Andrews: This interview is being conducted by phone with Dottie Roberts, on behalf of the Washington Women’s History Consortium for the 1977 Ellensburg/Houston International Women’s Year Conference’s Oral History Project. Dottie is in Cawker City, Kansas. And the interviewer, Mildred Andrews, is in Seattle. The interview is taking place on Friday, May fourth.

Dottie, as a beginning, would you tell me about your growing up years? Your family, your community, your school? How you developed your ideas about your role as a woman at home and in society?

Roberts: I was born in Lincoln, Kansas. And my first five years of my life was spent on the Pepper farm. And I was the second of five children. Those were the best years of my life. I loved the freedom, and a farm is a wonderful place for a child to start their life.

Went to, I started school when I was four years old at a country school. We walked a mile and a half to school. And the reason I got started at four was I was continuously in competition with my sister two years older. And my folks told me if I learned to spell Mississippi and hippopotamus, I could go to school. And I started going, and she didn’t send me home. So consequently, I was a year younger all the way through school than the kids I went to school with.

My father developed rheumatic fever, it was a heart condition, and was bedfast for a year. And the neighbors and Mom kept the farm going for a year, and then we had to move to town. The doctor said he just couldn’t stay on the farm. So we moved to a village five miles further up the road, and we couldn’t make it there. So we moved on to Beloit, Kansas, where my dad was a truck driver. World War Two broke out, and he was thirty-four and got a draft notice and laughed about it. And proceeded down, and he got drafted into the navy. It probably saved his life, because at that time, they had him on all kinds of restrictions. He went into the navy, and basic training put him up in much better health. And he went through two years of the major battles of the South Pacific. And Mom then bought a home back in Barnard, and we lived there till Dad got out of the navy.

Then we moved back to Beloit, where Dad opened up a café. Then we moved to Wamego, Kansas, and I think I went to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade in Wamego, Kansas. Then we moved back to Barnard and I went three years of high school. Then we starved out in Barnard, Kansas, and moved to Wichita, where Mom and Dad both went to work in the airplane, aircraft industry.

So I graduated, I moved to a city and graduated my senior year of high school in Derby, Kansas, which was a large high school. From there, I had sex once, got pregnant, and married a young man. Had three, well, we had two little boys. And he was an abuser.
I was a battered woman. I was nearly beaten to death when I was five months pregnant with my third son. And I moved back to Wichita with my parents.

So that pretty well covers it. We were pretty transient, but in those days, you went where the work was. But I had a good, close knit family. And my heritage is very strong. I come from a family that came and started this country. My grandfather on my mother’s side was the secretary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, came in 1627. Massachusetts people were the Peppers, and they were, I had three grandfathers that fought in the Civil War. I had one grandfather that survived Andersonville Prison.

But more than that, I come from prairie people, and they’re very strong women. I had a very distinct sense of who I was. It’s just part of the Midwest. I had no handicaps or challenges until I divorced. And then I ran into the challenges of need, and my parents literally saved my life and helped me raise my boys until I met my present husband of forty-five years and married a Boeing engineer.

We had sports for women in grade school. Everything was available to you if you were willing to work for it. And I had a good high school education. After my divorce, I did go to work at Boeing and went to school at nights and graduated from the Kansas School of Business. But until I met my second husband, I lived in public housing. I worked three jobs. I worked a full time job at Boeing, and I worked as a barmaid on the weekends, and I typed theses for university students. So I really knew what it was to stand the test. My ex-husband did not support the children, and I had a distinct challenge with being a single mom with three little boys.

So when I met Hal, he had no children, and had divorced because of it. And he married me and three little boys. But we had a contract, and the contract was that I wouldn’t work until the children were grown. That that was my first and foremost duty, which thrilled me to death after working three jobs. [laughs] To be a homemaker was an absolute luxury that I had never had.

From there, we got transferred to Seattle and came out there from Wichita, Kansas, in 1962. Then we spent thirty-some years there in the Seattle area. Now I’ve lost my train of thought. I think I’m running ahead of you.

Andrews: This is excellent. What were your parents’ names? Just for the record.

Roberts: My mother and father were Olive and George Pepper. My mother was a Heminger. My mother’s father was a quarter German and three-quarters Irish. And her mother was very English. And on the Pepper side, they were farm people and came from Massachusetts. I would say they were true country people. My grandmother was from Tennessee. She was my Southern influence. But the thing I distinctly remember growing up is we spoke, my mother’s folks were city, well-educated people. And we spoke a different language at Grandma’s house. She was a prairie schoolteacher. And when we were with the Peppers, you spoke country language. And it was something that was very noticeable.

My mother’s parents, actually saved my life. I think I would have been a juvenile delinquent without them. And she was a very staid, Presbyterian Calvinist. You didn’t even cut with the scissors on Sunday. But they were a wonderful influence and help when my father was at war. They would take me in the summertime and keep me.
Andrews: So were you a member of the Presbyterian Church?

Roberts: Yes, I was a Calvinist up until, I think, the ‘60s, and they went off the track. My husband was sent to Europe two years, two times, to Munich, Germany. And I have some really distinct influences that set my thinking by living in a socialist country and arguing a lot with socialists and communists. We were in, our daughter was born in Munich, Germany, and then we came back, I think in 1967, Boeing offered a political course and my husband and I attended. And I became politically involved because of our time in Europe. The comparison of European living to here really made me more thoughtful about being an American. Appreciative, maybe.

Then we got sent back, ’71 to ’73. We were there during all the terrorism that was going on in Germany. And we were there when the Munich tragedy of the murdering of the eleven Olympic Israelis took place. That was a profound moment in my life, because my children had been, my boys had been going to the Olympics. They knew the American basketball team by first name. And I was going to take my children and go to the memorial service. And it filled up so quickly that I didn’t want to be in that kind of crowd. So I told the boys we would watch it on TV. And the athletes from Russia and from East Germany were not allowed to participate. And it struck me so profoundly that never in my life had I had to ask permission to attend a memorial service. And it was a really profound moment in my life to appreciate our freedoms here.

But I would say that the influence of living in Europe four years did make me a patriot. I came back. I everything but got down on my knees and kissed the ground when I got off the airplane to be back home, because we have so many things that others don’t have.

My organizations as far as activities, I was a PTA president when I was twenty years old, in a housing project. And it was a marvelous experience. And I started an organization to better the housing project that we lived in. That was, and then when I met and married Hal, I was just busy with children and school. Then we took these two moves back to living in Europe. I didn’t have a car. [laughs] I didn’t have a washing machine. I didn’t have a dryer. And I didn’t have a dishwasher. Things were pretty bare, but we did do a lot of traveling when we were over there.

But when we came back in ’67, after taking that political school, I got involved in and worked for a congressional candidate. And then I worked for, took a large area, and worked for President Nixon. I think that was ’68. And then I was involved with electing a city council, a county councilman from Bellevue. A county councilman. So I had about eleven years. When I came back the second time, which would have been 1973, I really sensed a lot of militancy taking place. And I was absolutely furious when teachers went into striking in Washington. And I was absolutely determined that that was unreasonable and unfair. They were either going to be professionals, or they were going to go on the clock.

And I hooked up with a Democratic senator from eastern Washington and I ran a statewide initiative to put in a probationary period for teachers, extract the de nova clause, and put in a merit pay system. And I really spent a great deal of time on that, and really got a statewide networking up in doing that initiative. So I had that prior to the women’s conference. I had about eleven years of political experience.
And the thing that I noticed when I came back from Europe in ’73 was a militancy in the woman’s movement. They were having a fit over the cover of the phone book. And it was little clay figurines on the phone book. The boy had a fishing pole and the girl was sitting with a picnic basket under the tree. [laughs] And I really thought that was silly. It struck me as being extreme. And the more that I noticed that the movement was going forward, I sensed a religious zealotry in their goals and their activities.

And I went to a political meeting where the state chairman of Stop the ERA was speaking. And she was a lovely, lovely lady from Tri-Cities. I think she was the mother of nine children. She didn’t know, really have the experience to be running an initiative.

Andrews: Do you recall her name?

Roberts: Dolores Glesener. I agreed to take the western side of Washington and run the Stop the ERA initiative. I had voted, while I lived in Europe, for the state ERA. I mean, I totally support equal rights. But as I studied and looked into the federal Equal Rights Amendment, I was absolutely, totally opposed to it. I had developed a sense of legal interpretation by then. And I foresaw that as being the most dangerous breakdown of family law that we could have. And I’m very much in support of, I’m very liberal at home. I would say I’m a moderate at the state level, and at the federal level, I’m absolutely a hardcore conservative. The further that government is away from us I feel is the least effective, and I still feel that way. I haven’t changed in that regard. And everything that I’ve done in my life in helping people, I have never found the government to do it better than what you can do locally. Every effort I’ve made to hook up, whether it was working for the elderly or working with children, failed.

Our fostering of children we did outside the system. I had one child we took off the streets that was in junior high. And when the social worker came to my home, we had to go get x-rays, we had to go through this process. And she sat there and told me that this little boy should have been removed from the home when he was in second grade.

And that’s the kind of thing that I found always is to, there is so much red tape involved with social help with people. And I still find it today.

Andrews: How many foster children have you had?

Roberts: Oh, I think I counted over twenty-one. It’s according to how you categorize them. Did they live with us for months or years? The only time I ever counted it up was when I was legally charged with racketeering and conspiracy in Washington state. And after the trial, I had to go for deposition, and they wanted to know all of our money and assets. And I thought about it, and the greatest assets we had was all the families, or children that we had taken in. So I got out picture albums and lined them up. And when I got down to the deposition and they asked all the questions about how many cows we had and this sort of thing, I said, “Well, do I have to tell him what our real treasures are?”

And of course his ears perked up, and he said, “You absolutely do.” So I got out this stack of pictures, and I started telling stories. He said, “No, no, no.”

And I said, “Yes. You asked what our greatest treasures in life are. Now you’re going to hear it.”
But it is, it goes against my religious beliefs to brag about what you do. Christian
ethic is do good quietly. So I was always at a disadvantage when debating. “Oh, you
don’t know what it’s like to be poor.” Or, “Oh, you don’t really help these children.” My
Christian ethic says we’re not to blow our own whistle; we’re not to brag about it. So it
was only through that RICO trial, which I happened to win on reversal at the Ninth
District Court of Appeals, that I did that. And I did count over twenty. And that was
taking part timers to taking, we had some one, two or three years. Our last one was a
Scotsman we had at the ranch for four years, who happens to be a very successful lawyer
in Seattle now.

Andrews: So did the trial have something to do with the foster children, or the charge?

Roberts: Well, I have to go back to–

Andrews: You don’t need to get into great detail about that. I was just wondering.

Roberts: That was the fallout from the International Women’s Year. That year changed
my life very distinctly in the sense of one, I had the political ability to know what to do;
and two, I really felt that there was a radicalism in the feminist movement that
diabolically opposed my beliefs. And it was almost, they forced me into a war zone of
defense for the family. And it was, of course, defeated, of which I had a lot to do with
that. From the standpoint of, and as I’d say, I have, as far as the Equal Rights
Amendment at the state level, I always felt was manageable, and we could tailor and
make the legal changes when it didn’t work. And I felt strongly that the federal Equal
Rights Amendment would totally restructure law and create a great deal of chaos. That
was defeated in 1980.

By that time, after the women’s international year, in political organization, I
extracted support from the state platform of Washington Republican Party. And got the
attorneys that argued in the federal court in Idaho against allowing them the extension to
ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. So from ’77 to 1980, I was extremely involved in
countering the feminist movement.

Andrews: Let’s back up just a little bit and come back to that.

Roberts: Right. I’m a leaper, so you’ll have to keep me under control. [laughs]

Andrews: Oh, it’s great. I just want to get back to the roots of some of this. I noticed on
your questionnaire that you said you were appointed to the King County Women’s
Commission.

Roberts: Yes, that was after 1977, I’m going to say that was maybe ’78? The reason
being, it was a political appointment. And I asked Bill Reams, who I had worked to get
elected, to give me the appointment. And I wanted to make sure at the county level that
they did not go off half cocked towards radicalizing the intent of the women’s
commission. For example, one of the things I nailed them on wholeheartedly was they
were into, let’s set up offices for battered women. And I said, “Don’t go there until we
can provide shelter. And that shelter has got to be equipped to take women and however many children she has. But if you set up offices and quack to them on the phone about how brave they should be, you will get them killed.”

Because I was a battered woman, and I, it probably took four years before I could even verbalize about the amount of abuse that I took. So I was coming from knowing what a battered woman contended with, and what she would do. It’s complex. But to politicize it without true support, and giving them a shelter, which I have always done. And I’ve taken in some pretty dangerous cases. You have to provide shelter, and you have to be able to give them true support. Not just talk about it.

And that was something that I was able to influence when I was on the women’s commission. And I enjoyed it. There was a good mix of women on the women’s commission in King County. I moved on to Snohomish County, and was only on for a year. But I enjoyed what time I did spend on it.

I’m a troublemaker at heart. I’m a rabble rouser. Someone told me I was a female Samuel Adams, and I was so historically ignorant, I had to go look up Samuel Adams. [laughs] And he kind of made trouble in the streets, too.

Andrews: You listed yourself as a domestic violence counselor for thirty years.

Roberts: Yes. By that I mean, when I encountered an abused woman, I took her home. And I had the luxury, living on ten acres, fenced. So I could do that. But I’ve never turned my back on a woman in trouble. And I’ve been a qualified domestic violence counselor back here for five years. But back here in the local communities, I have to break all the rules in order to properly take care of women, because our shelter is an hour and a half away. You know, they tell you, don’t go to their homes, don’t do this, don’t do that. Well, you have to grab them off, hide their car, and then try to get them to go to a shelter.

See, a lot of women go right back for more. It’s a very complex subject. And I think it was a doctor or a lawyer, woman in Denver was a battered wife, and wrote a book on it. And she very well pointed out the complexity of it. There’s nothing simple about it. It is dangerous work. I gave it up after I broke my hip, because I don’t have the physical strength to run. [laughs]

Andrews: Thirty years is quite a legacy.

Roberts: Well, no, it’s simply, I think my children taught me that, I told them that they were to love their neighbor, and they started bringing home troubled kids from school. And we had to help them because I had just preached to them about they had to be good to their brothers and sisters, and to love their neighbor. And they did. They actually confronted me with real problems. And you helped them, and you did what you could. Otherwise, you got into hypocrisy, which is very easy to do as a parent.

Andrews: When did you become involved with CASA, the Court Appointed Special Advocate?
Roberts: Here in Kansas. Here in Kansas. I didn’t know about CASA back in Washington. And I saw a write-up about it in the paper. My whole life, from the time I married Hal, has been centered around kids. I love kids. And troubled kids was just, I got to be an expert at it. But the CASA program is out of Concordia, which is forty-two miles away, has a wonderful director, and I have never seen better school training and organization to help kids in trouble than they have back here. It’s outstanding.

Andrews: That’s wonderful.

Roberts: And they, the judges really respect it, I mean, the judge gives you the power to look into the psychologist, the teachers, everything going on in their life. And you have court appointed investigative powers. So by the time the case goes to court, I have completed a report and turned in to the judge, which he looks at totally separately. And I would say in every case that I covered, they took my recommendations, and treated them very respectfully. But it isn’t easy.

And I really found the best people to do it are people who have raised kids and have them out of the house. Having had that experience, I think you know not to get, the younger ones get too emotionally involved. And they have to be trained back to step back and try to be very objective about what’s best for that child. And I find the more mature women do an excellent job, because they know to step back. And the young ones have to be trained more to not get involved in an emotional way that will not do the justice that the judge needs to make some very hard decisions. And the goal is to keep the family together. There’s a lot of support on the Midwest in doing so.

Andrews: Let’s go back to the IWY conference time. What were your major organizations in 1977?

Roberts: At that time, I was state president of the Citizens for Education Accountability. And my total focus was my concern for the deterioration in academic education, and the militancy of the teachers’ union. So that was my major one, which I developed and created. Otherwise, it was the Republican Party, you know, as a member of the party.

And the party headquarters in King County did not receive a notice that was put out. I didn’t know about the conference. And I received a call a few days before. And we were flying to Kansas to pick up a car that we purchased. So I couldn’t go. And in Kansas, the top radio news was the overflow of people at the conference. And each state going back, traveling back to Seattle, it was the same thing. They were overwhelmed and they stalled down in their proceedings. And it really ended up, all the way across Wyoming was the same, Montana was the same, Idaho was the same. Those were the state news I heard going back.

When I got back, I was requested by the vice chairman of the Republican Party to serve in the challenge of the procedures, because I was a mechanic for that sort of thing. And I went to the hearing and they kicked me out because, this was on the challenge of the ballots.

Andrews: Oh, yes.
Roberts: They would not allow me, because I was not at the convention, to be part of the proceedings, which never went anywhere. They just kind of dissolved into— and that was the kick start of all out political war. And I must say that I met an awfully lot of novice, nonpolitical new people that were absolutely hysterical with the proceedings at Ellensburg. They were very negatively impacted, and they were very difficult to work with from the standpoint of their nonpolitical activity. They needed a lot of help. And I agreed to involve myself with the structural running of the referendum that defeated the state women’s commission.

Andrews: That’s Referendum 40.

Roberts: Yes. Referendum 40. And that was, as I say, in my political career, that and 1988, I believe, were the two years where we had a major influx of nonpolitical people, very highly motivated to get something done, [laughs] And it’s a lot of work. It was a challenge. I met a lot of wonderful, interesting people. And I was always accused of being either a Mormon or a Catholic. And I smoked and drank coffee, and they still tried to attack me for being a Mormon or a Catholic. [laughter]

So that was a springboard that created that activity. That time period really was highly emotionally charged. And my involvement was in a sense of leadership because I had that experience from politics. But from that time period, we went into, right after the Ellensburg conference, a meeting was called back in Ellensburg. And people, a whole auditorium full of people, wanted to start a statewide organization to counter the feminist movement. And in so doing, I was on the board. And it really started from the bottom of organizing. People just stood up and said, “I’ll be on.” They were from all over the state. And we named it The Umbrella Group [TUG]. We proceeded to create our by-laws to identify entities that were pro-family and then politicize them. And that was the major work that I did from 1977 through ’80. I was on the board of directors. The attorney that came aboard with us is now the chancellor of a college back in Virginia.

Andrews: What’s the attorney’s name?

Roberts: Michael Farris. He argued the case at the federal court in Idaho, and it was deemed moot, because the time period ran out and they didn’t get the number of states that they needed. But I persuaded him to challenge it when they got the extension.

From there, we became politically organized as a pro-life, pro-family structure in the state. And lo and behold, President Carter decided to have a White House Conference on Families in 1980. And from there, I would say that TUG had identified enough organizations statewide to communicate.

All we did was identify local groups statewide. And then provided them with information that we thought was an impairment to the traditional family. When the White House Conference on Families happened in 1980, we were well organized enough that we made very sure that the definition of the traditional family did not change. But in 1980, we educated those people that went to that conference on how to go to their local precinct, how to become involved in local politics. And in 1980, we literally took over the Republican Party, and took the family issues from the bottom of the platform and put
them at the top of the platform. And I believe it was, it was probably 1978 that we started our effectiveness in being involved in politics.

But it was a very challenging time. When I look back at the ‘70s, I consider those the hard years. They were extreme. And today, in thinking this over about discussing, I found it to be a spiritual battle. And I still find it to be the case. And I tried to neutralize the negativity, and to moderate with the hope that we would be able to find commonality with the feminist movement. And that never existed. It was never a possibility. I thought pornography would have been a neutral ground that we could have come together on and defeat. But I never could make the connection with the feminist movement. Their priorities became pro-abortion and pro-homosexuality. And that militancy really did take over the movement.

Andrews: So you sent me a tape from KIRO [TV in Seattle] about a debate about the ERA.

Roberts: Yes.

Andrews: That was with Dolores Glesener and you as anti-ERA.

Roberts: Right.

Andrews: And Jill Ruckelshaus and—

Roberts: LaTourelle.

Andrews: Elaine LaTourelle as pro-ERA.

Andrews: Could you talk about that a little bit?

Roberts: I think that was probably the kickoff of the war zone. [laughs] Right there. We ran the initiative to defeat the state women’s commission. And from there, we organized statewide. And it really was out of the Ellensburg conference was the motivation to politicize. And I would say that carried on to Michael Farris, who took my family action organization and moved to Olympia and became a lobbyist. I’m trying to think of the name of his group, but I can’t. But he was very effective, and he was very good at public relations.

He was a brilliant young attorney. And he had an organization, and then moved to Washington, DC, and became the attorney for a national Christian organization, CWA, Concerned Women of America. Oh, gosh. Women, I can see her face. It’s the women’s Christian organization, LaHaye. He went as counsel for Beverly LaHaye nationwide. And then he proceeded to start an organization, Home Schoolers of America. He was a lawyer for home schoolers. And then he had eleven children and he started a college, Patrick Henry College. And is now the chancellor of Patrick Henry University back in Virginia.

Now I even forgot what the question, what did you ask?

Andrews: Well, I think I did, too. [laughs]
Roberts: I don’t know, really, how to tie it together, other than to say that I think the women’s conference of ’77 was a political atom bomb. And it stirred up all sides. And I cannot say how much positive involvement came out of it. I’m old enough to stand back and look at what benefits were had from it. It’s according to which side you’re looking at it from, because it definitely polarized, very seriously. And I don’t know that it was intentional. But the radical part of the feminist movement, their vocalness and their adamant motivation on abortion and homosexuality, I think is what motivated a polarization to create pro-family organizations.

Andrews: Did you find any common ground? Points of agreement?

Roberts: Uh, no. That’s what was so disappointing. In the political sense, no. Because I’d really thought with running the initiative to stop pornography, there was a group of feminists. I did work with one group that were feminists against abortion, up in Everett. But other than that, no. I was very disappointed with the lack of coming together on what should have been common ground.

Andrews: Now this is probably what you just answered, but I’m going to ask the question anyway. How did the conference influence your perception of women’s role in the home and in society?

Roberts: Well, my influence, my question from that debate, first debate that I had until today, my question was, what about the children? And it still remains so. And in the sense of, I have asked many women, more my age, but on down to young people, about how the feminist movement influenced them. And they look at me pretty blank. [laughs] Those elderly ladies this morning that I had breakfast with, only one woman responded. And she said, “My husband and I both had to work. And we worked different shifts to ensure that our children had a parent at home.”

And other than that, my sister-in-law that’s here visiting was vice president of Sea First Bank. She was a single mom. And she said hard work -- she did not feel that the feminist movement helped her -- that she earned her way up to where she arrived and achieved.

So I don’t get a very good response out of people. And here in the Midwest, it’s just not an issue. I grew up with women that crawl on a combine and run it, or jump in the truck and drive trucks during the harvest, and do whatever needs to be done. It’s a different flavor here than on the coast. And you don’t see organizationally, I don’t see any feminism back here. I don’t have a college town close by. And my grandchildren are just about college age, but they’re not there. [laughs] So I don’t really, I do know that I think from ’77 forward that the American family was impacted negatively. And I truly believe, it has been well proven, that if you have children, it’s very important that you spend the first five years of your life with them as your top priority. It’s well proven. Day cares have been a failure.

Well, as I told you, Mildred, government cannot do better than what a community can do.
Andrews: This is not on my list of questions, but from what you’re saying, I gather that you would interpret feminism as basically an urban movement? Is that correct?

Roberts: Oh, yes. It isn’t here in the Midwest. There was never a need for it, so to speak. I would have to say go back to when I was seventeen years old and pregnant, I went to work at the phone company. And the phone company had, the taxi drivers, if you worked night shift, drove you home and flashed a light on your house for you to go in safely. And the taxi drivers went on strike, and I was probably seven months pregnant, and I went down to get in my taxi cab, which was an elderly, lovely gentleman that drove me home. And they said, “No, no. We’re supporting the taxi strike. You’re to go home here.” And these guys were unshaved. I didn’t know them. And I refused to go. I got in the taxi with my driver, went home, and he was found dead and his taxi burned the next morning.

And I became, that and the telephone company strike, I became very anti-union. I was horrified by it. And when we went back to work at the telephone company, the mean spiritedness between those that stayed on the job and those that struck was awful. And it marked me. So I’m really organizing, and a union mentality is just not part of my makeup.

When I debated Eleanor Smeal over in a television station in Idaho, it got hot and heavy because I really challenged them for this bigotry against this judge who they said was Mormon in the district federal court in Idaho. And we had a very hot and heavy debate. And when we got through, she said, “You just wait! One of these days, you’re going to need help, and who will you turn to?”

And I said, “Well, it is not going to be a woman’s union.” [laughs]

Andrews: Was Eleanor Smeal president of national NOW?

Roberts: Yes. National Organization of Women. And she’d flown in for the trial.

Andrews: And this was the ERA trial?

Roberts: Yes, in about 1980.

Andrews: But that’s what the trial was, that you were referring to before with Michael Farris?

Roberts: Right. From there, I would say that I was influenced, what? I was influenced with the exploitation of women. And I became an absolute supporter of life and the pro-life movement. I’m an anti-abortionist. And from there, in Washington state, I put out a challenge that we would challenge every doctor in the state of Washington as to whether they were pro-life or pro-death. Now this is 1983. And I had cancer in 1983. Had my throat cut. That’s why I sound like a whiskey drinker.

But a feminist women’s health center moved to Everett. They did second trimester abortions right across the street from the county courthouse. And they were not, there was no licensing involved, and there was no contract with the hospital. And a teenager could go in there and get an abortion and their parents would never know. And I
probably organized a thousand people that protested that facility. It burned down. A Catholic schoolteacher burned it down. But I got the credit. [laughs]

Andrews: There was an article in the newspaper about that.

Roberts: Yes.

Andrews: You had a poster that was quite controversial.

Roberts: I took a truck, well, I lost a grandchild, my first grandchild was lost to abortion. When my son was in the army and his fiancée’s father aborted the child. And my son was very, didn’t get home in time, and was very broken from it. That had a very strong impact on me. She had a nervous breakdown and my son died at forty-four, an alcoholic. That made me a radical pro-lifer.

But I was always disturbed with the sexual exploitation side of the radical feminist movement. And I researched the feminist women’s health center, and they were a chain out of California. And it was run by lesbians. And that’s a wonderful place to recruit young women, because when a young woman has an abortion, usually the man has let her down, or the parents let her down. And she’s very, in a very vulnerable position. But they also taught self-abortion.

And I just, at that time, I was appointed by, Reagan brought in the Private Industry Council. And I was chairman of the Private Industry Council. I started a farm show. I had lots on my plate. But I literally dropped it and made sure that every citizen in Snohomish County, realized what had come to our town. And when I, statewide, with Family Action, put out that we were going to create accountability with the doctors, I was then charged with racketeering and conspiracy. Our case was second in the nation, and it was well organized by the radical left. The Center for Constitutional Rights sponsored the initiative. And I was in their program under the homosexual rights. My case was, for some reason, in the homosexual rights of their program. But it was truly a big deal. It didn’t change my thoughts whatsoever, and I have not changed my position whatsoever.

What I was naïve enough to do was walk up to the door of the abortion mill, give them my farm show business card, and say, “I’ll take any girl that doesn’t want to have an abortion.” I did a little write-up, and showed a picture of my first grandbaby. And I stated that I had been pregnant at seventeen, and that I would give them help. And then I went home and prayed that my husband didn’t have to make a whole bunch of cradles.

And instead, I got thirteen calls from people wanting to adopt babies, which was not what I expected. But I took in a few girls that were being forced to have an abortion, and I never regretted it a bit.

Andrews: This is the controversial sign. I found the article from the Seattle Times that was dated August 3, 1986. And the title is, “For Dottie Roberts, the Baby War Never Lets Up.” And there’s a photo of you on the farm with a cow behind you.

Roberts: Oh, dear, yes. They always got awful pictures of me.
Andrews: Here’s what jumped out at me. “Next to the clinic was parked Roberts’ red pickup truck, displaying a four-and-a-half foot high, eleven foot long sign with a huge photograph of an aborted fetus.” And in quotes, “Killed by Abortion,” the sign said. And then again in quotes, “Does it upset you? It should.” And then your comment, “I lost a lot of friends over that sign.”

Roberts: Well, Christians did not like to see it, either. I mean, it’s a horrible, I had in my church, I went to a little Presbyterian church in Lake Stevens, a couple of girls that started an organization called Women Exploited by Abortion. And they had had abortions, and they came to church hysterical about the abortion clinic opening in Everett. And one of them gave me a large brochure called “The American Holocaust,” which was put together by a doctor in California. And this would have been like ’82, where they had found an abandoned transport truck with almost full term babies in buckets. One thousand, two hundred of them. And the feminist women’s health center went to court to block their burial, because that would be acknowledging that they were human. And this doctor had all these photographs. And I absolutely went hysterical. It broke my heart.

And having lived in Germany and gone through Dachau, I was, I almost fainted when I saw a beautiful twelve year-old boy with big brown eyes strapped to a board, and they dunked him to death. And it was to help the survival of the Luftwaffe pilots in the channel. And that was the moment I had to step outside and I just came unglued. That stayed with me. And when I saw that brochure the doctor in California did, it had the same impact on me.

It’s a silent Holocaust. We’re missing forty-seven million children in America. And I do believe with all my heart that women, instead of educating them, have been exploited. And I believe there are elements of the feminist movement that make a fortune on the industrial side of abortion. And that’s an exploitation that I think is heartbreaking.

I have always come from the position that education is the key to a civilization. And I recently read a report that said that girls that are sexually active under the age of sixteen have a very negative outcome. And we turn around and we look, in Texas they’re looking at a venereal disease vaccination rather than teaching them the control of their body. I would say that’s a horrendous failure for us as women. That that kind of sexual exploitation is still promoted rather than–

I would tell you, in my county, a doctor’s wife does a tremendous program of teaching abstinence. And it’s very effective. But that was never allowed as an alternate, to propose it and show it up against the whole sex industry. And it’s a horrendous money making machine in this country. And it’s tragic that our young women are exploited.

I’ve had a lot of exposure to young women who have had abortions. And the outcome of it has been extremely negative. And yet that has not been looked at objectively to reconsider where we should be. I’m just a hard line, and I would tell you it’s pro-life and it’s pro-death, and that’s where it’s at. And that’s a tragedy to me.

Andrews: You’ve already said quite a bit about negative outcomes that were related to Ellensburg. Were there any that you considered positive?
Roberts: No, I cannot say, because I feel like that it became a spiritual war. And that they were social issues that erased the positive outcomes. Let me propose this question to you. We have sent 160,000 women to fight the war in Iraq and Iran. And in so doing, we’re the first civilization in the history that have sent young mothers to war. And the Veterans’ Administration has done a study on women in the service. They don’t have much in combat except the Desert Storm war, which was a very short war. But out of the survey that the Veterans’ Administration did on that one, -- I think there were sixteen thousand women that went -- they found that 37 percent had been attempted or raped. No, 16 percent had been attempted or raped. And out of that 16 percent, 37 percent had been gang raped. And that they felt the more that the war was active, the more problem was had.

I feel that the negative impact out of those children being left with grandparents or with their father or with daycare is going to be a price paid out of that war that is going to be enormous. Someone, Mildred, one of the things that went away in the ‘70s or the ‘80s was debate. And that was a great shame for the women’s movement, that there was not debate. It became a screaming contest. And our media moved that way, which is a great shame. And my prayer is that we go back to objective debate and sensibility of the rules of debate on all issues that face us. But as far as the women’s movement, I encountered the radical side of the movement. And consequently, it was a battleground and there was no moderation in it. And you could not debate. The debate became screaming matches. It was very shrill.

And I think it was a great injustice to women in general that it went that way, and the media enhanced it. I would say negatively. The media played upon it. And I would say that most women that thought they were a feminist in the ‘70s, I’d very much like to have another debate. And I doubt if I could bring them to the table to debate.

Andrews: Maybe this project will--

Roberts: Wouldn’t that be great?

Andrews: Wouldn’t that be great?

Roberts: One thing I would say about women’s programs, is that they went radical. They did not stay with an objectivity. The example I would give you is the young women coming out of college were propagandized to be aggressive. Now I’m naturally assertive. And when I would encounter them, like a clerk at Frederick and Nelson’s or Bon Marche, and they responded to me aggressively, because they do not have the nature of an assertive person. When I came back at them, they didn’t know where to go.

Women have a God-given beauty and purpose, and it goes from A to Z. And I would very much like to see the women’s program focus on establishing who they are in their natural sense. And I’ve seen a lot of young women come back out of feminism and finally get to their true nature maybe ten years late than they should have.

And do you know what it all boils down to is toleration of all people. [laughs] Teaching them to tolerate differences. Exposing them to differences, and educating them to responsibility. They got educated to their rights without the same firm foundation of responsibility. And I would even go further, society at large has gone that direction. And
the fallout is horrendous. You know, I’m not going to pitch statistics at you. The one that disturbs me today, thirty years later, is the fact that we have sent, no other civilization, has sent 160,000 women to do battle. And will we assess it? But I have found a lot of censorship in the feminist movement. They do not go back and take a grade sheet of where they are and make corrections. And that’s a shame, because they do a dishonor and a disservice to women that have lost by the direction that they’ve been sent. So the corrections aren’t made in a society.

And frankly, in my old age, I’m just radical enough to say my prayer is that we return to deep respect for the Ten Commandments and teach it very well. And that’s been missing quite a long while.

And what about the kids? I think, I think everything that I would tell you thirty years later has, except for those elite few, and I will tell you, my grandchildren, my thirteen grandchildren are the elite few. Make it through without it being violent and ugly and mean-spirited. And that’s a tragedy. I wish I could give my children the freedom and the goodness of the society I grew up in. But you can’t. It moves forward. But to not make the correction is sad.

And the two things that I feel very strongly about is that debate is an absolute necessity, and education still is where it’s at with all young people. And I cannot, I wish I could, because you’ve given me time to think about the possibility of being able to come up with some positives. No fault divorce? Absolute failure. I cannot, and I wish I could. In fact, I’m more deeply disturbed today than I was twenty years ago in the sense of where we’re going as a society.

But I know it’s possible, because I ran away and came back to the Midwest, where all the rednecks live. [laughs] And you know, we have people in town I don’t care for. But her house burned down, and we fully furnished her a new house. We need to concentrate on community again. That, I saw lost on the coast. People evolved around their hobbies and they evolved around their interests. But as far as a neighborhood, I never lived in a— well, I take that back. We developed a block watch when we lived in Bellevue. We did develop a neighborhood there.

Andrews: I would imagine that you have a lot to do with that.

Roberts: Uh huh. [laughs] My husband’s the brains, and I’m the mouth. I stir it up, and then we quite often leave, and somebody else got to clean it up. [laughs] That’s shameful. But I lectured my sister yesterday for working too long in the yard and having to take pain pills. And I crawl back into the house from planting fifty strawberries and said to myself, you’re the biggest hypocrite in the world! While I told her not to work so hard.

Andrews: [laughs] Oh, boy.

Roberts: But you know, God has given us a magnificent world. I think the loss of education in nature and the thing I saw missing in my children’s education, on down the line to my grandchildren, is not teaching them physiology. I had twenty-seven kids in high school my freshman, sophomore and junior year. And we had really excellent biology of teaching the human body. And I have had to educate my children and my grandchildren. For example, your body’s a sponge. So wear gloves, wear a mask. Treat
your body with respect. But that’s really sadly missing. And many books are now being written and people making big money and telling you how to get healthy. We don’t seem to have the common sense. Is that an old lady’s comment? [laughs]

Andrews: Well, maybe it’s sage.

Roberts: You know, I always thought wisdom was the grand epitome, and that I would be sitting on kind of a throne, and my children would be kind of bowed down listening to my wisdom. And what I’ve found at seventy-one is I’m so doggone smart, but nobody pays any attention to me. And wisdom is a burden. Wouldn’t you agree?

Andrews: I’m paying attention. And what you said I think will be very important in our archive, in our collection.

Roberts: Well, it will be interesting. And I truly hope that there is a positive side to be brought out. But with aborting four thousand babies a day, with radical homosexuality being promoted, with the horrendous suicide and prescription rates with our teenagers, the pornography, I wonder if my grandmother thought the world was going to hell when she died. I don’t know, but I’m deeply distressed. Because the greatest power on earth is love, and it gives you the strength to contend with problems. But I have to write hopelessness on American society today. And that’s a tragedy. And I think apathy is the other negative. Now I’m generalizing. I’m moving away from the subject at hand. I’m sorry.

Andrews: Looking back at the Ellensburg conference again, and I think we may have covered this, some of the specific issues that concerned you then, do you feel that they’re still being debated?

Roberts: Oh, they were never debated properly. I debated in the ’70s. But debate, I would say, almost dissolved after the women’s conference. From then, it was a more intense, let’s call it religious zealotry, that began to exist. I mean, war zone. And from what I gathered from the conference was a lot of portrayal of radical activity was stunning to homemakers. That many of them were traumatized. I think the Mormon Church had a very difficult time getting their women back home again after being exposed to that radicalism that was there. I don’t say it was part of the program, but the groups were participating in radical ways there at the conference.

Sadly, the conference was not well organized. It, the consequence, the negative side of it not being well organized was a lot of waiting people on a very hot day. I ran large conventions, and it really requires a mechanical skill of being prepared for different fallouts. And it wasn’t there. And I’m not, I cannot, I don’t place blame, but I do think that they thought they were prepared, but they weren’t. And I don’t, I can’t give you the answer as to why that was.

I do know that I did check and the King County Republican Party did not have access to it in time to promote it to where women of the Republican Party went. I checked with the manager of the King County office. So it was, that not being well organized. But from what mine would have been, it would have been education. It would
have been stopping the killing, or sexual exploitation. See, I’m radical enough, thirty
years ago I was calling for a minimum sentence of twenty years on rape. And then you
wouldn’t want on record what I said you do next. It wasn’t a life term.

But I was never a, I’ve never been a woman’s woman in the sense of need for
social organizations. I’m very issue-oriented. So my life has been, but I would say the
International Women’s Year, what I’ve done from that year to now is their fault. [laughs]
And I have found that people love me or hate me, and there’s not much in between.

Andrews: So it really galvanized you, didn’t it?

Roberts: Yes it did. But also my background did. My raising did. And I, as I say, I’m
blessed with a great strong heritage that you help yourself and you help others. It’s just
the evolvement of living in Europe, that had an impact. That Munich Olympic tragedy
had a very, it radicalized me to an extent. When I got home, then to see the radicalization
caused me to go up against what I didn’t agree with.

And I still feel strongly that apathy is a major sickness in America. We’ve had it
too good, too long. And we’ve become, I don’t know what word I want to say that would
properly, decadent, I guess. Negative. Taking too much for granted and not being called
to be more than terribly comfortable, lazy. [laughs] Let me go on.

Andrews: Well, I think that from what you’ve said, you’re so motivated by a heart of
gold, by your background, your religious faith, from so much more, to be an activist.

Roberts: Well, I’ve been blessed by God, but also I do not disallow my heritage. My
grandmother made it very clear to me that it was not Betsy Ross that made the first flag,
it was Molly Stark, my great-great-great-great grandmother. And it comes to pass that
it’s really true.

I look at the elements. And you have to, I’ve been blessed with the good life of a
wonderful heritage. And I’ve been blessed with a husband, our marriage has been parallel
to Ariel and Will Durant. Yin and yang. My husband’s a genius, a marvelous intellect,
and I’m the mouth. We have worked together over the years and we’ve, thank God, had
mutual goals. He’s had, he has the heart of gold. He has the pocketbook. I give it away.
[laughs] I keep saying, “We come into the world naked, and we leave naked.”

And he keeps saying, “But I want clothes on until we get there.”

Once in a while he nips me in the pocketbook. We were in Indonesia, and that
was my Third World country. We were in a great big deluxe hotel, and then utter poverty
everywhere, Bandung. And I, the money was like a thousand to one or something
unbelievable. And I took a stack out every day, and by the end of the first week, he said,
“Honey, you cannot give away a hundred dollars a day or we’re going to go home
broke.” And I just took my driver and went out and gave money away.

Andrews: Oh my goodness.

Roberts: I told him under no circumstances would I live there, or I’d have to do what
Mother Teresa did. But the Muslims were very kind, gentle people. Very fascinating to
me in the short time I was there. In fact, I helped set up some sponsors. Kirk Douglas
started a home for children, impaired children. And I got some of the wives that lived there to sponsor the children, deaf or retarded children.

Andrews: Sounds like a wonderful thing to do.

Roberts: You’d go crazy over there, Mildred. And yet they had the most gorgeous skin, beautiful teeth, and about 95 percent of their diet was rice. So if you want to get healthy and look good, eat rice. I have no doubt. They called us bulis. The ugly big white people. And it was true! It was true. They had gorgeous skin and teeth. It was amazing.

Well, I hope that you come out and—

Andrews: Oh, I’d love to come to Cawker City, Kansas. That would be fun.

Roberts: I’d show you the Midwest and let you have some real quiet peace time. It scares a lot of people when they come here. [laughs] How many stars there are in the heaven that you can see.

Andrews: It sounds wonderful. Well, in summary, Dottie, is there anything else that you’d like to add?

Roberts: Well, not really. I don’t, I don’t feel good about this, Mildred, in the sense that I wish that there were positive things that I could say that would—

Andrews: You’ve given some directions that are certainly worth thinking about.

Roberts: I think the most important thing is to observe and acknowledge nature, our natural state, and to educate our young women to appreciate and respect and learn who they are, and to commit themselves to make this a better world. But from the standpoint of propaganda, I would love to see them rather resort to debate. And I think that would, I don’t know if there’s a need for a women’s program. That’s a good question. Or are there more general needs? I guess that’s where I come from. I have only one horrific prejudice that I’ve identified in my life, and that is the insistence to remain ignorant. And I cannot overcome that one. I get really impatient with people that covet their ignorance.

And maybe the question that needs to be asked is, is there a need for a women’s program? That’s a good question. And from there, I think debate is a lost art that needs to be restored. Dignified rules that allow people to go away having weighed the pro and con of something. Then as long as you have that, I’ve set up all my pounding the table with communists. [laughs] And it’s something that’s healthy, but you need to have, to look at both sides of everything. And work hard to love everybody.

Andrews: Yes. Well, it’s just been such a pleasure talking with you, Dottie, and I appreciate this very much.

Roberts: I really wince at the thought of seeing this on paper, because I’ve done a lot of depositions.
Andrews: You’ll get a chance to look at it.

Roberts: Well, we’ll see. And it’s probably worthwhile to pare it down to half. [laughs]

Andrews: I’ll send it to you so that you can do your edits, too.

Roberts: Well, if you can’t bring it back, why then, send it.

Andrews: And we can talk on the phone anytime that you like.

Roberts: And do you mind being e-mailed? Or is it a nuisance? Does it overwhelm you?

Andrews: Not at all. I’d love to hear from you.

Roberts: All right. Then we’ll stay in touch and maybe, maybe you’ll geographically come this way sometime.

Andrews: I hope so.

Roberts: All right.

Andrews: Again, thanks.

Roberts: You’re welcome, and God bless you.

Andrews: You, too.

Roberts: Bye.

[End Session.]