

**ILOHI Interview with Earline Rogers**

Monday October 29, 2018

Gary, Indiana

Interview by Dr. Michella M. Marino

Transcribed by Dr. Michella M. Marino and Jessica L. Cortesi

MP3 File, Sony

Earline Rogers=ER

Michella Marino=MM

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(Getting recorders set up)

[0:00:00]

MM: Alright, well I'll just state for the record then (ER: Ok.) that my name is Michella Marino, and I am interviewing Earline Rogers, and today is Monday October 29, I believe, 2018, and we are at her home in Gary, Indiana. So I'll just go ahead and get started um with some easy questions of when and where were you born?

ER: Born right here in Gary, Indiana.

MM: Ok, and when?

ER: 1934—December 20.

MM: Ok, 1934. What were your parents' names?

ER: My dad was Earl Smith, and my mother's name was Robbie Smith.

MM: Ok, what was her maiden name?

ER: Her maiden name was Hicks.

MM: Hicks, ok. And were they from Gary originally, or where are they from?

ER: No, no. My dad was from Tennessee, and my mom was from Georgia.

MM: Ok. Well how did they end up in Indiana?

ER: Uh, looking for jobs. The steel mills. My dad and my mom came here. Their parents came looking for work, and but my dad went to school here and so did my mom, and then my dad went ahead and worked in the steel mill for some years.

MM: So their parents brought them when they were young kids here? [0:01:00]

ER: Yes, uh huh.

MM: Ok. Now did they know each other like in high school or working in the mills or?

ER: They knew each other, uh, right after high school.

MM: Ok.

ER: I think my dad had graduated from high school, and my mom was uh living uh in his mother's home.

MM: Oh.

ER: He was away in college, and when he came home his mother was sick and so he had to leave college to come home to take care of his mom, and that's how they met.

MM: Oh, ok. So she like was boarding in the house.

ER: Yes, uh huh.

MM: Ok, that's interesting. Um, so, you said your dad then took work in the steel mills...

ER: The steel mills, yes, uh huh.

MM: What did your mother do?

ER: My mother never worked. She was a homemaker.

MM: Homemaker, ok. And do you have any siblings?

ER: Yes. I uh had three brothers. I only have one now that's alive, [0:02:00] and then I have one sister, who's right next door.

MM: Oh, wow. (laughs) Didn't move too far apart.

ER: No, uh unh.

MM: Where were you in the order of your--?

ER: I was second.

MM: Second.

ER: I have an older brother, yes, uh huh.

MM: Ok, alright. Um, how would you describe your childhood?

ER: Uh, fairly normal. I grew up in a housing project. It had just been built here in Gary, and so we stayed there until my dad got to a point where he was making more than enough money, and so then he bought a home, and I think I was probably in uh...middle school when we moved to another location. And so I went to the schools here, graduated from Gary Roosevelt, so fairly, you know, just a plain kind of a childhood—Mom and Dad. Dad worked. Momma was always there with the meals [0:03:00] and you know, I was second but I had two younger brothers that I grew up with. My sister is much younger than I, I mean so...I laugh 'cause I grew up between boys, and I think that kind of helped me to—I was kind of a tomboy growing up, you know, and uh fought all the battles with my brothers and all of that so...(laughs).

MM: And what were your siblings' names?

ER: My older brother was Earl, and then I had another brother named Robert, Gerald, and then my sister's Denise.

MM: Denise, and she's the one that lives right next to you?

ER: Yeah, right.

MM: Well, also you mentioned your dad went to college. Where did he go to school at?

ER: It was Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.

MM: Oh, ok.

ER: Mmhmm. He was an athlete, and he graduated from the Gary high school here at Gary [inaudible-Preble?], got a scholarship. [0:04:00] He was there...

MM: Did he play basketball or football or...?

ER: He was a football player, in fact he first started out to a local...At that time it was Indiana University Northwest, it was the extension, and I know one year he scored all the touchdowns for the team. Right? Yeah, he was phenomenal.

MM: Wow.

ER: Like I said he came home because his mother was ill. (MM: Ok) ... He met my mom and that ended the college career. (laughs)

MM: Ok. Who would you say were the most influential people in your childhood?

ER: Uh, I would say probably my dad and my mom were very influential and I was... and my grandmother too. I spent a lot of time at her home. Mostly family, were people that were influential in my childhood. [0:05:00]

MM: As a young girl did you have any understanding of your family's politics or political beliefs?

ER: Not really. The only thing I can remember vividly, is I can remember my grandmother had pictures on the wall, and there was only one picture of a white person. And it happened to be Franklin Delano Roosevelt. At that time I knew that that was a person she admired, and so I was familiar with the two parties. There were two parties and she was a Democrat. One time my dad ran for a precinct committeeman, and he didn't win. My mother always said later on, "Your dad's probably turning over in his grave now that he knows you're in politics," [0:06:00] but he was very influential in the public housing that we lived in. In fact, he had gone to an interracial school Gary [inaudible—Preble?]. The people who were the mayor and the comptroller who were in charge of Gary at that point in time were classmates of him. Even now, Peter Visclosky who is our state representative, his dad and my dad were very good friends. He had—his dad at one time was the mayor of Gary. I can remember my dad gathering people together for, uh— [0:07:00] these friends of his from high school that were now in government so that they could listen and he was kind of the political person in that precinct that they worked with. So, I kind of came up with political surroundings.

MM: Ok, that's interesting. I think I read that your families remained friends, even—

ER: Yeah, right, Peter and I are still good friends.

MM: Great. Did you have any sense of—obviously, you said your mother admired Roosevelt, did she talk about his programs or was it just a politician she respected?

ER: I don't remember any programs that she talked about. Evidently there was something about him, I don't if it was what he said or his carriage, or what it was [0:08:00] that she respected.

MM: You said you went to public schools here in Gary, right? Then did you graduate from Gary Roosevelt, or--?

ER: I graduated from Gary Roosevelt, yes.

MM: And what year was that?

ER: 1952.

MM: 1952, ok.

ER: It was interesting, I was president of the class of 1952, which was very unusual for a girl. I can remember my social studies teacher saying to me, you know, that I probably wouldn't win and it was something that I maybe didn't want to do. But I ran anyway and I beat the guy (both laugh) that I ran against. Interesting, he turned out—he was very smart, you know, in fact he turned out to be doctor, after you go to college and everything you know. But that was my first run for an office, when I ran for president of my class. I think I was the first girl ever to be [0:09:00] a president of the class. Back in 1952, it was generally reserved for the guys.

MM: Wow, well good for you. Was it an integrated high school, or--?

ER: No, unh-uh. Roosevelt was a school, it's background, I mean...It was built specially for African Americans. Right, so it was an all-Black school.

MM: What were race relations like in Gary in the 1940s and 50s?

ER: Not very good. I know that there was some incidents. Say, for example, I can remember... we have a beach here on Lake Michigan, called Marquette Park. And when I was coming up it was not a place where African Americans felt free to go. In fact, I can remember one of my dad's friends getting caught out there at Marquette Park beach and getting beaten. Ok, and so that was a place we didn't go. [0:10:01] But they had a pavilion there and I think it was my class that was the first class that was allowed to have a senior prom at Marquette Pavilion. So, we kinda helped to break some of the barriers there. The encounters, racial encounters at that time, basically we all lived, African Americans lived in mid-town in the middle of Gary, so there wasn't a lot of... Um, we had our own businesses and all of that so there wasn't a lot of opportunities for there to be interaction between the two races, but uh... [0:11:00] we basically lived in a smaller part of Gary, mid-town, which is where I grew up.

MM: Where is that in relation to where we are now?

ER: This is 15<sup>th</sup>, so Gary runs from, downtown Gary is 1<sup>st</sup> and Broadway to about 11<sup>th</sup>. So between 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue going north and 35<sup>th</sup> going south would be like mid-town. Basically from east and west, I would say I'm at 36<sup>th</sup> past Broadway, so I would say maybe 36 blocks in between would be the middle of Gary, the actual middle of Gary is where we were located. And where Roosevelt school was and [Grable?] school which was really a biracial school. [0:12:01]

MM: When did Gary integrate schools? You graduated before *Brown v. Board* and things like that.

ER: Well, but there was integration then, even when I was...

MM: At certain schools.

ER: It certain schools, right. There was a school out south called Lew Wallace that may... there may have been maybe 20, 30 Blacks there. Then there was an Emerson school in downtown Gary, so. There were small numbers at the schools before I graduated.

MM: Ok. You were involved in student government in high school, were there other extra curriculars that you participated in?

ER: [0:13:00] Well, the GAA, which was the Girls' Athletic Association. I participated in that and there was a club called the Y Chums, we were associated with the YWCA, that I participated in too. Basically that was the extent.

MM: Did you have a favorite sport? It sounds like you were interested in athletics.

ER: I was interested in athletics, but I ran track for a while when I was in grade school. I can remember I was the anchor for a relay team. I spent a lot of my life, as most girls do, trying to please their fathers. And my brother also, [0:14:00] my older brother was a track star. In fact, he was a long jump champion. He broke a 25-year record. (MM: Woah.) That's how he kinda got a scholarship to college. We graduated the same year. We're 11 months apart, but he's 11 months older than I am but we graduated the same year. He got a scholarship to the University of Iowa and played football for them and did very well. But I can remember when I was in high school, and I tease him about this now, is, uh, certain markers. When you do the long jump, you run and run and then you flip and go forward, and I could get the markers better than he could at that time, but there was nothing for girls to do, as relates to track at that time. But like I said, I ran track and I ran on the relay team, but I played some basketball but I wasn't very tall. [0:15:00] So I played around, but sports have always been a part of my life.

MM: Well I know, jumping ahead a bit, but in the 90s you... I don't know if they were actual legislation or rather recognition of girls' sports days in Indiana. You didn't really probably get to take advantage of that in the 50s.

ER: I was always cognizant of that, some of the things we were able to do as relates to sports. It was a vehicle for college, and like I said my brother and I graduated the same year. He got a scholarship, I had to go to IU Northwest, you know 'cause my dad couldn't send both of us even though he got a scholarship. [0:16:00] So I started working the day after I graduated high school. I worked at, well I wanted to be a secretary, 'cause I had gotten the award for the best secretary from my class and I thought that's what I would be. I got a job at the Y. I tell people this because they find it kind of funny, but I envisioned myself being a secretary, sitting on my boss's knee that was rich. [both laugh] And I wind up getting a job as a secretary at a YWCA! All my bosses were women. [both laugh]

MM: Probably a different experience.

ER: Right, right, right! So at that time I decided I would be a teacher. So because the Y was on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue a block past Broadway, and then on the other side of Broadway a couple blocks was where they had some classes for the extension at IU. [0:17:00] So I would walk from there across and take the courses and everything. I took two years here and then I went to Indiana University.

MM: In Bloomington?

ER: In Bloomington.

MM: What made you decide on teaching, then?

ER: Well, you know in those days when you looked at jobs for women, and especially for Black women, it was either a teacher, a nurse, or a secretary. You know, so, I just decided on teaching 'cause I picked that one as the one to do.

MM: When you were at either what is now IU Northwest or down in Bloomington, were you involved in other campus activities? Did you get involved in politics then?

ER: Not really. I didn't... I remember we had our, the little dorm that I lived in, we had our little, I guess group that kinda ran things within the dorm. I was in a dorm that we shared [0:18:00] expenses, a co-op dorm. So I can remember I did share the committee that interacted with the people who were over the—who represented our interests to those people who were in charge. I did join up a sorority. I did. But I led a pledge revolt. (MM laughs.) It was interesting, the lady that was head of the sorority down there, [0:19:01] she was already a soror, she had been dating who soon became my boyfriend and my husband, so she made it hard on me, ok? (both laugh) Oh man, so I led this revolt. They brought the national president down to IU and it delayed me getting to be a Delta, so I never went back to try and be one again. As I look back over my life, things that I've done, a lot of times I was in a position where I was kind of a leader. So, every kind of step of the way, I was.

MM: In sort of a different capacity, right?. (ER: Yeah.) [0:20:00] So did you graduate from IU in about '56 or right around that time?

ER: '57.

MM: '57, ok. Can you tell me about your employment history after you graduated from college? Where'd you go?

ER: Yeah. Well, right after I graduated from college I got married. My husband was in the service, so he was in Germany and I spent almost a year in Germany before I came out to teach. I lived in Germany for about a year, then I came back. Gary was just new and building schools and all that. So there was a new school that I was assigned to, and I was one of the first teachers to teach at this new school. I started my teaching career and soon thereafter I joined the Gary Teachers' Union, [0:21:00] and it was their suggestion that I run for state representative. In 1978, I think it was. I ran for state representative and I lost. It was kind of interesting, 'cause it was... I was the treasurer of the Gary Teachers' Union, and were having this executive committee meeting, so after you have executive committee meeting, you disband into a committee on political education called COPE. So, [0:22:03] I never was that interested in politics—my brother was. At this time he was a basketball coach. So I got up to listen to find out what the score was on the radio in another room, and when I came back, this guy who was one the board said "I think that person oughtta be Earline Rogers." Said, Earline Rogers what? Well, this is [Joe?] Harris for state representative, but he is not going to run this year. He was the person that was there for labor, and we want you to run. But you gotta get down there real fast because filing closes in two days, and you had to go down to Indianapolis to file! I didn't know what I was doing, so I came home first to ask my mom what she—'cause my daughter, I had a son and a

daughter at that time, she would mind them while I was away and then of course my husband he was fireman. So he was at work one day and off two, [0:23:00] so we got that all straightened out and we headed down to Indianapolis. I filed to run, then come back and tried put a campaign together, all in that very short length of time.

MM: Oh my goodness!

ER: And of course I lost. While I was out there, ‘cause the candidates sometimes would be in a group and then they would go in to speak to people in groups. I’d remember we were at the senior citizens’ home and so this guy who I had voted for all these years, kinda jingling change in his pocket. I said, “what’re you doing?” He’s says “these are all silver dollars. All I gotta do is go in there and pass out these silver dollars and I’ll get their votes.” I just was *so* awful. You know, I just... I thought to myself, I voted for this guy all these years, and this is how he thinks? So I decided that time, yeah I’m going to get into politics and see if I can do it the right way, you know. So I lost that race. The next year [0:24:00] there was a race for city council, and I ran. It was a district council race, right here in this district anyway. So I won. Then I became a council person. My second year I was elected president—first woman to ever be elected president of the Gary city council. (MM: Wow.) And I stayed there for two years, and then an opening came up in Indianapolis. A congressman died, his name was Adam Benjamin. Katie Hall who was then a senator, she went to Congress. Carolyn Mosby went from the House to the Senate, [0:25:00] and I came down from the Gary City Council down to the House. That was in 1982.

MM: Ok, so were you... So Mosby resigned to go the Senate, right? That’s what you said? So were you specially appointed or did you have to run an election for her seat?

ER: It was precinct organization in the district that voted that sent me there.

MM: So in the next cycle, you had to go to run?

ER: Right. In fact, I was up for the one to go to Congress, but at that time Richard Hatcher was our mayor and at that time it was the district chairperson we decided who would go to Congress. [0:26:00] I was, it was three of us, Katie Hall, a guy named Bob Pastrick, any myself that were running. I represented a group, a place out here called Black Oak that was really people who were from Tennessee, southern Indiana, I mean, the South. They were all white. When became city councilperson, then, I became to know them and I can remember they had a flood one time and I rode around in a pickup truck with them and all that. So one of the guys out there, he thought I should be the one to go to Congress. So Hatcher had a big meeting where people could come in and say who they wanted to go. This guy, I’ll never forget his name, Ernie Davis, he came in, he said “Well I think we’ll send Miss Rogers, [0:27:00] our council lady, to Washington. ‘Cause, I tell ya, Miss Rogers, she might be Black on the outside, but she white on the inside!” (both chuckle)

MM: My goodness! What did he mean by that exactly?

ER: I guess I don’t—he thought it was a compliment! Yeah, that I was Black, but that I guess I understood, white people, I don’t know! He came to me afterwards, you know, “what did I say?” You know, people just started laughing, and falling over. “Ok, Earline, just let you outta this, you know.” Oh me oh my. That’s not the reason, she had a lot, she was already a senator, so it made sense for her to go and...

MM: Now what was your relationship like with Mayor Hatcher?

ER: Uh, interestingly enough, we were in college together. Down at IU. We used to ride back and forth because [0:28:00] his best friend was one of my best friends, and they lived in Michigan City and we lived in Gary, so I would ride back and forth. So I knew Dick very well. We got along. We got along fine. I know I worked extremely hard--I was Teachers for Hatcher when he ran for Mayor and all of that. Now when I got on the city council, that's when I guess the relation between us was not, was not as good as one would have thought because of our background and knowing each other. Like I said, I got to be the president of the council. The police showed up at a council meeting to complain about the condition of the police cars. So I uh, you know, the council decided, [0:29:00] you know, me leading the decision, that what we would do is we would have an inspection of the police cars and designate a time and a place. So when Hatcher found out about it, he called me up, he said, "Listen, we're not having any inspections of any police cars." So I said well why not? He says "We are just not going to do that. You are *not* going to --." I said oh yes I am! Ok. So I subpoenaed the police cars. He called me up said "I have never in all my life been subpoenaed!" (laughs) Well you are now! So after that, [0:30:00] the relationship, you know, was not the same. And then I would resent the fact that he would call me and want me to vote a certain way. I would say why, and he would say "Why are you asking me why?" I said, well, you know, I might run into somebody at the grocery store, you're not gonna run into anybody at the grocery store that's gonna ask you why you voted for this. And so we uh, we didn't get as along as well as one would have thought since we'd had such a close relationship, you know, before then, so...

MM: Well, if I can jump back a few steps here and get a few things in chronological order. (ER: Ok.) So you went down to IU and you met your husband at IU, but he was from Gary as well?

ER: No, he's from East Saint Louis, Illinois. Football player. (MM: Ok.) ... Yeah.

MM: And what's his name?

ER: Louis. L-O-U-I-S.

MM: Ok. When did you have children?

ER: It was after I got married. [0:31:02] I was married five years before I had children. We uh, like I said, he got inducted into the Army out of college and so he... [shuffling in background] he got stationed in Germany, but before he got stationed in Germany, there he is [gestures to Louis]. Hi

LR: Hi.

MM: Hi.

ER: I just to talking about--we just got to the point where I met you.

MM: Good timing.

ER: Yeah, right, 'cause he tells a different story than I do, ok?

MM: Maybe I need to talk to him too!

ER: Right, right. [To Louis] Stand there just a minute while we tell this story. How I met him—I'm down there 'cause my friends have been down there before. So I'm down in a place called the Commons, you know, everybody meets. So we're sitting there talking, trying to acclimate me to everything. So the door opens and in comes the football team, and in comes this guy that I thought this was the most handsome guy I ever seen in my life! So he comes straight over there to me and he says to my friend, "Introduce me to her." [0:32:00] And so she made the introductions, you know. Then when I heard the name, it was a name I had heard before, about all these girls and they ironed his shirts and did his homework, you know. So I turned around and oh I'm not interested. (both laugh)

MM: [To Louis] Do you have to dispute that at all?

ER: Oh, no, he's not gonna dispute that. So then uh, [to Louis] you wanna tell, you wanna go to where you say I was trying to get your attention?

LR: Oh sure. On campus and in the morning I guess I passed her going to class. She stops and says, "Can you tell me where the Chemistry building is?" I said, you're standing right in front of it! (all laugh)

ER: I didn't know! He says I did know.

LR: She knew. Just trying to get my attention, and she got it.

ER: Next thing, a couple days later the phone rings. "Hey, I know a guy that's interested in meeting you. I know I made a mistake and you're not interested in me, but you know. He'll be over at the [inaudible—tree?] center at seven o'clock. You interested?" You know, and so then I go over there and it's him. [0:33:00] (MM laughs) So that's how we got—so here we are now sixty-three years, no sixty—'cause it'll be sixty-four years when we married in December and this was two years before, so sixty-six years I've known him.

MM: Wow! Congratulations.

ER: Right, right. [LR leaves room] Like I said, we lived in Germany.

MM: Where were you at in Germany?

ER: Ulm, Germany. So then I left Germany so I could come back to teach and he was still over there. He played football in the service, so he was still over there and I went to—I came back. So then after he graduated, I mean after he was out of the service, he came here to Gary. We got married before he left.

MM: For Germany?

ER: For Germany. He didn't want to leave me down there unwed. (both laugh)

MM: Smart move.

ER: So we were married five years before I had my son. [0:34:00]

MM: Ok. And what's your son's name?

ER: Keith.

MM: Keith, ok. And what year was he born then?

ER: Uh, he's 58. What year is that? [To Louis] What year was Keith born? He just turned 58 in July. Add that up, what year is that?

MM: Ok. Probably about '58 right? '58 or '59, close to it?

ER: Well we were married in '55...

MM: Or maybe '60.

ER: Maybe '60. Right, '60.

MM: And then did you say you had a daughter as well?

ER: Yeah, my daughter's eleven years younger.

MM: Ok. Um, so, you started to tell me, [0:35:00] running for that first office and lost, but how did you become more seriously involved in politics? What sort of drove you to get into that?

ER: Well like I said that little encounter with the guy that was jingling money in his pocket, and you know that's not right. We need somebody that's in there for all the right reasons. And then uh by my being a teacher, there were a lot of—in the Teacher's Union—teacher's issues that came up that the resolution of those issues, you know, were with the state. So a lot of my colleagues thought I could make a difference down there because of my background in education. [0:36:00] So when I went down there, of course, most of my interests were directed toward education and union activities, so those were two. Then of course city problems since I served on the council and Gary was certainly a city in which there were problems. So those were the areas—labor, education, and local government—those were the three areas I thought I could make a difference in.

MM: Ok. As you were getting involved in state government, did you have any national political heroes, or people you were sort of following at the time?

ER: Um...Not really.

MM: What about within the state, were you aware of other sort of leaders within the state?

ER: No, not really. I wasn't really that involved or knew that much about state government. [0:37:00] I went down to the legislature sort of blind to it all, you know, but... No, nobody. Now, I knew Katie Hall, and uh, Caroline Mosby. Those two, the two women kind of preceded me down there, but wasn't really aware of anything specific that they had done that I would have made me more interested in what was going on and so forth. [0:38:00]

MM: When you ran that first time and lost, do you recall who your opponent was? Did you lose in the primary or was it in the regular election?

ER: Oh, it's always in the primary here, it's always Democratic--no Republicans run and win. So, the only Republican I knew growing up was that old man down the street whose grandfather voted for Abraham Lincoln or something, you know? (both laugh) But other than that, you know, they just were not a factor. But you know what, I really found out that that was a plus for me, because they had never been an enemy and I was not that familiar with them and what their thoughts were and where they stood on issues and all of that. All of that was new to me, [0:39:00] the differences between Democrat and Republican, because once you ran here as the

primary, then that was it. Most of times I didn't even have a Republican opponent. So, I didn't go there not liking Republicans, ok, 'cause I didn't even know that much about them and where they stood. I mean, it didn't take me very long after I got down there (both laugh) to see the differences. But I didn't go down there with disdain or fear for the party.

MM: Sure. That's really interesting.

ER: Yeah, which I think, I consider that a plus.

MM: Well since it was all or mostly Democratic up here, did you find that things would get heated in elections?

ER: Yeah.

MM: Did people have vastly different political ideas, even?

ER: No, it was almost like a personality thing. [0:40:00] Politics and where you stood on certain issues weren't nearly as important as the fact you know, you're born in Gary, you served in Gary, you served in this capacity, your background, experiences and all of that. Those were more important than any issues you deal with, 'cause most of us were on the same side or had the same position on particular issues.

MM: Interesting, ok. You were appointed for that first time, which would have been '82, right?

ER: Mhmm.

MM: So when it came around for the next actual election, what was your first election day like? [0:41:00]

ER: I'm trying to think who I ran against. At that time it was like a two-member district, and I can remember one of the persons I was running was Robert Rucker, the Supreme Court guy. And it was so interesting, when he found he wasn't going to win, ok, he would come to the campaign meetings and campaign for me. It was so interesting, sometimes going in and out of the statehouse I'd run into him, you know, and we'd sit, we'd laugh and talk about those days I was just starting out and he was starting out. So I wound up winning and continuing to stay, you know, and then he gets appointed to the Supreme Court. (both laugh)

MM: Wow. Pretty good movement, too, I'd say!

ER: Right, right, right. Like I said [0:42:00]...one time it was a two-member district and there weren't a lot of people interested in running for state rep, or running for an office that would take them from home. So it was never an office that was that sought after. It was always the mayor or the city council, the county council, you know, that people were interested in. Especially where women were concerned, they didn't want to take that kind of a position.

MM: Right, I want to come back to that issue in just a second. You had to leave Gary to serve for a couple months, but what did you think that first day as you walked into the statehouse?

ER: Well, I wasn't afraid... I uh, [0:43:00] I mean, it's overwhelming, you know? 'Cause the only other time I been down to sign up to run. I had Charlie Brown in the House with me, so I had someone in the House with me, then I had Carolyn Mosby in the Senate, so I had them to

talk to. It wasn't very long after that that I ran into uh, my roommates. Wasn't the first year, but after I got a chance— [0:44:00] You know Sheila Klinker from Lafayette?

MM: I have not met her yet, but her name is familiar, yeah. She's on my list.

ER: She, and then there was Anita Bowser from Michigan City and uh... So the three of us, somehow [inaudible], 'cause both of us were teachers. Klinker was a teacher. Anita was a professor at Notre Dame. We met in caucus and all that, got to like each other. So after that first year we roomed together. We found us an apartment, and I'd say, I mean, up until I left—well, it was the three of us, then Anita died. I forget what year she died. Then it was just Sheila and myself. And then we were together. And it was interesting when we moved into the Columbia Club, that bastion for Republican men! [0:45:00] (laughs) But it was a great experience for me, I'd be-- we'd be like the only three Democrats there, but we'd be sitting down talking to Bob Garten, the pro tem of the Senate, getting to know people on a social level, getting an opportunity really to like people, you know. So it always was the three of us until, I think it was the year, probably when Anita died, 'cause Anita died at the Columbia Club. I had come in that weekend, 'cause I would come in and stop in and see how she was doing and all that. You know, and she wasn't doing very well, she died later on that day. So then it was just Sheila and myself. The two of us continued to stay at the Columbia Club and Sheila until maybe 2015, [0:46:03] when Sheila started to commute back and forth, then I started to stay there by myself.

MM: Where was your first apartment at then?

ER: It was... what was the name of that place? "River" something... It was an apartment.

MM: Like an actual apartment.

ER: Like an actual apartment. Right, right, yeah.

MM: Now, were the athletic clubs open when you were—'Cause didn't the Democrats used to go to the athletic club?

ER: They used to go to the athletic club, right, right, right. So at the time, well, it was so funny because Joe Harrison, he had to get a sponsor to go into the Columbia Club. Sheila called me and said Joe Harrison wants to sponsor us. Well, I said, "what?!" [0:47:00] (laughs) So she said, go ahead, I don't care, I'm fine. So he was our sponsor when we moved into the Columbia Club and we became members of the Columbia Club.

MM: Why did he want to do that? Or what were his motivations?

ER: I think they were low on memberships, I don't know why he did it. And I didn't question why. I said, "well, ok, hey." Gives me a chance to really find out how people really are, see whether or not... It was fine, we'd sit down there and talk, and found out that we were more alike than we were different.

MM: Well, sort of jumping back to what we were just talking about, [0:48:00] how old were your kids, I guess, when you were running?

ER: Let's see, my daughter, was she eleven maybe? And, uh, I think my son was in college.

MM: So what was that like, having to leave for a couple months?

ER: Well, it wasn't difficult because she stayed with my mom, her grandmother. And my older brother, he had two children that stayed there, because he and his wife were teachers. So, uh, even my—we were all teachers, the three, the three older ones were teachers, so my mother's like she had a daycare everyday with her grandkids. My daughter never suffered anything, in fact she enjoyed it, they had fun. So, interesting now, whenever she [0:49:00] does something that I'm not proud of, she tries to point to the fact that she was left alone. (laughs) "If you hadn't spent so much time—" (chuckles) I say, "Look, you had your grandmother, your grandmother raised me, so." She was fine. And like I said, days her dad was off, most nights he would have her at home, so it worked out. There were no problems there.

MM: How did it work for your teaching career?

ER: I would start in September, and teach until January. Then, I would take a leave of absence through the legislature, then I would come back in April or March or whatever. [0:50:00]

MM: I'm assuming that the schools liked that because then you were representing them there. [ER: Yeah.] Or was it problematic to get subs or things?

ER: Well, they would get---one person there would take my place. And I would, like when I would come in on Fridays I would stop and see how the kids were doing and all of that. I didn't have to do that, but I did that, you know, to try to keep up with where they are so when I came back in March or April I could pick up and finish off the school year.

MM: Right. I guess I never asked, what grade did you teach and what subject?

ER: Elementary grades. All the elementary grades I taught. Started out with first grade, second grade. I remember one year I taught second grade, and so uh, the next year I taught third grade, so when I walked in the classroom, the kids thought they had failed! [0:51:00] "Oh, Miss Rogers!" (both laugh)

MM: Oh, that's funny.

ER: Then I was a resource teacher. Probably the last ten years. I worked with paraprofessionals. I would go from school to school, and interact with teachers and paraprofessionals, make certain they were working well together and all of that. So, I wasn't in a classroom for the last years that I taught.

MM: For the majority of your years, were you at the same elementary, or did you move around?

ER: Yeah, same one.

MM: And which one was that?

ER: It was [inaudible] School.

MM: Well you mentioned Charlie Brown and some of the other people as you were getting into the House, but how did you learn the ins and outs of state government, and did you have mentors to sort of help guide you?

ER: No, I didn't really have any mentors, I just picked it up in, [0:52:00] uh...in my interactions with other legislators and stuff. Anita Bowser she very important in terms of the law, because she was a lawyer and taught law. So I learned a lot from her, we'd have good conversations at night.

So it was just my surroundings and people I came in contact with that I learned about state government, other than that you get from a textbook. [0:53:00]

MM: Sure, sure. How did you know the needs and wants of your constituents, of people back in Gary?

ER: Well, I had, like I said, as far as the schools were concerned, I had been an integral part of that, so I knew that. Then as far as government was concerned I was aware of the problems that we had during city government, so... having grown up here and knowing people, so I just, I was aware of what the problems were.

MM: In the early years of your time in the House and then when you were on the city council, what were some of the problems Gary was facing?

ER: [0:54:00] We've always had problems with the children and education, you know, being—keeping up, being on par with others. So I spent a lot of time actually talking and dealing with legislation, like early learning experiences, and making them see how important it was and the difference in terms how a child comes to school from a city like Gary and maybe one from a more affluent, you know, in terms of their vocabulary, in terms of the interest of the parents, you know, all of that. I felt that really a part of my importance there was to educate my peers about [0:55:00] not only the importance of the background of childhood school, but how that impacts the scores and everything. And by my being an elementary teacher and doing all of that and teaching elementary grades, I remember I get the vocabulary that a child from one kind of a home comes from and maybe one from another kind and how that impacts, you know. So, that, and then like I said, being on the city council and not having the resources. Say, like the police cars and how that impacted, you know, problems we had with crime. [0:56:00]

MM: Ok, do you remember the first bill you sponsored?

ER: Nope. (both laugh)

MM: Well, you had a lot of legislation over the years.

ER: I know it, I know it, I know it. You don't have that?

MM: I probably do, I can look it up.

ER: Ok, ok.

MM: I just wondered if you had a specific memory of that.

ER: Not the first one, no. I've got bills that stand out, you know, and I'm sure we'll probably get to those.

MM: Sure. In some ways you've already talked about this a little bit, but can you describe the regular interaction amongst the assembly members? What was it like on the floor, versus in the Columbia Club, or elsewhere?

ER: Well, surprisingly enough, what I found surprising was, the lack of opportunities to interact with the other house. I mean, in the House, I didn't get a chance to deal with the Senate, because the gavel would pound and everybody would go their own way. Some people, especially those who lived in Indianapolis, they would go home and get right back into their normal environment.

[0:57:00] And some people who lived in houses while they were down there, would go, and they would have a regular home atmosphere. Sheila... I used to spend half of my time trying to keep up with Sheila Klinker. We went to every reception. (Rogers laughs) But it was an opportunity to meet and interact with people that you wouldn't have a chance to interact with before. So we always made a reception, and it's so surprising to me that you don't get a chance to get to know people outside of whatever your interactions are on the floor. [0:58:00]

MM: So what kind of receptions would these be?

ER: All of them, you know. Like the bankers, the retired teachers, or the chamber of commerce. We went to all of them, you know. Which is good because that's where you get to learn the issues, and people who are, you know, who are important to whether or not you get legislation passed, so yeah.

MM: What were interactions like between the majority and the minority parties?

ER: When I first went down there—of course, in the House, [0:59:00] Democrats were in majority, so uh... It didn't seem there was as wide a division between the two parties initially. Ok, now I don't know, whatever you... And so... when I first went down there I think I was on the last row, you know when you do, so I'm sitting next to a Republican—I forget his name, was it Spencer? I forget who he was, but you know, sitting next to a Republican, we got to be good friends.

MM: I can probably look it up right here, I think I have that. So seatmates were important too.

ER: Yeah. You're not supposed to vote for anybody else—

MM: [confirming notes] Spencer.

ER: You're not supposed to vote for anybody, like if you're not in your seat. And so I remember one time he wasn't in his seat and he was like, [1:00:00] “Hey, push my button, push my button, push my button!” And so the guys on the Republican side say, “You're not telling *her* to--!” He said, “She'll push the right button for me.” So we got to be good friends, you know. Like I said when I first went there we had our differences... but it was not nearly like it is today. I don't know *what* it is today, now, but, like I said... I never felt a big difference. This was just a few years ago when I was in the Senate, Raatz, Senator Raatz you know he told everybody, “You know what she said to me one time? She said I can't believe a nice person like you belongs to the Republican—” (laughs) [1:01:00] So I know how to get this one senator, I forget his name, every time he'd talk to me he would talk real loud, “Hey, Senator!” You know, what the hell's wrong with you? “I know you can't hear, you're old.” You know, it's stuff like that. Just laughed, and you know. He was on the same floor with me when I was in the Senate. If I saw him now, he'd raise his voice like I can't hear 'cause I'm much older than he is.

MM: So was that like in good fun or was he being offensive?

ER: No that was in good fun. That was in good fun, you know, right, so. And you get to be really close to some people, just like even now I've got Facebook friends from the other party that we still keep up with, [1:02:00] like Tom Wyss.

MM: Well I talked to him on Friday and he told me I had to tell you “hello.”

ER: Oh, really, ok! And we went through something together. My son had cancer, his wife had cancer, so going through something like that together there's a bond that political parties just can't break up, you know, so. Like I said, I had the opportunity to go on a lot of trips you know, like to Europe, to China, to South America. When you're together like that in another country the bonding kind of takes place because you go through the same experience together, you know, and you take pictures and stuff like that, so. [1:03:02] Even Johnny Nugent and I are friends. We'll probably get to that when we get to the casinos. 'Cause one time he made an honorary member of the NRA. And that was fun, you know there was a house resolution. I said, "Hey, look, this can never get back to Gary, Indiana!"

MM: Well, walk me through the process of generating a bill. How did that work?

ER: Uh, a lot of times different groups with different interests might ask you to have a bill done or maybe something that happens, like, [1:04:00] I guess something that comes to mind, the Paula Cooper case—juveniles and the death penalty—was something that happened. And as I researched juveniles and the death penalty, I saw that Gary—I mean, Indiana, had the lowest age at which a child could be put to death. As low as ten. You know, they could have, the way our laws work. So I know that came as a result. That's how I got that legislation done. And then we had uh, Jojo's law. We had a preschooler killed in a car accident, [1:05:00] riding in one of these 18-passenger vans. So things like that that came up in my community. You know, or things that encourage me to try to...

MM: So if something came up in the community would you gather research on it and then send it--?

ER: Right, yeah, gather research on it. And then talk to them and legislative services and put together some legislation addressing it.

MM: How would you garner support for the legislation then?

ER: Well, uh, just after you've got the legislation done look at what groups would be affected by it [1:06:00] and have an exchange in conversation with them, let them take a look at it, you know. Talk to different caucus members that might have a background that they can aid and assist you, you know in terms of getting something passed. Everybody had their own specialties and had experiences where, dealing with these specialties. Basically that. Or the ISTA might have something and might think that you might be a good person to carry the legislation. Legislation would come outside of you to you or you find something interesting and try and get something fixed. [1:07:03]

MM: Was a lot of the conversation around the legislation on the floor or did a lot of it also occur at the Columbia Club, or at the receptions? Or all of the above?

ER: All of the above. Right, right, right. Like at the Columbia Club, [inaudible] after session you've got this big table, round table ok. And there are Democrats there and Republicans. And you go and take a seat at the table and just kinda talk about stuff. Sometimes there'd be lobbyists there, you know, that you get an opportunity to talk to a lobbyist about something. Or they would talk to you. Just in kind of a comfortable atmosphere, you know.

MM: So a lot of—"business" maybe isn't the word I want, but a lot of discussion you know, behind the scenes or in informal atmospheres—

ER: Right, absolutely, I found it to be very helpful. [1:08:00]

MM: Did you then have a sense of how people would vote on an issue before it came to the floor, or was—

ER: No. I mean I always thought it was important to know, you know, have an idea and meet with people individually to see where they are on a particular piece. And generally there's honesty that's there. Nobody's gonna tell you, "Yeah, I'll vote for it," and turn around and *not* vote for it, without at least, you know, letting you know where they were. Especially if it was an issue that was important.

MM: So you felt like people were trustworthy in that sense of letting you know where they stood?

ER: Absolutely. Yep, where they stood, right.

MM: Ok. During your tenure, maybe starting with the House and then we can talk about the Senate, but what roles did party leadership play? [1:09:00]

ER: Well, like I said it was the first time I had—well, when I first went there Democrats were in leadership positions, then I had to adjust to Republicans being in leadership positions. You know, in reality because of the conservative nature of a lot of the Democrats there was not a stark difference between positions. I found that out. In fact I used to talk about the Ohio River boys, you know (chuckles) they were the conservative Democrats. I remember a lot times in caucus I'd say, "Well, how did this person get to be a Democrat?" You know, how can you be a Democrat... So there are different shades of Democrats that I had to get accustomed to. [1:10:02] I'm thinking Democrats, labor, yeah, you know! Then you've got somebody that's not, you know... So I had to learn the differences within the party, which was always interesting.

MM: Did you see those differences in the Democratic side change during your time there or were they pretty consistent?

ER: Uh... they were pretty consistent. I think changes... I remember—and I don't know what year, the advent of the Tea Party, I think that was eye-opening for me in terms of the schism that was there between the two parties. [1:11:00] For a while there it was really stark, then after a while people just seemed like to not be so set. These people that were coming in to the legislature, you know, they came in with, I thought, not even a willingness to try to understand the other side and try to find common ground. It really was a different time. But then, that too kind of filtered down and so now we're back.

MM: And I'm not sure if I have the years right on this, but it seems like that was 2008, 2010s—was it even earlier than that maybe?

ER: Ok...

MM: Or rather, I guess that's not so much my concern is—

ER: Yeah, that would be about the time.

MM: Probably. So you felt that there were maybe a handful of years where it was hard to just discuss across the aisle where it hadn't been the case before. [1:12:00]

ER: Absolutely, right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MM: And so your last few years, did you feel like that had toned down?

ER: It toned down, that it had toned down, yeah.

MM: Interesting. Um, then what was the purpose of the Democratic caucus? How did it function, what was its role?

ER: I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

MM: I guess, can you describe what the purpose of the Democratic caucus was. So you would come together and what would be the goal of doing that I guess.

ER: I guess look at legislation, basically, you know, and see what its effect was on different areas of the state, and listen to what other people are saying. Kind of go through bills and stuff and see where everybody was. [1:13:00] That's basically what we would do in caucus. Say for example if I had a bill, I would discuss it with the caucus and see where their problems were, and if anybody had any problems with it, you know, make certain you come see me so you can talk about it. Basically, you know, we used our caucus meetings to discuss what was going on.

MM: Is it trying to get everyone like on the same page before you then went into session? Is that--?

ER: Yeah, make sure everybody understands what's going on.

MM: What about the Black Caucus then? Same type of--?

ER: That legislation that was particularly important in the Black community, you know, say for example lately it's been hate crimes bill, [1:14:00] you know, and our inability to get movement on that or it may just be party. State party issues, in terms of candidates that might be running and what their backgrounds were and whether or not the state party, chairman of the Democratic party was interacting with Caucus and all of that. They weren't really a host of differences within our Caucus, as relates to where the Caucus was and where the Black Caucus was. Sometimes it had to deal with leadership in the Caucus. 'Cause I remember when I was assistant minority leader in the Senate, [1:15:03] I remember Richard Young who was running for caucus chair, you know, he came to me and he basically offered me the caucus chair and I said, "Why not assistant minority caucus?" I'm bringing, I mean, I had the votes of all the Black Caucus members then I had Anita Bower, Rose, Andy, Jot. I had the numbers, you know. So he said, "Well, ok, you've got those numbers from me and I've got these numbers from you," and so I became assistant minority leader. So nothing, you know, no anger, just an awareness that we always tried to have with the Caucus positions on different issues, where we stood on 'em you know, so...

MM: Correct me if I'm wrong here, but weren't you also, is it like assistant party chairman for the Democratic party in Indiana?

ER: Yep, mmhmm.

MM: So how did you get more heavily involved with that as well?

ER: Uh, I'm trying to see how I got—I'm trying to remember how I got that position. John Livengood and I were good friends for one thing. It worked well together. It wasn't my idea to be vice chair of the party, but when he looked at the different offices that were there and the impact that Black community had on the Democratic party they thought that it was important to let everybody know that Blacks were important to the party and the best way to show it is to have somebody in leadership [1:17:05]. And so, it was interesting. Posing in counties all over the state, you know, and (laughs). Oh, me, I was laughing one time, I said, "Well. I'm looking at the low hanging limbs to see if I'm gonna be hanging from one of the limbs on the trees, you know, but it was fun. I got to meet a lot people and good friends.

MM: Interesting... Did you—was there ever conflict travelling in other parts of the state? Did you ever--?

ER: Nope, unh-uh, never felt anything.

MM: What does the public not know about how the General Assembly operates?

ER: [1:18:00] I don't think they recognize the camaraderie that's there. I'm not too sure about now, you know, how things work. But when I was there... I uh, I don't think that they recognize that the Democrat [inaudible] problems. I don't think that they realized differences between the two parties or why one party thinks one way and one of the parties—I think that... Then I think their expectations in terms of what you're able to do might be greater than you're able to produce [1:19:00] and may not know the difficulty of getting agreement on something so that it goes through the legislature. What might seem very simple to them in terms of their thoughts, they don't—especially if there's not the exchange that normally goes on in a community. You know, like I said here in Gary we very much—it's much more difficult for them to understand something than it would if there was interaction not on a daily basis, but a frequent basis, you know in terms of differences between the two parties.

MM: What were the most controversial legislative issues during your time in the Assembly?

ER: (laughs) It's gotta be the casino issue. [1:20:00] (MM laughs) I tell ya, I got... I meant to keep that letter. She wrote me a letter saying I was surely going to go hell because of this, you know. Interesting, here in Gary, I mean, the two prominent ministers were on either side. My minister was supportive like Caroline Mosby's minister and her congregation, so it was all of that that was a part of it. And because there were so many negatives associated with casino game, like the mafia, and prostitution and drugs, and all of that. [1:21:00] So, it uh, it was an interesting experience, that whole casino effort, you know. There was a guy named Bob [inaudible—Spoliar?], I been meaning to ask where he is. He was a former Garyite and he lives in Lebanon, Indiana, and he was a lobbyist, ok. And he just basically thought casinos would be good for Gary. And I can remember him approaching me in the hall and saying, "Earline, you know, this would be so good for Gary." I said, "Oh, right, ok," I didn't know what I was stepping into either, ok, I said "yeah, yeah, you're right." It was the year after we passed that Indiana can gamble, it was that one, you know. [1:22:06] So I—so then he said, "Can you set up a meeting between me and your mayor?" At that time the mayor's name was Tom Barnes, and I said "yep." So I got in contact with the mayor and they met and then the mayor was a positive about this, because we've had problems all along with trying to get enough money to provide city services. And so, uh, he was very positive about it, then we met and Caroline Mosby at the time was in the Senate [1:23:00] and she sent to Atlanta—to New Jersey to get the legislation. And the

legislation came back and Bob [inaudible—Spoliar?]and Caroline and I, we set down and put the legislation together. She filed it in the Senate, but then they found out since it was a revenue legislation it had to be filed in the House, and that's how I got it. The first vote—on the first vote we had a very good committee meeting and we had a guy named Carl [inaudible-Zikes?] that used to be on the gaming commission in New Jersey that aided and assisted us in the legislation and all that and testified at committee. And everybody was surprised it passed out of committee. And then it came to the floor [1:24:00] and we got 46 votes that first time, which says “ok, this might be a bill that could eventually be passed.” And it was so interesting. A guy named Dick Mangus, I was coming down the hall, he was coming down the hallway, and he said, “Look, how am I going to go back to my constituents and tell them that a Black lady from Gary, Indiana talked me into voting for a casino bill?” (laughs) I said, “Hey, look, that's your problem not mine.” (laughs) But uh, yeah, so, anyway that's how it all started and we finally got something through. In fact, [1:25:00] they had an article in yesterday's papers, we're still trying to get the casinos, we're trying to get our boats out of Buffington Harbor which is where our boats are, and uh, because we've got a better use for that. So we wanna move them to land, so we're gonna have some legislation that's gonna try outlast... We went from the water to the footprint, and now we're gonna try to get them from the footprint to somewhere else. I lobby for the Majestic Star Casino now.

MM: Ok.

ER: [1:26:00] Interesting, I started last year and when I ran into my former legislatives down there, they said, “So you're on the darker side of the process now, huh?”

MM: “Sure, you know how it works.”

ER: Right, right. I said, “No, no, no, here's one lobbyist that you guys know how important it is to be truthful about everything!”

MM: What was your motivation in first working on the casino issue?

ER: Just, uh...It's always been getting money for Gary. I mean, I don't know... I was born here so I feel I've able to be successful here, and I just feel as though that if I could just get something going here and with the steel mills, you know, on the decline, and people without jobs [1:27:00] and all of that, I was looking for something that would change the direction in which the city seemed to be going in. And it's always been, it was always just trying to get money for the city. To meet city services, our schools, we've got a low percentage of people that pay taxes and people and their homes—they just get up, I forget how many abandoned homes we have, and I just felt as though now here's something that could turn the city around. So we took casino gaming but then we had—at the same time they were trying to get horse racing passed. [1:28:00] That's when the horseracing people...I remember getting into it with Larry Borst, you know. He told me, he said, “You know, I don't like anybody from Lake County anyway.” He said, “In fact, I don't like anybody but my dog and my wife.” And uh, I thought to myself, I didn't dare say it, I wanted to say, “Is that in that order?” (both laugh) I knew not to say that to him. But finally we worked it out, we realized and I understood that he had been the driving force to get this change and it was horseracing that was driving it. And I also understood the fact that [1:29:00] when there was horseracing and casino gaming in the same state that the casino took moneys away from the horse, so I understood. But we worked it out, because initially what we did was for every dollar admission—I mean, for three dollars admission, one of those dollars went to the

horseracing industry. So there are ways to work things out down there, you know, without, you know... But like I said, I had to fight, so that and then the religious people we talked about with moneychangers somewhere in the Bible, I didn't understand all of that, you know, so there were these religious objections to it. Then like I said, mostly it had to do with, I mean, so we—we did the, on the river we did the riverboats because it was thought that—the police, I mean—they could be buffered and that nobody had to [1:30:01], you didn't have to go over that way if you didn't want to. They would be on the water, not in everybody's way. So it was all in an effort to try and assure people that yeah, this was casino gaming but it would not negatively impact, you know, the fabric of a particular city. So that was the genesis of it. It was interesting. Now, we, the city of Gary, the bill didn't call for us to have any input in to who we picked to be a license holder. So we had picks, we got two licenses. I mean, all along the state really tried to aid, to show Gary that we appreciate what you've done and the importance of what you've done and all of this. [1:31:00] So they gave—we were the only location that had two licenses. We picked Don Barden who was an African American out of Detroit and we picked a group called Monarch, it was out of Las Vegas to be the other license holder. I remember getting a call from Jack Thar who was the gaming commissioner at that time and he said, “We think that you all need a top name for your, for one of your boats, and we think that name oughtta be Donald Trump.” Ok? (laughs) So it's so funny when Donald—we had a process here, I was on the committee where we interviewed people coming in. So this one day they would come to city hall and this group would ask questions and all of that. I was there on that committee and I'm back at the coffee urn pouring me some coffee, and his hand reaches out and says, [1:32:00] “Hi, I'm Donald Trump.” And I looked around and said, “Yeah, you are Donald Trump, aren't you?” And we shook hands, you know. We went down the steps of city hall and we took him out to Lake Michigan where he could see where the boats would be. I tell you, he was just so excited. He said, “Is that what I think it is?” I said, “Yeah, that's the skyline of Chicago.” He goes “Oh, great!” You know, and he was just so excited and you know, he was going to do something that would come across the water from Chicago. I forget what those kind of boats are called. And made a lot promises, and so...that's why the state gave him a second license.

MM: So that did go through, right? He got it?

ER: He got it, right. And I can remember when we had our first sail out cruise, you know, and he came. And he had Marla Maples with him, ok. And so he ran in to me and he said, he introduced me to her and he said, [1:33:00] “This is the young lady that didn't want me to have a license.” I said, “No, no, (laughs) that wasn't it.” I mean, we had somebody else, but it wasn't, you know—I didn't even try to explain it to him, you know, so...

MM: What was he like, I mean, you said he was excited, but—

ER: Oh he was jumping up and down. I asked the guy with him, I said, “Uh, why is he so excited?” So he said, “Well, people don't realize that Donald Trump is a land developer.” And uh, so...I don't know what it was. I think when he sold his license to Don Barden, uh, I think he was trying to get rid of some assets because of some bankruptcy or something. [1:34:00] But he never really lived up to the expectations, you know, that we had. 'Cause he talked about this hotel he was gonna build, you know, and doesn't compare hardly to a Days Inn.

MM: Why do you think it didn't come to fruition?

ER: I think uh...He, uh...Like I said, at that time what he was trying to do, I guess, was file bankruptcy and get rid of some assets. And this, this was one of the assets I think that he was willing to get rid of.

MM: So it never even had the chance to kind of build up like you were hoping? Or everyone was hoping?

ER: Yeah. So Don Barden, he wound up with both licenses. And he was spreading himself too thin because he went up to Pittsburgh with somebody somewhere and he was trying to open up there. [1:35:00] And then he went into bankruptcy or something and I think it was all the stress and all of that, you know, he died. We have been kind of limping along, but, you know, but what happened was—all of our clientele comes from Chicago. And so the first, although it was us that led the charge, and we were given two licenses for what we had done. We didn't even have to have a referendum in Gary, 'cause we had had a nonbinding one, so we didn't have to have a referendum. Then we were given first shot at being first in the water. They set a date ahead that nobody could start until, you know, we started. So the state in every way was trying to, you know, say "thank you for efforts," [1:36:00] so, but...All of these things. Then Hammond passed it and East Chicago passed. And they're closer to Chicago, so most people would go to Hammond, and then we're third in line. Not only that, it used to be the boats could only dock once an hour. But since we had—they would do 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock, that. But since we had two boats, Trump would do like 7:30, 8:30, and 9 would be, you know, so ours was really every half hour. People not wanting to wait would come there, but then they passed a law that said, you know, so. So we got kind of the short end of the stick on that, so.

MM: Well, I want to ask a question and I don't really know the story behind this. [1:37:00]

ER: Ok.

MM: But I heard a rumor that you have probably one of the only apology letters from Donald Trump.

ER: Yeah, and I need to find that letter, too. (both laugh)

MM: What's the story behind that?

ER: I'm trying to think of his—it was his attorney that, uh, there was an article in the paper where it seemed as though the two of us, and we did have a difference in terms of something. He uh, it was on Donald Trump's letter head, [1:38:00] but it from his organization that apologized for what was written in the paper and stuff, you know. So it's somewhere here. I've gotta find it, because it has a lot of meaning now. (both laugh)

MM: I'd say so!

ER: I've got, I don't know, I got, I mean, on the casinos I've got these collapsibles, I've got everything. I've got every vote that was taken. I've got newspaper articles. I've got letters back and forth, you know. Don Barden and I, we got to be extremely close because we shared the same birthday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. I can remember he, uh, one time when I went out to the boat and we were talking, I asked him, "What are you trying to do? You know, you're just spreading yourself so thin." [1:39:00] We had that kind of relationship. 'Cause rather than put his money into the property, he was getting property other places. Mississippi, Pittsburgh, you know. And Ameristar, they were putting money into property and then I think it was Caesar's that got the

Hammond. ‘Cause it was so interesting that once we got this all passed. I remember it was Circus Circus. We thought they would be good to come to Gary, but then they responded that Gary didn’t have a family-like atmosphere and they wouldn’t come to Gary. So not only did we, although we had fought this battle, there were some companies that were interested in other places and not ours, you know, [1:40:03] so.

MM: So that was a struggle getting people.

ER: Right, yeah.

MM: Obviously decades have passed sort of since this first came to fruition. What do you think have been the results?

ER: Well I mean, we certainly—there has, I mean, I don’t know the millions of dollars, I did know the millions of dollars the casinos bring into the state. I mean, money goes to the state, and then money goes to the city where the boats are docked, it goes to the counties where the boats are docked. There’s another—I think it’s technology [1:41:00] or some kind of educational component to it, so. I think, you know, in terms of the dollars that have come into the state, I think that they have more than aided and assisted us. I, uh, sometimes I smile because my biggest opponent trying to get that passed was Evan Bayh, ok. And I remember how we in Gary had worked so hard to try to get him elected governor, you know, and had done that, and then here he is, you know, in opposition. I can remember the day—‘cause we put the legislation in the budget. I can remember the day that we were to vote on it. He...Everybody from his administration came out, [1:42:00] came down and was trying to keep us from voting against it. Ok. I can remember Stan Jones, he and I had been partners in education for so many years since I had been down there. Stan came and said, “The Governor said he wants you to vote no on that. In fact, the Governor wants to see you.” I said, “You tell the Governor I’m too busy counting votes, I can’t come see him.” And I didn’t go. Rose [inaudible], who was supporting it, she came back and she was close to tears. I guess he was *really* hammering Democrats to be against it, you know. But...So, I called us, there was seven Democrats. I called us the Magnificent Seven. The Magnificent Seven voted for that, and of course the Republicans voted for it.

MM: [1:43:00] For the gaming legislation in particular?

ER: It was in the budget.

MM: In the budget.

ER: It was in the budget, right. So I smile when they were thinking about him running for president and he was saying—they were saying about Evan running for president that one of the few governors in the country that had not had a raise in taxes. I said, “Yeah, that’s ‘cause we got the casinos.” (both laugh).

MM: Yeah.

ER: Crazy.

MM: Well, in—did I understand there was some pushback from some of the Democrats, in particularly in Gary, then when he was up for reelection because of his pushing back against the casinos?

ER: Yeah, I'm sure there was. I mean, I didn't use that as an excuse. Once you win, you know, why do that? [1:44:00] There's some people who still to this day in Gary who've not forgiven him.

MM: Mhmm.

ER: When he came and ran for uh, what did he run for lately? The Senate? No, yeah.

MM: Probably.

ER: U.S. Senate or something.

MM: Maybe, I can't—

ER: I forget. But his latest election try, there were people in Gary who still remembered that, his position on that, you know, so.

MM: Ok. Um, well, I meant to ask this earlier, but what prompted you to switch from the House to the Senate?

ER: Well, it was... Well, you know, it was that Adam Benjamin died and so it was open. And, I mean, to be perfectly honest, what I didn't like most about being a Representative was running every two years. So it gave me the opportunity to have to campaign less, and every four years. I thought it was interesting [1:45:00] that there was—I thought I could go over to the Senate and continue to work on the casino bill, and it would be like the first time in the history of the state where the author of the bill was also the sponsor of the bill. (both laugh) And uh, so I thought maybe I could go over there and work over there. 'Course, I knew Charlie Brown would continue the work in the House. He was up to go over there too. So, I just decided, you know, once every four years, I mean, I couldn't pass that opportunity up, since, so. [1:46:00]

MM: Were there any differences between being in one versus the other that you liked or didn't like?

ER: Well, you've heard what they say, right? The House is like a [inaudible—tap?] and the Senate is like a library? That's not quite true, but I do think that it, the Senate is uh... I think they deliberate more and in the House I always got the impression, because there was so many of us in the House, you know, everybody was trying to stand out. You know what I mean? I remember one time Dellinger stood on the desk to get the attention of the speaker, [1:47:00] you know. Dick Dillinger, I just thought about that again. And the Senate was a little bit more deliberative, you know, and uh, I, you know, so, that's uh... That was my, my views then, you know, as to why I decided to go there. Mainly it was just not having to run every two years, you know, so, which is important.

MM: Obviously, you said that casinos were some of the most controversial legislation. Is there anything else that sticks out to you?

ER: Well, the juveniles and the death penalty was one because it came on the heels of that Paula Cooper case here in Gary, where these teenagers had stabbed the Bible teacher. [1:49:00] And, so, I tried to not let that get in to it at all. That once, [1:48:00] you know, I—'cause it was Dick Bray who was chair of the committee where the bill was heard and he said, "Earline, I'll let you, uh, have a hearing, but I'm not too sure we're gonna vote on it." So I said ok. And there was a guy from Cleveland State University that was like the expert on this. I didn't even know he was

coming. He came to me with such an excellent presentation until Dick turned to me and said, “Earline we’re going to take a vote on this one.” You know, and then we voted. Got out of committee. [1:49:00] Got out of the House, went over to the Senate to—what’s that congressman’s name? [1:50:00] That was in the Senate at that time?

MM: Baron Hill or somebody like that?

ER: No, not Baron. I forget his name.

MM: What year was this, or around?

ER: I don’t remember what year it was. But anyway, he left the Senate and went to—he left the Senate and went to Washington.

MM: Oh, ok.

ER: But, uh, so, when it went over there I can remember Frank Bourbon from Hammond, ‘cause I went over there to listen to the bill. And he was against it, and he was back talking about the Paula Cooper case. He got up in front and he said, “She stabbed him and she stabbed her and she stabbed,” and I mean, going through all these machinations, [1:50:00] you know, and I’m thinking to myself, “Oh, you’re gonna kill this bill.” But it passed out. Bob Hellman was there at the time and he aided and assisted its passage. And it passed because all along I knew, Paula Cooper would be negative, you know. But I remember one time I was walking down the hall and I heard Randy Shepard, said to me, “You do know that you were responsible for saving Paula Cooper’s life?” Because when we passed that legislation, it was like—what it basically said was, no death penalty for up to sixteen and then you can use sixteen to eighteen as a mitigating factor, you know. So all those she had been, like, they were getting ready to sentence her to death. They didn’t. And uh, so, uh... [1:51:00] But then I was so sorry when I found out she had committed suicide. I can remember I was—my son lives in Arizona and I was just gotten off the plane and was going into his house and a reporter called me from back here to let me know that Paula had committed suicide... Interestingly enough, her sister contacted me a couple of years ago. Her sister is doing a book, so her sister came over and visited with me and I keep a picture of Paula [1:52:00], you know, on my stand over there, so. ... It...I don’t know. And ‘cause [inaudible] asked me, “Did you ever—” I’d never met Paula Cooper. And then I was thinking to myself, you know, wondering if there’s anything I could have said or done that could have prevented her from committing suicide. I guess not. Her sister and I have basically become like friends. We’re Facebook friends, and she, uh, kind of runs things by me when, if she’s getting ready to—they still haven’t written a book, but they’re gonna do a whole book about that whole Paula Cooper episode.

MM: How did that legislation come to you? I know that the incident took place in Gary. Is that something you picked up or is that something that someone said, “Look, this is—?”

ER: No, I picked it up. [1:53:00] I was upset [1:54:00] that they were going to give her the death penalty. ‘Cause like I said, people don’t understand the kind of homes that these kids come from and what happens and you know? Just like now. The Chicago kids that are here once they close down those high rises in Chicago. We’ve got a large population of Chicago kids that are here. My sister is still teaching, and when she comes home and tells me some of the things that those kids say to her—and she’s an intervention specialist, you know, and so she works the kindergarteners and the first graders. You know, the other day she said the little boy had said,

“Shut up, fat ass.” You know, calling her names. And the parents come over, you know, and there have been parents coming over to fight the teachers. [1:54:01] Peggy Hinckley, I’m working with her here. I, uh, the mayor appointed me to be on the advisory board for fiscal management and I was elected chairperson of that, so I am working closely with Peggy. But people don’t understand the children we have to work with here in Gary and the homes from which they come and the difficulty that’s there. I don’t know... We, uh, ... I don’t know what you do with kids like that. And there are kids that, I’ve never experienced this, they’re a group of kids they’re called runners, and uh, that they have to get up and run. And they’ll run out the school and they have to catch ‘em. I never even heard the term “runners” when talking to, about a group of kids, you know, [1:55:04] but... I don’t know where we’re going to go in Gary or what--how we can stem some of the problems that are here, the violence. So, my son keeps trying to get me to come to Arizona. Well, I’m like hmm. (laughs) He said, “Mom, you don’t know what it is to wake up everyday and the sun is shining.” (MM laughs) I said, “Ok, ok, ok.” But he and his wife, they teach at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix. So, they’re doing just fine, you know. Then I’ve got five grandsons, one granddaughter, and they’re all in that area, but I, you know.

MM: It’s hard to leave where you—

ER: It’s hard to—that’s right, yeah, right, yeah, yeah. [1:56:00]

MM: What was your proudest moment as a legislator?

ER: My proudest moment as a legislator...I think it was the passage of the casino bill. You know? I’ve got a picture somewhere of me going over to Johnny Nugent’s desk, ‘cause he made the greatest speech that night. You know, Johnny Nugent didn’t talk very much, but I tell you, he made a great speech that night and I can remember going over to his desk afterwards and saying, you know, “Thanks a lot, we did it!” So all you can do is to do what you think will make a difference. I was so glad that we had done that. It has not made the difference that I had thought it would make, [1:57:04] but we really haven’t been the recipients of what I thought we were going to get as a result of it passing, you know. I mean who would have thought that it would be Hammond. I mean, Hammond does extremely well. They are really moving forward, you know, and East Chicago. And we do too. Some of the money we’ve used, we’ve employed people. Most of the people that work there are from Gary, so we’ve got employment there. So it’s doing fine, but it would have been so much better if those two cities hadn’t been there and they were coming straight to Gary. And then Michigan City, they were the last to get on board. So all of the traffic that would have been coming from the north, [1:58:00] ah, we would have gotten. So Michigan City there and then those three casinos there, you know, and so. Maybe if we get a chance to move out to 80/94 where all that traffic is you know, we can begin to do some of the things we still need to do here in Gary, so, but anyway. So I’ve still got my hands into working with the emergency manager here and trying to see what we need to do here as far as education is concerned and still working to try and get additional moneys, you know, for the city to solve some of our problems, but in a different capacity. It was the commute back and forth that, uh, was the reason that I decided not to run again, you know. I mean, people think I had a driver, you know, but I was driving back and forth. [1:59:00] And you know, the advent of cell phones and all that, you know. I mean, just to me, was a little more hazardous than I wanted to do. Then I thought that this would be the time for my husband and me to do some things. Then he, uh, as you can tell, he’s not well. He’s not ambulatory, and, uh, he, uh.... He has cancer. And so we are

not going to be able to do a lot of the things that we thought we would be able to do. [2:00:00] So right now it's back and forth to the cancer doctor and stuff, you know. But anyway... I'm glad I did the legislature, I mean, that is... I felt that I had been able to contribute and I think, I mean I was a little late leaving, but I've still got some time, you know, here to continue to do some things, and you know, I will continue to do that, so.

MM: Yeah. ... Do you have any favorite anecdotes or stories from your time in the legislature? ... Or do you have too many that you can't choose? (both laugh)

ER: I'm trying to think... [2:01:00] I don't know, I think I've probably shared everything that I... high points, you know.

MM: I just have a couple more questions for ya.

ER: Ok.

MM: One, I just wondered—and you've addressed this at a couple different moments—but did you ever feel that you were treated a particular way based on either your race or your gender when you were a legislator.

ER: Maybe initially. But I think—I think it's the way in which you carry yourself. I never felt different, and so I think by my not feeling different, I don't think I acted different. [2:02:00] And I think people... I guess nobody ever really forgets, you know, that you're a woman or what your race is, but I do think there are ways that you yourself can behave in such a manner that people take that into consideration, ok. So I don't think that I did behave in that manner, because I never felt—I mean, I'm surrounded by people of a different political party, you know, but I never felt in any way not being able to get involved in what was going on. African American—[2:03:00] sometimes I think it's an advantage because people have low expectations of you so then when you do ok you're considered you're a genius (laughs). Then being a woman, I mean, I've always competed against guys and my brothers, you know, I was the only girl brought up between three boys and I'm sitting trying to get my dad's attention. And uh, so, you know, I've been able to succeed in the quote unquote "man's world." I have just kinda put those—the fact that I'm a woman, the fact that I'm a Black, the fact that I might be of a different party—I just never take those things into consideration and I think that, you know, in the end it bodes well for what you have to get done.

MM: How has the state of Indiana changed over the course of your lifetime?

ER: Hmm. ... You know, [2:04:00] I don't know whether or not—I think I could have said something different a couple years ago than I do now because of all the things that are going on in the country at this point in time, you know. I had that that Indiana and, you know, racism and all of that was ebbing, ok. Because I was Barack Obama's first district coordinator when he ran in 2008. We carried Indiana, you know, [2:05:00] and so that kinda led me to believe we are in a different point here than we were when I first got into politics. So like I said, I thought that maybe race did not play as significant a role because of the Obama situation, but now that, you know, different—now in this atmosphere I'm not too sure whether I viewed that right or whether or not actually things have gone back the other way, so. We'll see. Kinda scary.

MM: Very scary.

ER: Yeah, right.

MM: Given that you had previous contact with the president, [2:06:00] I guess has his involvement in politics surprised you from your earlier interactions or not?

ER: Yes, yeah, it is surprising for me. I didn't realize that he was so crass, you know what I mean? And, uh... I guess I probably maybe should have wondered about his maybe sincerity in terms of some of the things that he promised and didn't deliver on. Say, for example, when we had a hotel downtown that was—that we had to close up, and it was right next to city hall. And as we were going down the steps to get into the van to go out to the lake, Donald Trump said, "What's that?" And I said, "Well, that's an old hotel there." He said, "That's the first thing I'm gonna do, is I'm gonna get rid of that hotel. We're gonna level that." He never did that (laughs). I don't even think—I don't even know whether he ever thought about it again. [2:07:00] We finally got it leveled, you know, because it was an eyesore to walk down to city hall and see this abandoned Sheraton Hotel sitting there, you know. And uh, so...you know, c'est la vie.

MM: You've addressed this a little bit, but how has the general assembly changed during your, know, thirty plus years of service?

ER: You know, like I said, when I left there I didn't see nearly the...I mean... I don't know, maybe I was blind to it, but [2:08:00] I never—I didn't see the hard political lines that were there when I first, you know, came to the legislature. They were there and they were visible, you know. Not like they are today, but they were there. But I always thought—or maybe it was my shift from the House to the Senate, but we got along fine in the Senate. I mean, say for example, I was the ranking member for our party on the education committee. Dennis Kruse—now, Dennis Kruse homeschooled his children, probably, you know, would be the exact opposite of where I was on education issues. But Dennis Kruse invited me to [2:09:00] partner with him to—the day before every education committee meeting, we would meet with legislative services, the attorneys would come in, meet with us, go through the bills, so we understood the bills, ok. And I would say to Dennis, "Well, you know, that's something I can't support." He said, "I understand that, well I'm gonna be here on this." And so, you know, we—we did that. When we met as a committee, it was no—I mean, it was...he did his thing, I did my thing. He said, you know, and it was no rancor or anything like that. And I don't know whether that continued or not, but I always thought very highly of him for doing that 'cause we didn't want—for education—we didn't want to [2:10:00] be negative and all of that. I can remember one time, Ryan Mishler, he uh, he was testifying before the education committee on a bill or something, I forget, but one of the things I said to him is, "I'd like to invite you to Gary to visit our schools." And so, he said, "Who's gonna protect me?" So a hush went over the room, ok. I didn't say anything, I just went on. So he came to me later, he apologized, [2:11:00] and he came to Gary. The superintendent and I took him around so that he could see the schools and stuff, you know. ... So like I said, it was that kind of atmosphere we had in the Senate. I'm not too sure whether or not they were still—running every two years, you gotta be more political, you know, than in the Senate where you only have to run every four years, you know, so you can—so I think they get into more maybe political stuff than we did in the Senate, but I enjoyed the Senate a lot.

MM: Well my final question, then is—especially because you travelled all over the state and served for so long, what, if any, enduring qualities do you think Hoosiers have or hold dear? Or are there any?

ER: Well... You know... There's a certain... [2:12:00] I think, integrity to Hoosiers. What you see is what you get. There is no pretense, no hiding, you know. Even though you may have

differences, I think there is an honest portrayal of what you see is what it really is. So it's that integrity and that honesty, I think, that differs us from other states. It may not be what you like, it may not be what you want, but it is what it is, and when it is what it is and there's an honesty and an integrity there, [2:13:00] then you—to me, it's fair. And it helps you and enables you to see a way to maybe change things, whereas if you're not getting the right picture, you might be going down the wrong road. Does that make sense?

MM: Yes, absolutely. Mmhmm.

ER: Ok, right yeah. So I'm—Illinois, I'm next to Chicago, so we see the news from Illinois all the time. That's not what's there. Maybe that's why, I mean, I can see the big difference that's there. I mean, a Hoosier, they'll tell you where they are and that's where they are. You don't like it or not and there's no, you don't have to dig deep or any of that. [2:14:00] It is what it is, which to me is fair. I think what is not fair is when people hide, you know, and you don't know where to maybe alleviate any problems and all of that.

MM: Sure. Well I could probably talk to you for about ten hours (ER laughs). You have fascinating stories and I am very cognizant of your time. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you want to get on the record or anything that you feel like we haven't gone over?

ER: Nope. No, just that I absolutely loved the process. I do. And I just am so thankful that I was able to be in a position to do what I did. I'm having a hard time going back to normal life, you know. I was reading in the paper about this teacher at a catholic school here [2:15:00] who's been teaching for fifty years. I could have done this, you know, and I keep asking myself, you know, "Gee, Earline, you coulda got a chauffeur or you coulda—" You know? (laughs) But I miss it. When I talk about my statehouse family, you know, it is. It was my family, so the separation has not been easy for me, but it gets better everyday, you know, and so. And I know—

MM: Well when you're there for so long, I mean, that a part of your life.

ER: Yeah, right. Absolutely, yep. But like I said, I still, you know, keep in contact with them from time to time. Klinker and I, we are still good buddies. I guess she'll still (laughs)—"Earline—" 'Cause Charlie decided not to run, "Earline, why don't you run and Charlie Brown—" That's all you can—you think I'm gonna start all over again? (both laugh) Well we watched our children grow up together and so, and then her husband and my husband, former athletes, and I know Vic has had some health challenges too, [2:16:00] you know, so. There are associations that you make there that impact. Well, anyway. Well I've probably talked too much.

MM: No! No, it was really great. I very much enjoyed it and thank you so much for agreeing to do this and taking the time and I'll just hand this sheet back to you here. And if you're ok with it, if you just want to check "no restrictions," and sign up here—

ER: Ok, no restrictions, yeah.

MM: But if there's anything that, you know, want to close off, I'm happy to do that too.

ER: No, that's fine.

MM: And I'll go ahead and turn the recorder off here. [2:16:32]