their jobs. Also, he gets some money toward his rental housing opportunities commission which does a great deal because the first two and a half years he was in his own apartment I had to pay for everything. Plus, he only made about six hundred dollars a month, which of course I'm so grateful and happy that he works at Georgetown University in the animal research lab. He loves his job. He has three pet rats which he leaves there, fortunately, or we would have them here [*laughs*]. But, before that, I had to scrounge up the money on my widow's pension and I was forced to rent a room in order to help out. I couldn't do it financially. So that all of these things made a big difference, the funding. But if I was in the district forget about it, O.K. Oh, if you lived in the district and you wanted their support you had to waive your rights to your child. They became, that's right, it is still that way today. I wouldn't give up my rights to my child to anybody. So there you are that's why I am so grateful for reasons I can't even go into right now those are the main ones that Robert is not in the District. I cannot abide the way the District is run. I cannot abide it.

AH: I want to ask you this question, from your current perspective looking back how do feel overall about the 1950s?

RI: I told you I think in terms of being with my children, working. And Robert of course was a problem. But it was a challenge. I have a retarded brother who is 73 so that when I discovered that Robert had some retardation is wasn't until he was over a year old. I knew he cried more than my other children, I knew that he walked more in his crib than other children, that he wasn't speaking on time or walking on time so that he required a lot of attention and attention to what was going to happen to him as he grew. There were no facilities for him. So the 50s, he was born in '57, I remember when he went to the district, there is one thing I enjoyed about the District of Columbia, they have a recreation program for preschoolers and we lived in the Palisades area off McArthur Blvd. And it was great, it was a play program and the parents give up one morning a week to help out which I did and during that time it was fun living in that area. I became secretary for the Palisades Citizens Association, and we put on a 50th anniversary show, which I produced from my little theatre experience, which was great fun, great success. Mt. Vernon let us use their auditorium. It was very challenging period for me—the 50s—raising the children, finding out what to do with, when you have a child like Robert you always have to be on guard. For instance when he went to preschool the first year he was fine. Mary my daughter who had been born in 1960 was going to the same program and in the beginning Mrs. Dubord lead the group, she had been an experienced kindergarten teacher. Everything went smoothly. The second year someone else took over the program and one month into it, the second year, she comes over to me and says, "Mrs. Idarola I think your child needs testing." And I knew what she was going to say and I was very patient and said, "Yes, I know he has been tested by the Children's Association, I can't remember down on 13th St., I know that he has problems, that he is retarded. But I think this program is adequate for him, besides which there is no other program for him." I kept thinking about that and wrote her a letter explaining maybe she should think about how she views Robert, and how, yes, how she views him and maybe it's that view that she has of him that is a block for her.

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INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Invariably, at the start of every history course students are plagued by the question "why study history?" Historian Frank Luttmer said, "an understanding of the past is fundamental to an understanding of the present [and] also provides unique insight[s] into human nature and human civilization." ("Why Study History") In other words, history allows us to gain insights into the past therefore, avoiding past mistakes and better understanding the present. Oral history has a unique role in our understanding of the past. Historian Edward Hallett Carr said that history is "a dialogue between the historian and his facts" (931). Oral history is what is often left out of historical facts. It is the emotion behind events. Historical texts often leave out the stories of the common person, especially marzginalized groups such as immigrants, blacks, Native Americans, and women. The stories of women in the 1950s can only be heard through oral history. My interview of Rosalie Iadarola, in her late twenties and early thirties in the 1950s, gives insight to the untold stories of a woman's life in "the golden age" (qtd. in Smoler 60). The interview mirrored much of my research, but allowed me to see the frustration and good times that surrounded the period for women. Without her story, the triumphs, fears, sorrows, and desires of women in the 1950s would be incomplete.

Oral history perfects the work of the historian. Historian Edward Carr says that the historian must be selective in their facts. American philosopher Carl Becker argued that "The facts of history do not exist for any historian till he creates them" (qtd. in Carr 928). In other words, historians determine what is worthy to be called an historical fact. Therefore, one must understand the biases of what historian Arthur Shlesinger Jr. calls in his *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, our "unconscious preconceptions." Only by looking at all forms of history—traditional, revisionist, and oral—can one truly grasp the significance and historical value of an event. Although it is impossible to eliminate presentism from the study of the past, oral history can allow a person to recall how they were feeling at the time of an event, demphasizing modern biases. In addition, oral history adds a quality of enjoyment that is lost in traditional, factual historical text. It adds humor, sadness, frustration, elation, and indifference. However, it does have its weaknesses. Oral history, like all historical sources, is biased. Nationality, background, values, race, religion, age, sex, class, and profession can all cloud the presentation of an event. For example, the Battle of Little Bighorn, 1876, commonly known as "Custer's Last Stand," was a crushing defeat for white forces under General Custer. White versions of the battle claim that they were overwhelmed by 2,000 to 7,000 Indians; a stark contrast to the 800 to 1,200 estimated by Native Americans in an oral history written by Joe Marshall and two co-authors called *Soldiers Falling into Camp*. Clearly, conflicting points of view can alter facts and that should be understood in the study of oral history. Memory can also be a factor. It may be difficult to accurately recall events and details, as well as focus on a particular event or time period.

In hindsight, the oral history project, although trying at times has been a wonderful experience in my historical education. One of my greatest challenges, one that all historians face, was to be objective. As a young feminist of the 21st century I battled by presentist biases. I was shocked to discover that Iadarola was relatively content in her role as wife and mother; she did not know anything else. Some of my questions may have steered her to my own view of the 1950s as an oppressive period for women. In addition, I would have liked to focus the interview more on the 1950s. Her other stories, such as her campaign for a tuition grant for her son, were fascinating, but my follow-up questions should have focused more around her experiences and memories of the fifties.

The interview reveals that women were not prohibited from being professionals or having an education, as my research suggested, they were discouraged. Complacency is the best word to describe the period. Iadarolla calls the 1950s, "a plateau between the 40s and the 60s" (11). After the turmoil of war, people were content in their lives and placed great faith in their government. That bridged the gap with the domestic turmoil of the sixties. This attitude of acceptance is best illustrated in Iadarola's deep desire for an education, after falling short of a passing grade for entrance to Hunter College, Iadarolla says,

> There was nobody to guide you, no counselors, nothing like that. I felt like I was a failure. I didn't meet the standards. I couldn't go to Hunter. You just don't know, you're ignorant, you don't know how to proceed. The door was closed that's all I knew. I didn't explore, ask for help, nothing. (3)

Another interesting point raised by the interview was that the domesticity of the 1950s for women was the exception in America's history of women working. While women were always wives and mothers, working was the norm. In the Depression, women had to work to help support their families. During the war, women assumed the "Rosie the Riveter" role of working in the factories to help aid the war effort. Lastly, although, the 1950s were a frightful time—of communism, of not fitting in, and of McCarthyism—Iadarolla was happy and content in the suburban community in her role as a wife and mother, "I never felt cheated. I was happy…caring for my children's needs, my husband's needs" (11).

The interview with Iadarolla made very clear that not all women were bombarded by social stereotypes perpetuated in the media. For example, my research alluded to the fact that the views of Dr. Benjamin Spock in his book, *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (1946), were accepted by most mothers. Iadarolla who was influenced by childcare books by Gesell said that,

> What I found myself doing was comparing what she [oldest daughter, Terry] was doing to what was expected, expecting her to be doing what was happening in the book. This went on for a year or two. And I finally said, hey, wait a minute, this is going to drive me crazy. I threw the book out and I never looked at another book except Spock's when they got sick or something. (9)

In addition to Spock, when asked about *The Kinsey Report on Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) she responded, "I just knew these things in passing. I would read about them or hear about them on the radio but I didn't have time to go into depth on anything" (Iadarolla, 11). When shown the way women were supposed to act when their husband's came home from work in the home economics textbook excerpt, Iadarolla laughed,

> You know, that was mainly it but dear God, use common sense, "don't complain if he's late for dinner, arrange his clothes, offer to take off his shoes." He can do that himself! " Speak in a low, soft, soothing and pleasant voice", now that is real stupid… Oh this is really wild, "you wash the children's hair because they are God's creatures and he would like to see them playing the part". Who wrote this? [*laughs*] (10)

Clearly, not all women were controlled by the popular ideal of how to be a wife and mother. My research also showed that many women in the suburbs were miserable. Iadarolla enjoyed the sense of community and opportunity it gave her. The most important discrepancy between my research and her feelings was the contempt expressed for the lack of opportunities for women. Iadarolla expressed her happiness in taking care of her family.

My research also confirmed much of what Iadarolla said in the interview. The widespread fear of communism and McCarthy, the lack of professional and educational opportunities for women, David Halberstam's interpretation of the 1950s as a "10 Year PTA meeting" for women, and the desire for a steady income and stability were all verified by Iadarolla.

The unanswered question left from the interview was, why was there a women's rights revolution in the 1960s and 70s? Was it a product of the fifties? I would like to continue the interview and find out what Iadarola thought about what she called "that whole revolution of the young people" (Iadarola, 11). It would also be interesting to interview a woman who broke social barriers in the fifties who, for example, got an advanced degree, had a professional career, or did not get married. Also, I would like to interview a “Rosie the Riveter” who gave up her job in the factory to work in the home.

In the study of the 1950s this interview may not be the most defining resource, but it does contain the story of one woman who lived through it. This interview is extremely valuable when used in conjunction with other sources. However, to gain the overall picture of the 1950s, one would need background research as well as interviews of women from all walks of life. One can see the purpose of this more complete picture of the past when one refers back to the question, “why study history”—to avoid mistakes and better understand the present. Using oral history as a complement to other sources in the study of history, one can understand more clearly the impact of an event and the motivations behind it.

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