Andrews: The following interview is being conducted with Jean Dance 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 March sixth, 2007, at Jean Dance’s home in Bellevue. The interviewer is Mildred Andrews.

As a beginning, Jean, would you tell me briefly about your growing up years? Your family, your community, your school? Essentially how you developed your ideas about your role as a woman in the home and in society?

Dance: You better tell me how much you want to know. [laughs] I’m a talker. I actually was born in a little town, in Garland, Utah. My father was a teacher and my mother too before the children were born. But my dad has always been a teacher. He earned a double Ph.D. in theology and counseling at Stanford in the summers while we children were growing up. So we grew up feeling that education was very important.

Another contributing factor was my Swiss-German great uncle, my grandmother’s brother. He was the gentleman that helped found Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho, when he first immigrated over here to this country. He was not only a teacher in his homeland of Austria, but he was the type of teacher who could do anything. He could play any kind of an instrument that he put his mind to. I do not remember how many languages he could speak, read and write. But as far as a young kid, it was mind boggling. I did not ever know him. He had passed away when I was born. But I heard stories from my grandmother, of course, of her beloved brother. So education was very important in our family.

I went to school just a couple of years in Utah and loved it. Then my dad was transferred to Minnesota with our church for three years.

Andrews: This is the Mormon Church?

Dance: Yes. He was an administrator there in Minnesota, Minneapolis, for three years. Let’s see, I would have been like eight to eleven. So this was astounding to me to live in a big city after a little small town. We loved it, learned to ride the bus very well, all that sort of thing. Because of his job, his assignment, my mother would go with him sometimes. So we had to learn how to be hosts for visitors at a young age. So this is where I learned to be okay with myself. When we came back to Utah, I became the greeter in my new schools, because I wasn’t afraid to meet people. They had me meet the newcomers, and so on. I found out the best way to make people feel at ease was to make fun of yourself, so they can say, oh, I can do that. And so I had a lot of friends.

Somehow I started getting into administration. I was the junior high student body vice
president, and a class officer in high school. Then as a senior, I was in charge of the yearbook. That was interesting, because that was during the war years. And so everything was changed in that there wasn’t enough money to do everybody’s picture individually, like all the yearbooks you see. In our yearbook, this would have been 1943. We had to line up the class and take the pictures from the balcony. So we got a whole group at the same time. And I always felt bad about that, because you certainly don’t get the full faces like you’d want to. But we had a close class, and they were okay about it.

In 1941 when war was declared, we wanted to help, but as high school kids, of course, there wasn’t much we could do. But the girls in our sewing class made what I think now were the ugliest uniforms I’ve ever seen. [laughs] We went down to the USO and served refreshments to the army guys that were stationed up at the college. We weren’t allowed to dance with them. We were too young. A few girls did anyway, and ended up marrying the guys.

So I was introduced then, so to speak, to the broader world, not only by the big cities of Minnesota, but now to the army personnel. The army units were still stationed at the Utah State University when I went to school there. In fact, the Home Economics Building was not even available for our use. We even shared the Field House for athletics.

My sister had been Coach Romney’s secretary for three years. I wasn’t nearly as good as she, but when she graduated, I became his secretary for a couple of years. It was peculiar during the war years. Coach Romney had to field a football team with whoever was available. We had one fellow on the team, who had a false leg. He was a good kid. I thought that was pretty darn good to be on the football team. [laughs] You hear of runners now with false limbs, but of course, at that time, it was most unusual. We had a pretty good football team for the war years.

I had stayed in school politics. I was the freshman representative, so I was on the student council for three years, and was still there when David got home from the service, and was elected to the student council. So as seniors, we were both on the council working together, and decided that we liked that very much and were married the next year.

So, that’s my upbringing -- love of family, God, education, and administration, and not being afraid of people.

Andrews: That’s great! Did you get your degree in home economics, then?

Dance: I did. And I taught for three years there at the university.

Andrews: And this was the University of Utah, right?

Dance: No. Utah State College, a land-grant college in Logan, Utah. Now it is called Utah State University.

Andrews: Now, let’s jump forward to the 1960s and ‘70s, and if you want to fill in the space in between, that’s fine. I’m just wondering what your major affiliations and networks were.
Dance: By 1960 we had five children. I had another little boy in 1965, but he didn’t make it for more than a day. I had a little girl in 1969, so that makes six children. During the fifties, living in Yakima, besides being a mom, I was a volunteer teacher in our church children’s program, called Primary, and also helped with my son’s kindergarten class.

We lived in Yakima for five years for my husband’s job. Dave was with New York Life Insurance Company. We also lived in Boise for two years until he was transferred back to Seattle in 1961. Making the big circle, as we had come to Seattle in the first place in 1951, spending three years here during the Korean War. During that three years, I taught classes in our women’s group, called Relief Society. I enjoyed that. I mostly taught a literature class, using the poems and stories of Keats, Shelley and all the famous ones of that English period.

Andrews: Could you talk a little bit about the children’s group, what you did with them?

Dance: The name of the organization is Primary, like a Sunday school, only on a weekday. It was children from the age of three years to twelve years, Boy Scout age. In Yakima I was the area leader for the three year-olds, called the Moonbeams. I would go to meetings to learn how to do that, then would teach the teachers, show them my posters, etcetera. Each age group has it’s own name: four-year olds are Sunbeams. Our church baptizes the children at eight years old. We figure that’s the age of accountability. So we have the classes leading up to that. They’re called CTRs, and they actually have a ring which says CTR on it, which means “Choose the Right.” It’s a great organization. In Seattle I was the adult leader of the whole group, about a hundred children at that time in our congregation. Now it’s about twenty-five.

My neighbor, Doris Wilkins, was the music leader and really knew how to teach children how to love music and love to sing. I worked in this organization for about ten years and then switched and worked in the women’s group, Relief Society, again both as a teacher and a leader for another ten years or so. Then in the ‘70s, I taught “Fascinating Womanhood” for five years in peoples’ homes or church classrooms, depending on where the organizer wanted it. I remember teaching in churches in Issaquah, Queen Anne, St. Joseph’s in north Seattle, and many different homes to classes of about twenty women. I also taught in my own home.

Andrews: I’m intrigued to hear more about “Fascinating Womanhood.” I understand it was very important in terms of conservative philosophy, if that’s the way to put it.

Dance: Well, it was great. It came almost at the same time as the feminist movement. People’s marriages were breaking up. So the whole point of it was, “You’re a fine person as a woman, but why drive your husband into the sand, just because he’s a man? He’s important, too.” This was the whole thing. If you’ve got a marriage, then it’s a team; you don’t have to be a doormat.

Andrews: How did your husband go along with that?
Dance: He went along with me fine. But I think all guys at that time, without realizing it, were what we call chauvinists now. They didn’t realize they were. Their moms did everything in the house usually didn’t even have their own checkbook, while the men did everything outside the home. That’s the way the kids were raised, just seeing what their parents did. I feel, myself, that it’s gone too far the other way now. You watch TV shows and the dads are made fun of. No wonder families are falling apart. The dads have no respect from their family.

Andrews: That book certainly had an impact.

Dance: It was good. I had good classes, and everybody seemed to appreciate them. Some women were really having trouble with their husbands; they were so domineering. We’d learn how to say things, say, “What do you think about this idea?” rather than bursting out with your idea first. You do and say things in a nice way.

As my little grandma would say, “You catch a lot more flies with honey than you do with sandpaper.” [laughs] This is basically what the whole course was about—just be nice. We live together, let’s be nice and support each other.

Another part of Fascinating Womanhood that I like to remember is the importance of being a good mother. One of the important thoughts was—“When the world needs a general, a statesman, or a prophet, etcetera, God sends a baby.”

Andrews: Who could argue against that? Dance: Another thing that I remember, probably before Ellensburg. Someone called and asked me to fill in for a lecturer at the Seattle Community College, because they knew I was a “Fascinating Womanhood” teacher. I should have listened better who I was to substitute for. They were expecting a talk about the feminist movement. I tried to tell them, “You’ve got the wrong person. I’m a mother and I love my family. I’m not a feminist.” I’m sure they didn’t come to hear what I had to say. I told them that I was going to talk about family, and I did.

I showed them a picture of, a woman, president of our Worldwide Relief Society (an organization a hundred-and-fifty years old with approximately six million members now), and they said, “What is this supposed to show?” I said, “She is a woman and a mom in charge of this large group of women, but she is not a feminist. Look at her smooth, beautiful, happy face. I’m sure she’s over sixty, but she doesn’t think she has to act hard like a man, and she loves her family.

Andrews: Do you remember her name?

Dance: Yes, Barbara Smith, Mrs. Douglas Smith. They had dinner with us one weekend when I was president of the local group of women in Magnolia-Queen Anne. I wished after that I had told them about another president of the Worldwide Relief Society, I had met in the fifties. Belle Spafford was her name. She had been president for over twenty years and was responsible for the church saving grain before and during the war. This, then, was available to send to the starving people in Germany during the “Cold War.” I wish I had told the college group about both of them, because it seemed to me that the feminists at that time had the view that Christian or conservative women didn’t have the
smarts to do such intelligent, capable, fore-sighted things, especially as both these women had happy marriages and families.

Andrews: Okay. So that takes us up to about the time of the conference, doesn’t it, in 1977?

Dance: Yes, I got a call from my neighbor and precinct leader, Judy Quinton, telling me about a meeting in Burien that we should go to. I had been a committee member and PTA board member for quite some time and was part of a phone tree to let other conservative moms know what was going on. Judy had always been way more knowledgeable about current events and politics than I ever was. I was just a mom, while she worked in the public sector and knew such people as Ruby Chow, a city council woman. So I would take my guidance from her as to what was true or false. But being a career person, working all the time, she couldn’t do some of the things that we as committee people did. A whole busload of women went down to Olympia a couple of times when she couldn’t go, so she probably doesn’t remember them all. They were probably PTA moms and went because of something about the family, I’m sure. One time we each carried a red rose.

Judy said that Susan Roylance from eastern Washington had called and said something like, “There’s a women’s conference going on in Ellensburg and we need your support. So I called my telephone tree and they called their telephone tree. This was only in our church, I think, at this particular time. We ended up with a nice big roomful of people to hear what Susan Roylance had to tell us.

Susan had brought two young women with her. The one I remember the best had a big thick brown braid. I thought she was very attractive. Her name was Sharla [Glover]. The other young woman was Kathy Carr. The two of them told us about the women’s conference. I don’t remember what they said, other than that as many of us could, should go over and lend our support to the conservative women. And we did. Years later, this Sharla with the dark brown braid that I was so attracted to, was now my daughter-in-law.

Andrews: Your daughter in law? [both laugh]

Dance: Several years later when I talked to her about the meeting, when she was my daughter-in-law, she said, “Mom didn’t you know that was me?” And I said, “How would I know that was you? No, you didn’t have the thick braid and I didn’t remember the names of either girl.” So, no. I didn’t know it was her until she told me years later, after she had married my son, that she was the pretty one with the dark brown hair. [laughs] She was at the conference in Ellensburg, I’m sure, but I have no remembrance of that.

Andrews: What happened after the meeting?

Dance: The meeting had been in or church building on Ambaum in South Seattle. That, I presume was the week before the conference. I know that it wasn’t too far before as we really had to hustle to call others that hadn’t been at the meeting to see who could come.
Judy Quinton was the driver of our car of four passengers, as far as I can remember: Beverly Hubbert, that was the first time I had actually met her, although I’d heard Judy speak of her many times; Judy; myself; and Mary Murray, a single college girl. She stayed the whole time with me and we became buddies, as MS [Multiple Sclerosis] was getting my legs, and I was using a wheelchair for traveling at that time. She managed the wheelchair in the elevators, in and out of doors, moving across campus, etcetera. I could not have managed without her.

But anyway, when we got there, we pulled up in our car, and went right directly to the main meeting. Someone came and talked to us and said that we should have blue and white ribbons, because we were supposed to be a part of the blue and white coalition – conservatives, I guess. I don’t remember wearing any. I believe someone told us there weren’t enough to go around. We did not realize we were entering a fight. We thought we were there to support something, not fight something.

So we went to all the different groups, chose who was going to go where, and spoke our piece for what we believed would help in holding families together. Actually, I thought we did really quite well in the proposals and the supporting and everything that was going on. I had no idea that we were considered as interlopers—and that someone had alerted them the day before that two thousand uninvited women were coming.

Andrews: Susan Roylance told the planning committee, that.

Dance: [laughs] There weren’t any two thousand of us.

Andrews: What’s your estimate?

Dance: Judy thought there were about forty, but we had no idea of the three or four other groups Susan and the girls talked to, how many had responded—but we couldn’t think of more that forty or fifty. Judy and I had a good laugh about that the other day. We didn’t realize our rather small numbers had given everybody such an excited problem.

Anyway, we went to the various workshops and did our best. I remember one that I went to, I really felt involved. It concerned government child-care centers for working moms. I had been set on being a career person. I just married my husband too soon. I did teach for three years and loved it at Utah State University. I thought I would get back into the drapery field after our first son was born and we were living in Seattle in the Service, if I could find somebody nice to take care of my baby in the daytime. When I went looking at the neighborhood places that were available to take care of children, I thought “No! I’ll take care of my own baby.” These were my thoughts at Ellensburg, maybe a company day-care center of something close to work, but not a government-run institution.

Andrews: Were there other issues that were of major concerns to you?

Dance: Besides the family, yes, but that was the main one that I can remember. That was thirty years ago, and I have forgotten many things. The booklet you provided, *The Women of Ellensburg*, helped me remember the controversy, however. The big deal Saturday night was voting for delegates to Houston. I was asked to sit in a certain place
(probably because of my wheelchair, they knew I would stay put). I was to check each voter’s registration for legality – by driver’s license, signature, I frankly cannot remember. Being trustworthy myself, I’m naïve, sometimes. Not realizing there was any problem, I did not see anything wrong all evening.

Andrews: So you didn’t turn anybody away?

Dance: [laughs] No. It all looked OK to me. After the voting, we were very concerned about whether the conservative women would get some delegates elected. As it turned out, we should have been concerned. Out of twenty-four delegates, only one was a conservative. The five alternates were conservatives, but according to Kay Regan and Judy Quinton, no alternates were allowed to speak at all at the Houston conference. It was a complete walk away for the feminists, and of course the NOW group. Judy says that Judith Lonnquist, a Seattle lawyer and a delegate, was an active member of that group.

Back to my part of the story. Our carload, and it seems like some others, were all crammed into one small motel room. Bev Hubbert was not with us all night; she had to guard the ballots. She would be a very interesting person to talk to about what happened that night. [Andrews conducted a subsequent interview with Beverly Hubbert. (ed.)]

The next morning, Sunday, for the Plenary Session in the big gym, we didn’t see Bev either. I think Judy said that they were recounting the ballots.

As it turned out, we really needed her and her superior knowledge of Roberts’ Rules of Order. What we were doing was voting on the different propositions considered in the workshops the day before. Some went pretty good; it wasn’t terrible all the way through. But the last one was very very hard. It was a two-part question concerning the ERA and the minority women’s rights. If we voted against the ERA, we would be voting against the minority women and we certainly did not want to do that.

We kept telling the black ladies in front of us, “We’re not against you. We’re not against you.” The ones that were close would say, “We know that,” but there was no way we could tell the whole building that we were not biased against the minorities, so we really agonized about that vote. Bev told us after the fact, “Why didn’t you divide the two issues?” Of course, that would have been the answer, but we didn’t have the sophistication to know how to do that. Beverly did, but she wasn’t there, so we just plain agonized about it for a long time. If Bev had been there, it never would have happened that way. And that’s about all I can say.

Oh, and then the papers said that we had men going up and down with walkie-talkies, telling us how to vote.

Andrews: What was your response to that?

Dance: We did have some men come in; my oldest son actually came. They may have had walkie-talkies, but they certainly didn’t tell us how to vote. If they had known how to separate the question, that would have been wonderful. But it was Bev that we needed walking up and down with a walkie-talkie, not our men. No, the news thought the Mormon women were dummies, being told what to do by their men. [laughs] That’s what they thought.
Andrews: There doesn’t seem to have been a great deal of communication. You didn’t go to Houston, did you?

Dance: No. Judy did and Kay Regan. I’ll let them tell you all about that. I just remember they weren’t happy about it, but there was a conservative conference going on close by with an excellent program and a much different attitude.

I know Judy and I were wondering what had actually been accomplished with the use of all that time, effort and money, for the women and the family. I know that Judy later went on her own money to Switzerland to the International Conference of the Family. Hopefully she will tell you all about that.

Andrews: Well, you’ve summed it up very well. And I think you’ve answered most of my questions. Is there anything else that you’d like to add?

Dance: No. I think I probably said it in the beginning, that I’m all for women’s rights and that sort of thing, but I think we’ve gone too far, pushing the men down. And interestingly enough, I’m going to a meeting, a group, I belong to Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, in Magnolia. And I’m going to go to a meeting on Thursday. And I did not realize that the eighth of March is called Women’s Day. Have you heard of that?

Andrews: International Women’s Day is–

Dance: Uh huh. That’s what they sent me.

Andrews: So this meeting that you’re going to is about International Women’s Day? Or commemorating that date? Is that–

Dance: I don’t know. Well, I don’t know that they’ll even mention it on Thursday. Probably will, as they sent us this stuff. This is our newsletter person. Oh, here’s the other page., I’ll show you all three pages she sent me. And she sends those to everybody in our group.

Andrews: Could I get a copy of one of your newsletters?

Dance: Sure, you can have a copy of all three pages, if you want.

Andrews: Okay. I’ll put this with the records, then, so that we’ll have them in the archive.

Dance: We’ve got a copier in the office, so my husband will do that. Let me show you, this one is a story of a woman, Emmeline Wells, who was very active in women’s suffrage. And that’s her, kind of her biography. And I saw her in a monologue DVD about a year ago, on our TV. So I put that, my memory together with this, and it was interesting.
Andrews: I think that’s very significant. It would be a nice addition to what we’re collecting.

Dance: Yes. I’d like to see that monologue again. As you probably know, it tells it right here. Utah actually, Utah territory was the first area in the country that allowed women to vote. And then–

Andrews: Wyoming was first, and then Utah, wasn’t it?

Dance: No. Utah *territory* was. But it was taken away from them because of the Edmonds-Tucker Act until, they were mad at us because of polygamy and that kind of thing. So when the state actually became a state, not a territory, then their constitution put women’s suffrage back in. That was 1896, so then we were the third. Actually we were the first, but then taken away. So when it came back, we were the third. [The territory of Wyoming adopted woman suffrage in 1869, followed by Utah in 1870. Wyoming was admitted to statehood in 1890, as the first suffrage state. Utah came into the union with woman suffrage in 1896. Colorado (1893) and Idaho (1896) were the other “pioneering” suffrage states. (ed.)]

Andrews: Well, I’m glad you showed these newsletters to me, and I think you’ve answered all of my questions. Thank you so very much for sharing your insights and for all of your contributions to this project.

[End Interview.]