Andrews: This interview is being conducted with Eleanora Ballasiotes on behalf of the Washington Women’s History Consortium, for the 1977 Ellensburg-Houston International Women’s Year conference’s oral history project. The interview is taking place on January 29 at Eleanora’s home in Fircrest. And the interviewer is Mildred Andrews. Eleanora, at the beginning, would you tell me briefly about your growing up years? And your family background, community, school?

Ballasiotes: Sure.

Andrews: And how you developed your ideas about your role as a woman in the home and in society.

Ballasiotes: Well, I’m the eighth of eleven children. My father was very undereducated. He got as far as the fourth grade. Then his father was killed. It was a different era completely. His mother was widowed and expecting another child. And so he didn’t go any farther in school. He was brought up by a Catholic mother. My mother was a Swedish Lutheran from Iowa. And she was graduated from the eighth grade, and was far better informed and educated, and loved to read.

But in growing up in this family I realized, as I got older, that poverty, number one, is not a good excuse for failure. A big family is not a good excuse for failure. And lack of education is not a good excuse for failure. But optimism, determination, pride in family and home, and willingness to work are probably the things that I learned from there. But number one, education was a primary tool. It was crucial to have a halfway decent education. At least to be able to read and write and compute, and have some knowledge of the world historically and geographically. Because if you don’t have history, you don’t have a background of some sort of American world history or geography, you’re going to get lost in time or space. So that only what happens in front of you today, is what counts. Which brings rise to the moral behavior of anything goes. And if it feels good, do it. And what I do now is all that really matters. How’s that for a mouthful?

Andrews: That’s wonderful. And the second part of my question was how did all of this background develop your ideas about your role as a woman in society? The education part, you said. But I’m just wondering if you want to elaborate a little more.
Ballasiotes: Well, I was the only one in our family who did graduate from high school, which is interesting. Because of circumstances during the Depression, and in the Second world war and so on, my brothers and sisters went on to work. Well, I really believe that it was extremely important, and a matter of pride. I wanted at least one of us to graduate from high school. And the three younger ones under me, I hoped that they would, too. But I knew that I needed to have that education. And what was the rest of that question? I get off, I talk too much sometimes.

Andrews: Oh, no. You don’t. I was asking how all of this helped shape your ideas about your role as a woman in society.

Ballasiotes: Well, it didn’t take me very long before I knew that I had some talents and that I could go into drama. Because everybody told me I could, and I needed, desperately, approval. So the stage, from junior high onward, was a good place for me, and it didn’t take long for me to discover that I did have some rudiments of talent in art, the art field. So there were lots of things. Teaching. I loved children. I could teach. And I felt good about nursing. By the time I was nineteen or twenty I thought, you know, all of those are good careers, but I’d probably get real screwed up in the dramatic career. I thought I’d go to Hollywood, you know, and I’d really mess up my personal life.

I thought about all those things. I couldn’t think of a better place to exercise all those capabilities than to be a mother, to be a housewife, to raise a family. I felt that I could do a good job. And I realized somewhere along the line, in American history class or somewhere, I don’t know, but the foundation of a strong nation is a strong family. You have to have a family that’s based on morality. If you don’t have a religion, you’ve got to know the difference between right and wrong, go back to teaching the Ten Commandments, which I wasn’t aware of in school for many years. But at least I learned at school and home, you didn’t lie, you didn’t steal, you didn’t cheat. You didn’t run around with somebody else’s husband or wife. You did believe in God.

I thought also, if you see a broken family, you have not only a broken home and broken lives that come from it, but you’re also going to have a fragmented chip off the foundation of our country. I determined, I really wanted to be a homemaker. I just wanted to do my little bit there and raise nice kids, good kids, and let them do better than me. Help them get an education, live a productive life.

Andrews: Well, that’s a great introduction, the way you’ve developed it from your own home, I mean, your family home, to your home with your own husband and children. And I know you had four children.

Ballasiotes: Yes. They have nice children, too. They each have three, two boys and a girl. And it’s almost like they came in a litter, because there were three grandchildren. And then nine were born in three-and-half years. Would you like to see a picture?

Andrews: [laughs] Love to. Should I put this on pause for a minute? [pause] Okay. Now we’re continuing. I want to go back to something you wrote in the questionnaire, Eleanora. You talked about growing up during the Depression era, and about World War Two, and some of the impacts those periods had on your thinking.
Ballasiotes: Well, the Depression, I was born in ’31. So I spent my next thirteen years in the Depression. And looking back, I think it had its embarrassing times. We were always worried about the day we were going to get weighed and measured, because we weren’t sure if we were going to get caught with holes in our socks. Isn’t that crazy?

Andrews: Was this at school?

Ballasiotes: At school, weighed and measured. And then another time I remember, and it probably made one of the biggest impacts of my life. My mother called us to the kitchen one morning. We always packed our lunch to go to school. And that’s an interesting lunch, and you ate hiding under your newspaper. Your lunch was wrapped in newspaper. And so you’d unfold it and eat here, so nobody else would see what you were eating. Mom gave us a note one morning, and I remember her eyes were wet. She said, “Take this to the principal.” Mom was asking for a free lunch for her children, and it broke her heart to have to do so.

And now here we are today. Look where we’ve come down the pike. We’re not in a depression. We’re in the best times of America, you know, economically. And how many people are given free lunches and free breakfasts? And this broke Mom’s heart, because she had the fiber in her to be self-sufficient and not ask for food. And so it was very different then.

And then to add insult to that, well, when I did get my free lunch, that was a pretty long buffet. There were all kinds of good things in it, I had never gotten. I saw that there was pudding, and Jell-O, and fruit cocktail, and lots of sweet, nice things well as staples. And I remember taking my tray down and filling it up with those sweet things, which were unknown to me, basically. And the principal snatched my tray and said, “You’re not going to eat that.” And she took it back and filled it with something else. And I thought, oh, I’ll never do this again. So that did make an impact in the rest of my life, I’m sure.

Courtesy to children that are in need is extremely important. It can make a lifetime impact on them. But the ability to feed your own, and care for your own, is also extremely important in my mind. Look what happened in forty years. Demanding that our children be fed in school. Demanding free lunches, free breakfasts. Demanding the right to abort our own children. Protecting the right to abort our babies?! That, to me, is the most horrible thing that’s happened in our history in the last forty years.

Andrews: And you said that World War Two and some of what happened there had an impact on your thinking about that.

Ballasiotes: What did I say?

Andrews: You mentioned the Nazi death camps.

Ballasiotes: Oh, yes. I didn’t realize during the war that, you know, until after the war, when we were exposed to those things. You know, the atrocities that took place against the Jews and homosexuals and the handicapped, retarded, and women, were forced into
pregnancies and then forced into abortions for their various experimentations. And those things were all horrible! Atrocities.

But here we are in this nation of so much, the foundation for the free nations. First time everybody had the rights under God. And here we are, aborting our babies?!! Voluntarily? Fifty million in thirty years is beyond my comprehension. Beyond your comprehension. What is fifty million babies? I’ll tell you what it is. I just saw a map of this country, just a couple of months ago, from a pro-life organization. They asked that question, what is fifty million? Well, it took out the whole center. All the blue states, or the red states, you might say, of the United States. Idaho on east into, almost east to the Mississippi. Fifty million people. If you want to lift fifty million people out of the country, that’s what you did.

Andrews: That’s a very dramatic illustration.

Ballasiotes: It’s from 1973. And actually, from this state. In 1971, we legalized abortion by a vote of the people, which was the first time it happened in this country.

Andrews: This gets us moving on towards the International Women’s Year conference. Before we do that, when did you come to Washington state?

Ballasiotes: 1945.

Andrews: So what were your major affiliations and networks in the 1960s and ‘70s?

Ballasiotes: My major affiliations in the 1960s?

Andrews: Mm hmm.

Ballasiotes: Well, I had four kids by then. So one was just starting kindergarten. So that was my basic affiliation. And I’d just decided I was going to join the Greek Orthodox Church. My husband is Greek, but he hadn’t really been affiliated with the church. But we did baptize our babies in that church. But until then, the priests all spoke Greek, and it meant nothing. Then there was an American born and English speaking priest, and so I said okay, I’ll go see what it’s like. And I found my church home, is what happened there. So that was that. We’d been attending an almost nondenominational congregation. And it was making some changes at that time. My husband had gone to congregational Sunday school, but my life was basically school and church. And I played a little bridge. My husband just opened his drugstore in 1963. So I was really very housebound.

Andrews: Was that in Tacoma?

Ballasiotes: It’s in Midway, Washington, north, up I-5. And that’s a nice story. That drugstore is probably the number one compounding pharmacy in the state now. My husband turned it into compounding. And he started out by himself. And when we sold the place, we had six pharmacists there. He’s a success story in his own right. His first language was not English.
Andrews: Yes. And just for the record, his name is George Ballasiotes.

Ballasiotes: Right. And he’s done a lot of independent research and come up with alternative medications. For example, he was one of the frontrunners in this state in alternative, in natural hormones for women, as opposed to the chemical hormones. So that’s one of the backbones now of that business up there, is treating women with natural hormones. Anyway, I lose the question. Oh, it was basically the kids.

Andrews: Were you involved in your husband’s business?

Ballasiotes: Just slightly because of the four children.

Andrews: Sure.

Ballasiotes: I tried that. But babysitting is not satisfactory. And then also, are you familiar with Shaklee products?

Andrews: Somewhat.

Ballasiotes: Basic H products? Well, I was introduced to that just about the time we opened the drugstore. And I was the first one in Pierce County to have Shaklee products. I was so excited about it because I could see it was going to take a lot of work, but it was a biodegradable, and there weren’t biodegradables around at that time, in ’63 and ’64, that I know of. This was important. We want to keep the place clean. So anyway, this was a good product. So I hired a babysitter for a while, and I was going to go out and sell that stuff. And it didn’t take very long for me to realize, no, no, no, no, you forget, I may come on the top of that, it was a pyramid thing, but then I’ll probably be visiting my kids at McNeil Island federal penitentiary.

So I did find a lady, I signed up a lady, and she owned a little grocery store here in Fircrest. Her name was Helen Reesman. And I just hung in there with those folks and persisted that they try this. That this was better than their dying grocery store. I bought my everything from their store as long as they were open, because I really believed in independent businesses. I said, “You better look into this stuff.” Well, they ended up being probably the number one salespeople in the nation. She said, “Oh, Eleanora, stay with it, stay with it, and you could make a fortune.” But no. What I was doing with the kids was more important.

Andrews: Okay. Well, now we’re going to move up to 1977, the time of the Ellensburg conference.
Ballasiotes: Well, by then, I was already very much involved in my concern for public education, and the failing of what was happening. In 1977, it was a disaster. And I traced that back to, with the help of the Tacoma Public School, 1965, with the federal government getting involved in our education.

And by then, I was also very much involved in the anti-abortion movement. Because in ’71 was the referendum to – I can’t remember who sponsored that darn referendum. I think the women sponsored that referendum, because there had been a lot, apparently, to forbid abortion on demand. I can’t remember. It was a Referendum 20, it seems like. So I was snatched. So they dragged me into that campaign, because I am the eighth of eleven children. “What do you think of abortion? What would your mother have done? Why didn’t your mother; how did your mother happen to have eleven kids?” And so on.

Andrews: Who was it that brought you into this?

Ballasiotes: It was a very loosely formed organization at that time, the Human Life Organization. It was to counteract that referendum. So I became a speaker. And how old was I in ’71? I was just barely forty, and hadn’t really done any public speaking. I guess my first public appearance had to do with being opposed to a federal funded education program that my grade school was going to get involved in. But that’s how I got involved in the anti-abortion issue.

Andrews: And then when did you first hear of the International Women’s Year conference in Ellensburg?

Ballasiotes: That summer of 1977. I was concerned about, basic education. Very concerned that the federal government was involved, because he that pays the piper is going to call the tunes.

Andrews: So many of the conservative women said that they didn’t know anything about the conference until about two weeks before.

Ballasiotes: Well, I had seen something in the paper about it, and I thought, “Oh, go for it, girls.”

Andrews: So you were registered then.

Ballasiotes: Not really. But I was concerned about the women’s movement, to a degree. You’d pick up a home magazine, and you see the comparable worth type things. You know, “Look, you as a housewife, why are you spending so much time doing nothing or volunteering your work, donating your work. And you’re worth this much outside the home.” You know, from chauffeuring, cooking. So those things did alarm me a little bit. I was concerned about the women’s movement, but I didn’t connect the two. These little charts will show you, from 1972 to ’75, the downhill swing in every skill subject, in every class in the Tacoma School District. [Tacoma Public Schools, Office of
Evaluation, “A Longitudinal Look at Districtwide Approximate Mean Grade Equivalent Scores on Standardized Tests”]

Andrews: That’s appalling.

Ballasiotes: Absolutely appalling. I believe, ’65 is when we started getting our first of the federal grants. I was appointed to a committee to study needs. And there’s a much more graphic chart that I wanted to show you. I’ll probably run across it. I know how important it is for kids to learn to read and to write and compute. See, these charts track the basic skills. This didn’t take into what they were sloughing on history, or sloughing on geography, which were very important. You had to have a foundation in history to know where you are today. And geography, for God’s sake, because if you don’t know anything about geography, you’re isolated in your little tiny space. You can’t relate to anything internationally, or nationally.

So anyway, all these things showed me how serious it was. And I will find that other chart. Because it showed how ’65, we were at this level. But then two-and-a-half years, well, this is just ’72 to ’76. Four years, there’s that much decline. Four years! And I started raising hell at the school board, and made a presentation on that subject. And after being on that committee, and we were summarizing what the various schools were requesting for additions. It was called “Building a Budget from the Bottom Up.” And it was going to be a culmination on the grade schools’ needs, and so on. So we read those requests of each school. And it seems like there was not one math teacher, in view of these failing district-wide results, there wasn’t one new math teacher requested, not one. No new literature or English or language teachers. Nothing. But every school wanted additional counselors, and that kind of thing. And that was the pattern.

And I said, well, what are we doing here? Are we trying to educate, or are we trying to counsel? So that was a burning issue. And I made no friends. And finally pulled out my youngest at the junior high level, and put them in, I wish I’d done it before, put them in a, you know, opted out of public education.

Andrews: Did you put them in a private school then?

Ballasiotes: Right. It’s just a local school. My son was a tenth grader, and he was going to this new experimental Foss High School, where this shooting just took place this last, couple of weeks ago. That was the first year it was open. And they were tracking kids, they were putting the kids in four groups according to academic abilities. And also, they were merging all of these basic things, history, literature and world studies, I guess, into four little team things.

And my son, I discovered after the first quarter, was in the bottom level of the four teams. He was in the bottom. A neighbor boy across the way was no greater than mine, and yet my son was put in this bottom team. Understand, he played music. He did very, very well in algebra, science, and geometry. And I don’t remember if he was in language at that time. But why was he in the bottom level of this other stuff?

So I went up and I really needed an explanation. Well, they showed me his records; they said, “Well, he’s right where he should be.”
I said, “Really? Would you like to show me why you’ve determined that he’s in that level?” And they showed me his first and sixth grade academic, or IQ scores. I still have those. And here on the top, and it was mimeographed. Here on the top, it was 95 percent. Actually, he was in the 95 percentile in the nation. But they read that as his IQ. And so I was just furious. I didn’t have the sense that I do have now. I should have sued them. I should have sued the district. Instead, I pulled him out of English and history and literature, and transferred him over to Bellarmine, which is a private school. And all he had to do was walk over a hill, you know, to go to those three. And he didn’t argue with me. He was probably glad to be out of there.

And then the following year, I had a ninth grader, and I just didn’t monkey with it. We took her out of public school at the end of eighth grade and put her in private school.

Andrews: Well, I think that explains most of the answer to my question about specific events that spurred your thinking about the changing roles of women in home and society. And certainly the issue with the public schools, and your need to be an advocate.

Ballasiotes: Yes. And there were very few people by that time that were involved. Because in ’75, there were women that were going to work; they didn’t have time. I certainly didn’t feel qualified to be debating college . . . That’s when I came into my own. I’d read the charts, learned to read the charts, to figure out what’s going on here. So who were the advocates for the kids that are in school? There weren’t very many. I really tried to throw that ball in the lap of many college graduate couples, who wouldn’t have a thing to do with it. They wouldn’t touch it. So I just had to go on my own and round up other parents. There were a few. And so that was the main issue, the number one issue. And then the second was, of course, the abortion issue. I felt so strongly about that.

And then in answer back to your question, how did I decide to go to the International Women’s Year, well, someone called me. And she had been tracking it much more than, I hadn’t been tracking it. And she also tracked education, and still does, to my knowledge. And she tracked this Ethical Quest in a Democratic Society, which came into being about that time. And that was a totally humanistic educational movement. But anyway, she called, and assumed I was going. And I said, “Well, no, I really hadn’t planned to go.”

And she said, “Well, you know, they’re going to be making a lot of resolutions to Congress. And education should surely be one of those things. And certainly, abortion is one of them.” And she knew that those were my two biggest concerns. And this humanist education movement. Are you familiar with that?

Andrews: Well, I am somewhat, but I’d love to have you talk about it.

Ballasiotes: Well, to me, I was totally, totally surprised and appalled that there was such a movement. The thing that dovetailed precisely with this Ethical Quest in a Democratic Society. And this was a federally funded program. And much to do with the fact that Tacoma was selected as the school to write a program, An Ethical Quest in a Democratic Society. I thought, my God, they can’t even teach them to read and write, and here they are, going to teach our kids morality! And what is right and what is wrong. So I went
into that, and found that it was diabolically opposite of what I believed. That there is no god. That’s a little bit involved to get into this now. But when I found the Humanist Manifesto that declares in no uncertain terms that they believed that there is no god, and there is no right and wrong, you make your own choices. And that judgments must come from the individual. Well, you’re dealing with partial truths, and building on it. And that’s like, start out and let the child make up his mind from the day he’s born, almost, if you don’t have that.

So anyway, yes, I went, I don’t remember who I drove with, rode with, or where I stayed. We must have stayed with friends, because by then the arrangements had already been made, apparently, for houses to stay. So we didn’t stay in any dorms. We didn’t stay in a dorm room. Or maybe even had a motel. I don’t remember. I was just so overwhelmed by the impact of so many, many women in one place. And I didn’t, you know, I wasn’t really much of a, other than going to church or the PTA. And there was such a marked difference in them. You know, the women, the ones that were out in the courtyard, I felt like I could definitely relate to them a lot better. And some of them had strollers with their little babies. They had little ice bags that they kept dampening things for their, you know, it was before the wipes, the day of the wipes. Little ice bags with water in them to keep washing, you know, to cool their babies. And finally the babies kind of disappeared. It was too warm outdoors.

But I had the feeling of being in a holding pen, and what is going on here. I didn’t really have the full background of, we knew that there were going to be workshops. And my hope was, and I came armed with some of this very same stuff, and a little presentation, hoping that I got into an educational workshop. Or into an abortion, anti-abortion workshop, whatever it was going to be called, and was going to speak against it. But I don’t recall that I even got that far in there. I’m not sure that I even got into a workshop.

Andrews: What were your impressions? You talked about the conservative women that you said you could relate to better. What about the others?

Ballasiotes: Well, the other women looked very angry and very mean. They looked rude and mean. They looked very troubled. I didn’t see any smiles. Of course, they were the ones that were having to deal with this. It was a confrontational thing. It surprised me about women and women. Of course, I ran into that earlier, in the abortion movement. And I did not buy the program that legalizing abortion was for the sake of the safety and well being of the Catholic woman who already had eleven. I couldn’t relate to that world. [laughs] “They shouldn’t have to have that . . . ” You know, “They shouldn’t have to have that baby.” Well, look, you’re talking to the wrong person. I know you don’t have to have these babies. Condoms were out when I was conceived. I saw that the women were different. Whenever a woman is going to argue for the right to kill her own unborn, they’ve got a different look on their faces. Just a different look. Or if they’ve done it. How many grieving souls.

Andrews: That brings tears to your eyes, I can see that.

Ballasiotes: Excuse me.
Andrews: Here, I’ll turn this off for a minute. [pause]

Ballasiotes: So, where were we?

Andrews: Well, during the pause, you brought up the topic of racial integration

Ballasiotes: I feel that it made it very, very hard on the black kids. And then as a result, the kids that were going to school with black, in our junior high that was integrated in a more natural way, with kids, people moving to the neighborhood. And there were lots of people. This was not a lily white community. And those schools that the kids were going to, they got along very well. It was a natural integration. Thank God for open housing. Because then everybody had the right to live where they wanted to live. That was solving the problems of school integration.

Yet somebody got involved in the federal government in deciding. Of course we were having to deal with the problems of other parts of the country, where integration was a crucial thing to do. But then it flowed over, you know, the grant writing, and “there’s money available for integration.” Not to say that there was no prejudice. I’m from a very prejudiced city where I was born. For twelve years, I was embarrassed over the things that I saw there. But I saw that that was all wrong. And it was wrong to assume that coming from another Tacoma neighborhood, those kids weren’t going to be as capable. The bottom line is, give everyone the skills to do it. But to me, all those experimental programs that were going on with federal dollars were destroying what was if not an excellent education, it was at least average.

Andrews: I think you’ve already talked about some of this. But were there follow up activities that you participated in after the Ellensburg conference?

Ballasiotes: Oh, yes.

Andrews: Talk about both short and long term.

Ballasiotes: No time was wasted. That was the same year as the creation of the Washington State Women’s Commission. [Governor Daniel Evans established the State Women’s Commission in 1971. (ed.)] You’ve got to be familiar with that. That the women’s commission was approved by the legislature. And out of the International Women’s Year, those women, I think Aline Carroll was one of, yes. Was one of the women that said, ”Hey!” They filed a referendum against the women’s commission. And I definitely was part of that, at least here in Pierce County. I still have some of these little fliers. [laughs]

Andrews: You still have fliers that you handed out?

Ballasiotes: This one was coming out. I mean, I got on the ball. I got busy with the Mormons in this neighborhood, because they were the leaders in collecting signatures here.
You had to get that on the ballot. You know, if someone filed a referendum challenging the International Women’s Year. No, challenging the women’s commission. It’s amazing, you shouldn’t throw anything away, should you? Because here’s a copy of the referendum.

Andrews: Oh my goodness!

Ballasiotes: And the law in the back. That’s August 25, 1977. The signatures had to get in. And actually, as I recall, they collected twice as many signatures as was required. Twice as many signatures to get that on the ballot.

: Then, you probably know this, you probably know this already. But the women’s commission was repealed by 75 percent of the voters.

Andrews: Yes. Yes, it was. I’m just going to read the front of the brochure that you just handed me, Eleanora. Just so we have it on the recording. It says, “Do you want feminists, women’s lib, to have their own tax-funded commission?” In bold letters, “No! Safeguard the moral, social and economic integrity of the family. Vote no on referendum 40.” And then it continues with more arguments in favor of this position. So you waged a very effective campaign.

Ballasiotes: Well, I don’t know how much money we had to spend. But I put up this flier.

Andrews: You did this yourself?

Ballasiotes: I did this myself, based on a talk sheet that they had given. So I just reproduced the arguments and put it in there. And we weren’t getting any material down here in Pierce County. So I put this up and got their approval, and printed it myself.

Andrews: I see. And this brochure, the sponsor is Women for Integrity in the Nation.

Ballasiotes: WIN. Just WIN. Aline Carroll was the chairman.

Andrews: And she was from Edmonds.

Ballasiotes: Mm hmm. You can have that.

Andrews: May I? I’ll make sure it goes into the archive for this project. Thank you.

Ballasiotes: I don’t have another one of those. But anyway, just being very brave putting women’s lib in here. I showed this and wanted someone to go through this with me. And
he said, “Well, why don’t you put women’s lib in there? That’s a key objection to it.” [laughs] So that’s what I did.

Andrews: Well, it’s a powerful brochure, I must say. Very well organized.

Ballasiotes: Well, those were the issues there at the time. In reading this law for the women’s commission, I just felt my gosh, that’s going to be probably one of the most powerful commissions in the whole state. They had authority to go in and go through businesses and decide if there’s discrimination. Which seemed to me like they were a bunch of female Nazis going to go in and tell businesses and the state and everyone else, you know, their opinion on what was going on there as far as discrimination was concerned.

Let’s see, “The commission shall examine and define issues pertaining to the rights and needs of all women, and make recommendations to the governor, the legislature and state agencies in respect to desirable changes in programs, laws” Well, that didn’t bother me. They were doing that. “They shall further advise such state agencies on the development and implementation of policies and so on.” “They shall,” well, that was really giving them a lot of power. And our argument was listen, we have legislators that are there to represent us as women. We don’t need a women’s commission to look out for us. If anything, we can speak for ourselves. That was the primary argument.

Andrews: That was the primary argument.

Ballasiotes: Yeah. They’re certainly not our protectors, that women’s commission wasn’t.

Andrews: Well, it’s obvious a lot of people agreed with you. From your perspective, how have women’s lives changed since the conferences? And in what ways have they stayed the same?

Ballasiotes: Oh, I don’t think women’s lives have stayed the same at all, in many respects, because the anti-discrimination laws basically helped, in my opinion, basically helped the professional women. They’re the ones that benefited. But so many of the women I know, they worked on food lines and in food packing companies down here. And when we ratified the Equal Rights Amendment in Washington state, their lives changed dramatically. In the sense that they were no longer in jobs that they were qualified for based on their bodily structure. There was anger out there, and they paid a price. They paid a very big price with having to take the same job that men would take. And that meant picking up the heavy cartons of foods, the cases of canned goods, and hoisting them on over to the such and such. It didn’t last very long before these women were falling off the job and going after unemployment compensation for hurt backs, and ending up in welfare. I can cite at least three excellent cases of that. They hated the Equal Rights Amendment. They got paid a little less than the men that were doing the heavy work, and they were begging for their jobs back. And owners said, “No, we can’t do that. Sorry, ladies.” So there was a certain amount of bitterness on the part of many women
who were doing that kind of labor. As opposed to the women that were, you know, battling in the structure of, the corporate world.

Then there’s the matter of the women who wanted to stay home and take care of their children. And because of the Equal Rights Amendment in this state, she was equally responsible for their, what do I want to say, their expenses.

Then there’s the matter of the federal government’s cost to women. Programs cost money. They still have to pay taxes, whether they’re married or single. So many families, now, have to have two salaries to make ends meet. So she has to go to work. If she doesn’t have a college degree, it’s her loss. She has some problems. So she’s going to start at minimum wage, for starters, as an opening. But it won’t take long. Minimum wage doesn’t last very long. If you’re doing anything at all, you’ll get up there to nine, ten, eleven dollars. But she has to do this. So somebody pays the price. Usually it’s the kids at home, especially the kids that are in preschool or in nursery. How many millions of babies are in nurseries? And that’s the price. You pay a big price for federal involvement.

How many millions of children are diagnosed with ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder] today? And I think there’s a definite connection between ADD and nursery babies. Look at a baby who lives in a nursery eight hours a day, the prime time. And he or she may, should develop some human bonding. So it makes an emotional connection with hired help that may not be there tomorrow. So when Mother picks them up at 5:30 or six, she’s supposed to have a bond? She’s supposed to somehow bond with that child? How’s she supposed to bond with it? The relationship between is very dramatic, in my estimation between the more babies that got into nursery care, definite correlation by the time they’re in kindergarten and first grade, more are decided to be ADD.

So, yes, women’s lives have changed dramatically, and not to the good, in my estimation.

Andrews: You make some very compelling arguments.

Ballasiotes: Well, we do have women who, they’ve succeeded up the corporate ladders. And I’m very happy for them. But they don’t represent the majority of women in this country. The majority of women are still having to work their guts out. And come home, and then try to keep a family going. Maybe there’s a husband that helps. Maybe she’s getting him trained to help; maybe not. And there’s another thing. I know you’re running out of time. But I’ve always felt that the equal rights, and the right to choose, right to have an abortion, those were, I mentioned, I think, on my questionnaire, that those were issues that men benefited through those. They absolved themselves of responsibility. You look at the single families, you look at statistics, and I didn’t do that in preparation for this. But the statistics of the black community, of the women that are single parents, and the men. We’ve taken the manhood away from the black man. In thirty years, we did that. And I’m going to lay part of that blame on the women’s lib movement, the radical women in this country who pushed that. I lay much of the blame on them. Now, what else do you want to talk about?
Andrews: I just want to thank you so much for all of the perspective that you’ve given to this, the candor that you’ve shown, the very persuasive arguments. I will be interviewing Dolores Gilmore and some others that you mentioned.

Ballasiotes: Oh, good. I saw that list. Yes, I looked, I saw that list. I said, oh, that’s good. I haven’t been in touch with them since some very dear friends of mine died.

Andrews: Since you mentioned them in the interview, I thought it was important to add that to this.

Ballasiotes: Right. I’m glad. Dr. Kathleen Skrinar who’s here, in this book [The Story of Ellensburg] here, she’s my mentor, as well as Dottie Roberts. You asked about mentors. Kathleen was my first mentor. I met her through the pro-life movement. And yes, and we were very much involved. We became very much involved for ten years on three things that were important to me I mentioned. And that was the pro-life movement, education, and the election process. And we spent ten years together in the battle, here in Pierce County fighting for, to maintain an honest election process, trying to stop punchcard voting here.

We were one of the few counties in the state—I think there were five others, that still had the old lever voting machines. And we proved beyond any question of the doubt, that they were safer, cheaper to run. And people felt they were safer. Not near as much opportunity for fraud as the electronic systems. And in King County at that time, you had converted to punch card voting. And we were going to be getting punch card voting by 1982. And so we filed our first referendum in Pierce County under our new charter in 1981, to challenge that implementation of punch card voting.

And we ended up having to take County Executive Booth Gardner to the state supreme court, because he was going to deny us that right to referendum. And we did win at the state supreme court in March 1982. We had our first referendum, and we won by 75 percent. But for some reason or another, this state was determined to convert. And we proved, no question—

Andrews: So do you still have the old style balloting in Pierce County?

Ballasiotes: No. We did eventually lose. It was our third referendum when we lost in November 1991. And they implemented the ballot scanner. And then quickly dumped the lever voting machines. But they had proven to be half as expensive as the ballot scanner system.

Andrews: Oh, boy.

Ballasiotes: Really. Very suspect. And as I say, if there was any opportunity for fraud with the lever voting machines, you had to go in and mechanically manipulate the machines. If one had some question, one could impound those machines and go have someone check them out. And as it turned out, we did have to do that once. In our own election, we impounded the machines.
Andrews: Oh, my goodness. [laughs]

Ballasiotes: And found that it wasn’t in the mechanics of it, but it was in the printing process. You know how invariably on a ballot, you always have the yes’s first? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, when there were measures? Well, on our measure, they reversed on the ballot, on the front of the machine, the no with the yes in some of them. And so when people thought they were voting for us, they were voting for the ballot scanner. And at the end of the day, it wasn’t very long before the phones started ringing off the hook from precinct committee people who said, “Hey, something’s wrong. We’re losing by 30 percent, when we should be winning by 70.” That’s the way it was.

Andrews: Interesting.

Ballasiotes: Yes.

Andrews: I’ve enjoyed this so much. So in summary, is there anything else you’d like to add? I think you pretty well summarized it right then by getting to the election issue.

Ballasiotes: Yes. There again, so I feel like we’ve lost them all. Education is a total disaster, not only in Washington state, but in the country now, so we’ve lost that battle. Abortion has run rampant. And the pro-family things that we fought for. The rights of parents to be declared innocent until proven guilty on the subject of child abuse. But in a court of law, you’re innocent until proven guilty. But in children protection services, get a hold of alleged possible child abuse from parents. Well, I don’t know what that was a vehicle of. But there were a lot. We’ve lost a lot of battles in the pro-family movement.

Andrews: Well, again, thank you so very much.

Ballasiotes: You’re welcome. You didn’t expect me to talk that much, did you?

Andrews: Well, I learned a lot. This has been fascinating. And I appreciate it again.

[End Interview.]