

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Blanche Lambert Lincoln
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
September 17, 2012
Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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**Scott Lunsford interviewed Blanche Lambert Lincoln on
September 17, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Senator, we're here in your hodgepodge home in—in Little Rock, Arkansas. And I can't thank you enough for lettin' us come in and . . .

Blanche Lincoln: Sure.

SL: . . . have our way with your home here. Um—I know it's kind of disruptive to have all this stuff—all the cable running all over the place and the crew members in every other room in the house [BL laughs] doin' what they do, but I really thank you for lettin' us be here. Let me say that this is our second session. Our first one was in Washington, DC. We got a couple of hours there, and we're hoping to get a couple of hours here today. Uh—and today's date is September 17, 2012, and we are at the Lincoln residence . . .

BL: In Little Rock . . .

SL: . . . in Little Rock, Arkansas.

BL: . . . Arkansas. That's right.

SL: And it's a cloudy, misty, rainy day, and it's—it's very comfortable and cool. Um—I just want to thank you again for doing this for the Pryor Center, and—um—uh—I'm just really—I've been

looking forward to—to catchin' up on this . . .

BL: Me, too.

SL: . . . deal.

BL: I've enjoyed it. It's been a wonderful time for me, a great opportunity. I think you and I were both laughin' and cryin' at the last session, [*laughter*] so . . .

SL: It is.

BL: . . . I'm looking forward to this one, as well.

SL: Well, me, too. Uh—you—you know, we—we covered a—you covered a lotta stuff in a really precise way—uh—in those first two hours. Much—uh—much more fluid than I think I've ever experienced an interview.

BL: Yeah.

[00:01:20] SL: And so I—we can almost leave Helena because there's so much more to your life besides Helena, but I do want you to feel free to come back to Helena at any moment that you think of somethin' because—uh—I'm always after those earliest, oldest memories.

BL: Well, you know, it—and it's funny because your life is really built on—um—all of your experiences. And much of them are tension-like experiences or—or new experiences. Um—I always liken it kinda to a rope. You know, the—the—the way you make

a rope strong is you twist it, all those many fibers, and—um—so many of my fibers in my rope come from Helena. [*SL laughs*]
Uh—they come from not only growin' up there, but the—the—you know, my family that grew up there before me and the stories that I heard and the things that I've learned. And even—even living in Little Rock—uh—my husband's home—you know, my mom talked about cousins that lived in Little Rock and the trips they would make over here, or my grandfather talkin' about leavin' Helena on a train headed out for—um—you know, World War I—um—and Little Rock was his first stop—um—when he left home. So—um—Arkansas's kind of a—one big city in many, many ways like that because, you know, with relatives all around the state—um—fanned out, it—it—you always go home to that place you started—um—but it really makes the whole state feel like home—um—when you have cousins in Fayetteville and Hot Springs and Little Rock and . . .

SL: Can't get away from it. [*Laughs*]

BL: You can [*SL laughs*—well, you can't.

SL: One . . .

BL: It . . .

SL: . . . big family.

[00:02:56] BL: But it's—it's a good thing . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . uh—for . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . for those people who really do love and appreciate family and who've been blessed to grow up in a wonderful family—um—you know, you don't really wanna get away from it. Sometimes you think you do, [*SL laughs*] but you really, really don't.

SL: No, there's nothing ?stronger than? family.

BL: That's right.

[00:03:13] SL: Um—speaking of family, I—I've actually looked at our first two hours last night. Had a wonderful time with it—um—and we talked about your siblings, but in the actual interview, we didn't name them. And . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . so I think we oughta go ahead and . . .

BL: Sure.

SL: . . . get those names now and kinda make sure we're on the same page with that.

[00:03:31] BL: Well, I'm the youngest of four . . .

SL: Yes.

BL: . . . which is the reason I'm so tough and resilient. [*SL laughs*]
Um—my—my parents always said I—I was pretty tough at most
anything and could withstand it all, and it's because I have—my
oldest sister, Mary, who is a little over nine years older than I
am—um—and she's always been one of my—you know, a sh—a
big sister. I've idolized her, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: And—and she's very talented and skilled—um—was the smartest
of all of us. She was the National Merit Scholar and, you know,
very—extremely well read and—um—just very skilled and
talented in so many dif—different ways. And—um—she—um—is
a film director in Hollywood and—uh—was one of the first women
film directors out there—um—early on. Got her start—um—her
degree's in art and—and film animation and photography. And—
um—so she was one of those that just kinda—you know, when
Mother and Daddy said, "Spread your wings," boy, she took 'em
at their [*SL laughs*] word—um—and she spread her wings.
[00:04:33] My middle sister, Ann, is kind of the soul of the
group. Um—she is wonderful. She's a teacher in many, many
ways—um—a very gentle soul—um—but one that is thoughtful
and—and—and amazingly kind. She's six years older than I am.
Um—she's a master gardener. She has an unbelievable—um—

touch with God's creations, not just the earth and animals, but humans. And—um—she—she really identifies—um—and i—is thoughtful and—and nurturing in so many different ways like that. Um—she's very talented and skilled in her own right and in a whole host of different things. And—um—my brother is a farmer, and he is three years older than I am. Daddy said there—Mother had a child every three years, and [*SL laughs*] in 1960 when I was born—uh—he held his breath for three years and then [*laughter*] no more children. Um—I think Mother would've kept on, but anyway—uh—my brother is a farmer. He—he, too—um—has that same kind of a, I don't know, a—a unbelievably human soul that reaches out to people. Um—he's very thoughtful. He's very artistic, as well. Uh—sometimes he doesn't exercise it as much, but—um—his skills in—in the arts are really amazing when he—when he allows himself to do that. [00:05:59] But he's a good farmer—um—and he's a devoted brother and son and dad. Um—has raised three beautiful daughters, very smart—um—so they're—they're great. I'm—I'm blessed. All—my siblings are wonderful role models. They are great friends. Um—they didn't torture me too bad [*SL laughs*]—um—but they . . .

SL: You survived.

BL: . . . made me tough . . .

SL: You survived.

BL: . . . which was good.

SL: Yeah.

BL: Uh—they made me tough and taught me a lot, an awful lot, and always, always have supported me—um—which is a wonderful thing—um—in—in siblings.

[00:06:33] SL: So does he farm here in Arkansas?

BL: Yes. Um—my father's name and my grandfather's name, it's all Jordan—um—which is really kind of a Southern pronunciation of—of—of *J-O-R-D-A-N*. Um—and my broth—their nicknames were—was always Jerdie [*SL laughs*]*—uh—so we call my brother Jerdie. He—um—he had a nickname when he was little. When we were very, very little, we called him Buddy. And I think it was, like, he turned eight, and my dad said, "No more. We're not gonna call him Buddy anymore."*

SL: Hmm.

BL: "He has a perfectly good name, and nicknames are not necessary, and we're just not gonna do that." And from then on we didn't—we didn't call him Buddy anymore.

SL: Well, that's interesting.

[00:07:14] BL: Yeah. Well, my—one of my—my aunts, my—my

dad's older—older sister, always called him Bud.

SL: Uh-huh.

BL: 'Cause I can remember when her Christmas box would come at Christmastime—she lived in Florida and—um—his—my dad's birthday was three days before Christmas.

SL: Uh-huh.

BL: And so it was always fun to open the box and it—there was—everybody had a gift, and Daddy had two. He had a Christmas present and a—and it always said, "To—to Bud," which was what she called him. But—um—but—um—yeah, they—it's a great bunch. My—my brother still farms—uh—here in Arkansas and—um—and loves it. Um—he does—he manages—uh—pecan crops and—and soybeans and rice. Uh—I think rice has always been everybody's favorite crop, kinda.

SL: Yeah.

[00:07:59] BL: Um—but—um—and loves the outdoors—uh—and has an unbelievable connection with the outdoors. Um—you know, he can move through the woods just unbelievably silent. Um—he's always been very good—a very good hunter. Um—we—we all were—we all went hunting—um—and—but Dad's rule was you don't, you know, you don't hunt what you're not gonna eat. You don't hunt what you're, you know . . .

SL: For sport.

BL: Yeah, it's—it's—it's not a s—it's, you know, it's hunting. It's—it's not shooting. It's not, you know, sport killing. It's none of that. It's hunting, and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . and—uh—we were—we were really taught how to respect nature and how to respect the woods, and my brother probably better than any. He loves the woods, and he would be out—I can remember in high school he was—uh—two classes ahead of me in high school, and before he could drive, Mother and I would get up, and we would drive him up to the national park. He loved to turkey hunt. He and Daddy both loved turkey huntin'. And—um—we'd drop him off, and Mother would say, "Okay, you have to be back"—this was before cell phones or anything, so Mother said, "You have to be—be back here at a certain time in order to get to school on time," 'cause we'd have to go back up to the [*laughter*]*—uh—national forest to pick him up. But—um—he was just amazing, and still is, in the woods. He, you know—um—he—he's—he has an—a kind of a keen sense about nature and about animals and—um—it's wonderful.*

[00:09:27] SL: Did he spend—um—time with your father on the farm when your father was farming?

BL: Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah. He grew up—um—spendin' some time on the farm, and—and—uh—certainly, he and Daddy loved to hunt—um . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . that was—um—that was their pastime and their joy of—was gettin' out in the woods. And sometimes, you know, it wasn't about—it certainly wasn't about just huntin' animals. It was about bein' in the woods. It was about . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . enjoying—whether it was a cold and rainy day or whether it was bright sunshine or . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . you know, and all the things that could be discovered. I mean, I remember one time we were out huntin', and we came back by a little creek. And—and Dad said, "Well, let's stop and pick some watercress." And I said, "Well, that's great. What—what, you know—how'd you find this?" And he said, "Well, watercress always grows in a body of water that has a limestone base. Um—and up here in this part of the woods, there's—there's a—a good limestone base." And we stopped and picked watercress for—for a salad, you know. I mean—but it was—it was discovering things and seeing nature . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . um—enjoying it in its purity. [00:10:34] Um—when I—when I first was elected to the Congress—um—I remember—um—askin' the—the—the national parks—the—um—Forest Service to give me a tour of the St. Francis forest, which is one of the three—um—federal forests we have, national forests, we have, in the—in the state. And—um—it's probably one of the smallest, but it's one of the, probably, most well renowned in terms of the quality of the hardwood . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . in the St. Francis National Forest. And it's right above Helena. [*SL laughs*] And so Daddy spent—he grew up turkey huntin' up in those woods, and he knows every inch of 'em. And so when the National Forest Service was gonna take me on a tour, I said, "Well, can I bring my dad?" And they were like, "Well, sure," 'cause I was single. I wasn't married. So, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . and—um—so we—we went on—on the tour, and we went through there, and when we finished—um—I'd asked Daddy—I said, "Well, did they leave anything out?" And he said, "Well, no." He said, "There's just a few things that they could've

showed you, probably." He said, "There was some clear-cuttin' spots that, you know, are—are obviously, you know, about done," and—um—that was when clear-cutting was being phased out, and you know . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . it was—it was selective cuts that were being put into place, which was a smart thing and . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . um—and he said—he said, "You know, clear-cutting is not the appropriate way to manage a forest." Um—he said—um, you know, that a forest is a crop. And he said, "What most people don't realize is that this forest, you know, at the turn of the—the twentieth century or the—the—the—the late 1800s or— or mid-1800s," he said, "this was pastureland." He said, "The settlers that came across, they cleared this for their—their cattle." And—and he said, "You know, it's built back." And he said, "When you manage a forest, it'll grow—um—and it'll—it'll thrive." Um—and—um—so it was fun. It was, you know, it was—to—to—to really see the national forest, not from a manager's standpoint, but from someone who knows and loves it and uses it . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . really, truly utilizes the forest—um—which was great.

[00:12:35] SL: You know—um—in our first interview—um—we talked about both your mom and your dad.

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: And I kinda—I kinda got the impression that you spent a lot more time with your mom than your—your—you did your dad because your dad was doin' . . .

BL: Workin'.

SL: . . . the farm.

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: Um—and—um—so I kind—I kind—I do kinda wanna talk a little bit about your dad, but I—I also wanna move on to your career 'cause . . .

BL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . we haven't even gotten there yet. But the—um—um—he was a World War II veteran.

BL: No. Korea.

SL: World—Korean War. That's right.

BL: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm.

SL: That's right. He was a Korean War . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . veteran, and he never would talk about his . . .

BL: Hm-mm.

SL: . . . experiences in the war.

[00:13:16] BL: No, he didn't like to talk about Korea. He was—he went in—uh—as an enlisted man. Um—my—my grandfather—um—he's—Daddy was—his birthday was in December, so he was usually the oldest in his class. And my grandfather was worried that he was gonna—um—turn eighteen and get drafted before he finished high school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: So they sent him off to military school his . . .

SL: Hmm.

BL: . . . last year of high school and—to ensure that he could finish high school. And course, he went out—down to—I think it was Marion Institute down in Atlanta, which . . .

SL: Okay.

BL: . . . was a military school, and graduated and came back and, I think, two weeks later, enlisted. [*Laughs*] Uh—so he went in as an enlisted man in the army. And he said it was hard—um—you know, as an enlisted man, but also just in the army—um—bein' deployed to—to Korea. Um—it was cold. It was bitter. You know, it was—it was—it was tough. Um . . .

[00:14:17] SL: So he was infantry?

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah.

BL: Uh-huh. He was infantry. And—um—so he was there for, I think, eighteen months.

SL: Hmm.

BL: And then came back. And he and Mother had dated in high school. They were high-school sweethearts, and—um—she was a class behind him, and so when he got back, he'd caught up with her, or she'd caught up with him. Uh—and so they both went to Fayetteville to the University of Arkansas together as freshmen. And—um—he enlisted—oh, he joined the Air Force ROTC . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . when they got to Fayetteville. He said they'd never been called out. And of course, they graduated in the spring, and they were called out. [*Laughs*] And so he—he was—they—was sent to the Azores. He and Mother—um—they got—they got married in September of their freshman year 'cause I think I may have told you before that they were both supposed to be president of their respective fraternities and sororities, and so then they had to step down and—um—but it was—obviously, they—they adored each other, and it was perfect. Uh—they got

married, and—um—and then graduated in the spring together.
And then Daddy got called up and sent to the Azores, and
Mother was expecting my oldest sister—um—in the fall. And so
they were—oh, she—Mary's—uh—October—October 13 is her
birthday, so she was born, and Mother swears she invented
the—the baby . . .

SL: The—the car chair.

BL: Car seat.

SL: Car seat.

BL: The seat. Yeah.

SL: Yes.

BL: 'Cause she decorated cardboard boxes to . . .

[00:15:58] SL: Well, they had to fly on a . . .

BL: A transport . . .

SL: . . . transport . . .

BL: . . . plane.

SL: . . . military . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . transport.

BL: Mil—military . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . transport. And—uh—so the—the—I think Mary had to be

four months old or somethin' like that. I can't remember . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . four or somethin' . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . three, four, five months old. Um—and so—um—they—I can't remember Mother's—she said—I think she lived with her mom. She lived with Gan Mommie—um—and, she and Mary did, while Daddy was in the Azores, and then they flew over and met with him. There's some fun pictures of them in the Azores with Mary. They're in that—in the album I—I shared with you.

SL: Well, we'll get that.

BL: Yeah.

SL: They're—they're listening to us now . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . so we're tell . . .

[00:16:37] BL: But it's in . . .

SL: . . . we're tellin' 'em to get that.

BL: . . . it's interesting because—um—course, you know, they—both of 'em grew up in Helena. Um—their parents grew up in Helena. Their parents' parents grew up [*laughs*] in Helena. You know, so they were livin' in the Azores. I—I—no, that—that's not right. Mother said they—they—they went to Texas first to some

training. And I remember her talkin' about, you know, all the people they met along the way. Um—Mary was born in Indiana—uh—Indianapolis at a base that they were—Daddy was training at. That's exactly right. 'Cause he was here—um—when Mary was born, and then he shipped out—um—and then Mother stayed until Mary was old enough. But you know, just the stories—and—and they were so vivid, the stories about, you know, the little house they had in—or apartment they had in Texas, and Mother was pregnant, and she said she was so hot, and [SL laughs] she said there was some sweet little ol' woman that lived next door that loaned her a rockin' chair and, you know, taught her how to put a wet towel in front of the fan . . .

SL: Fan.

BL: . . . to try to cool off . . .

SL: Cool off.

BL: . . . just a little bit more in that . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . heat. And so—but the—you know, just wonderful stories of—of—you know, really, those kind of experiences that allowed couples to strengthen their bonds. [00:17:57] You know, today, I know my husband and I—um—really, when we first got married—um—we were older. But I was in Congress,

and you know, we were both workin' hard, and we were faced with different challenges. Um . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . and you realize how that helps you build the kinda bond and friendship in a marriage that you need. And I think it was probably easier for my parents' generation because that's kinda what was expected of them. I mean, you know, they didn't—they didn't start their jobs and build their careers and then get married. They got married, and they built a career or a farm—farm business, or they went off to the service and lived in strange places and, you know, it—I'm sure it had to have provided an opportunity for them to cling to each other and to . . .

SL: Sure, what they . . .

BL: . . . strengthen their . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . relationship . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . and—and—and their friendship, as well as—you know, which is obviously a huge part of a marriage, is a friendship. And . . .

[00:19:02] SL: Hmm—learning . . .

BL: . . . so . . .

SL: . . . life together.

BL: Yes. That's exactly right.

SL: Getting—getting through life together.

BL: Uh-huh. Getting through life together and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . and learning how to do that. Um . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . and—and it was also different. I can remember when I brought the twins home from the hospital. We came home, and Mother and Daddy came up, and—um—I was still in Congress, but we were—I was obviously [*laughs*] on maternity leave. It was the summertime, which was good, 'cause . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

BL: . . . I didn't miss many votes. But—um—Mother and Daddy were there, and Mother came in there and she kinda—"Steve is in there tryin' to change a diaper."

SL: Oh yeah.

BL: "You better go help him." And I said, "Mother, he is perfectly capable of changin' a diaper [*SL laughs*], you know." "Well, you—you don't want him changin' diapers, do you?" And I was like, "You better believe I want him changin' [*laughs*] diapers." I said, "It's a new day." "Well, your dad didn't change diapers." I

said, "Well, Steve, he's gonna change" . . .

SL: Different now. [*Laughs*]

BL: It's a different day.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:19:57] BL: But you know, you build those—you—you live life together in the times that you're in. And you know, that was their time and—and our—but it's still—still havin' that time where you, like you said, you live life together. You grow through the challenges together, and that's—I think that's important to building a bond. So . . .

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:22] SL: Okay.

Trey Marley: Scott, we need to . . .

BL: I don't know. I got off on a tangent there, didn't I?

TM: We—no, that's good. [*BL laughs*] We need to check and make sure that no lipstick . . .

[Tape stopped]

[00:20:27] SL: Okay, I'm gonna get you outta Helena now.

BL: Oh. [*Laughs*]

SL: 'Cause we . . .

BL: It's hard.

SL: . . . we get—we . . .

BL: You can take . . .

SL: I know.

BL: . . . the coun . . .

SL: I know.

BL: . . . girl outta the . . .

SL: I know.

BL: . . . country, but you can't . . .

SL: I know.

BL: . . . take the country . . .

SL: Okay.

BL: . . . outta the girl.

[00:20:35] SL: So you graduate from high school in Helena.

BL: Yeah.

SL: And it—let me make sure I got this right. During the desegregation period in Helena, you actually had African American teachers.

BL: Oh, absolutely.

SL: And I commented during our interview that I'd never heard of that. It was always the African Americans integrated into the white schools. And there were no African American teachers there and so . . .

BL: No.

SL: . . . so it—I was fascinated with that. And so did you—in Helena, was there just one high school, or were there two high schools?

BL: Right. They consolidated the school systems and didn't consolidate the cities until much later. Now, that's been in the last ten, fifteen years, I guess . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . they consolidated the municipal governments. [00:21:24] But they did consolidate the school system, so there was one high school, one junior high, and then they still had two elementary schools because the one in Helena was downtown and the one in West Helena was so far out. But they—the high school was right in the middle of the two towns.

[00:21:42] SL: Okay, so you graduate high school. What happens next after you graduate from high school?

BL: Well, you know, I had watched my older siblings. My oldest sister went out to Colorado and then transferred to Rhode Island. My middle sister was at Fayetteville, but then ended up graduating down in Mississippi. And then my brother went off to LSU, came back after a semester, and went straight up to Fayetteville and graduated from the University of Arkansas. So everybody else had graduated somewhere different. Well, actually, my brother was at Fayetteville when I was there, so we

actually were there together. But the—you know, we all went to different schools, but I had spent a lotta time in high school goin' up to Fayetteville for football games. You know, way back when, people didn't go to Fayetteville for football games because it was just such a long trek.

SL: Too big. Too far.

[00:22:38] BL: Right. But as it got better, you know, and . . .

SL: The roads and . . .

BL: Roads and cars and everything else. It was certainly more accessible. And so, you know, my junior and senior year in high school, I'd gone up to Fayetteville for football games, and you know, I'd really seen the campus and spent some time up there. And so it was fun but it—I kinda felt like I had already experienced it. [00:23:00] And so I was kinda anxious to try somethin' a little different, and I wanted a smaller classroom or kind of a more—smaller, personal type of experience, I guess. And so I went to a small women's college in Virginia. I went to Randolph Macon Women's College . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

BL: . . . in Lynchburg. And it was great. I'd [*laughs*] never been there, never seen the campus. I had applied to several schools and thought I was gonna go to school at SMU in Dallas, and I

got down there and just realized I was not a city girl . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . and changed my mind and said, "I'm not goin' there." And Daddy said, "Well, where [*laughs*] are you goin'? You're goin' somewhere." And so I said, "Well, I believe I'll go to Virginia to Randolph Macon." And he—Daddy thought that was crazy. But anyway, I went up and, lo and behold—I didn't know anybody, really, there. There was a—one friend of mine that was a class ahead of me at high school in Helena that was there. Lisa Kurts was there. And she and I had not gone to high school together 'cause she'd gone to the private school. But we knew each other. [00:24:05] And so Mother drove [*laughs*] up there with me. And of course, on the drive up there, Mother talked. She said, "Well, you know, one of my good friends went to Randolph Macon." And I said, "Well, you never told me Miss Martha went to Randolph Macon," you know. "Well, yeah, Miss Martha Rhodes from Osceola, she'd gone to Randolph Macon." And then another friend—I mentioned "Moo" and Bob McCord, who were great friends of Mother's and Daddy's. Moo had actually gone up there her freshman year and then ended up transferring to Arkansas. And so anyway, I became—I realized that it wasn't someplace far off in outer space, that it—actually, people we

knew had been there. And I got there, and as a new freshman, I think I was probably miserable the first six weeks . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . 'cause I was far away from home and it—I couldn't get in the car and drive home. But after that I had a wonderful time. It was small classes and, you know, very personal relationships with professors. You know, great opportunity to talk and—I don't know. It was just a small—I think my graduating class was—oh gosh, I can't remember how much it was. It was, like, less than—probably was less than 70 people in my graduating class.

SL: Oh, is it that small?

BL: Yeah, it was very small.

SL: I didn't realize it was that small.

BL: I think the whole student body wasn't more than about 300 or 350.

SL: Oh, that's great.

[00:25:19] BL: Yeah. So it was a small, old school, which I love old things. I love history. I love, you know, the antiquity of things.

SL: It's close to the Shenandoah . . .

BL: It's beautiful.

SL: . . . River.

BL: Right at the bottom of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. And the school was old. I mean, it's, you know, it's still the old, brick buildings. And I can remember on Sundays you'd come in 'cause there were several men's colleges close by, *[laughs]* and if you went to the parties, that's normally where they were was up at W and L or UVA or . . .

SL: My son . . .

BL: UVA had . . .

SL: . . . my son went to W and L.

BL: Yeah, that's right. So you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:25:54] BL: You—it—and then Hampden-Sydney and VMI. And UVA had only been—I didn't—UVA was all male until 1975, I think.

SL: I kinda remember that.

BL: And so I went—and I was there in [19]78, so the odds were still even better for women at UVA at the time because they hadn't had that many women. But I can remember on—you know, in the fall, late fall, comin' in on a Sunday afternoon and lookin' up at the Blue Ridge Mountains. I had a—my dorm room was on the third floor. And you just—this beautiful vista that was unbelievable, you know. And then you'd—it'd start to get cold,

and you'd hear the ol' radiator start knockin' . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . kickin' on. And everybody would open their windows 'cause it would get so hot, and so you'd be kinda warm and toasty with a cool breeze comin' in off of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was lovely. It was a . . .

SL: Yeah, it is beautiful.

BL: . . . lovely spot. It was a great experience. I made a lotta wonderful friends. I took my sophomore year and came back. I was worried to death that I was missin' somethin' at Arkansas, so I came back and spent my sophomore year at the University of Arkansas. And I pledged Chi Omega . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . like my mother and aunts and cousins and everybody else . . .

SL: Legacy.

BL: . . . which was legacy. It was great. I loved it. And—but after that year, you know, I thought, "Well, this has been a wonderful year, but it's gonna be the same thing next year and the next year. I kinda wanna spread out and do somethin' different." And so I went back to Randolph Macon and then studied in London for a little while and then came back and graduated at

Randolph Macon.

[00:27:34] SL: So you got a semester abroad in London?

BL: I did. I got a semester abroad in London, which I loved. I was actually studyin' biology, and so my semester abroad was kind of—it was—made it tough because none of the science credits would transfer, and I was takin' mostly art history and, you know, some history. World history, European history, English history. And so I came back, and I had to really dig in to science. I spent my senior year—I think I did three lab courses a semester.

SL: Oh, man!

BL: So I spent a lotta time down in the lab and that kinda stuff, which was—it was interesting and fun. It just kinda wore you out a little bit. [00:28:17] Which is kinda what took me to Washington because I'd—I had spent—I was gon—I wanted to go into nursing, but I had spent my senior year just really drillin' down on my lab courses. And I thought, "I just need a breather." So I thought, "Well, I'll go do somethin' for a year that—kinda fun, and then I'll head back to Little Rock to go to nursin' school.

[00:28:36] SL: So you graduate with a biology degree from . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . Randolph Macon?

BL: Well, it's a bachelor of arts with a major in biology.

SL: And you decide to go to Washington, DC.

BL: Mh-hmm. Well, it was close.

SL: And how—so—but you had to have some kind of opportunity.

You can't just go to Washington, DC, could you or . . .

BL: Yeah, I did.

SL: You did?

[00:28:55] BL: I did. I did. Well, I first went [*SL laughs*—I spent the summer in New York. I went up to New York and worked for Sotheby's . . .

SL: Okay.

BL: . . . because I loved art, and I love the art . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . world, and it was a great place to have an internship because New York's pretty dead in the summer. But I was in the international sales. And so all the art auctions . . .

SL: Wow.

BL: . . . in Europe are goin' full—full-fledged, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . in the summertime. So it was a great spot. I enjoyed that.

It was fun, but I knew I didn't wanna live in New York [*laughs*]

after that. You know, I was startin' to think, "Well, maybe I don't wanna go into nursing. I don't know. [00:29:35] Who knows? Maybe I can put it off another couple of years." So—but anyway, I headed down to Washington 'cause it seemed a little tamer than New York, and it was. It was easier to find a place to live. I had a cousin. I think he was workin' at the Pentagon or down at the War College or somethin'. I can't remember. And so anyway, I slept on his couch for, like, three nights and just, you know, pounded the pavement on Capitol Hill and walked into quite a few offices lookin' for a job, just like I see kids doin' today.

SL: Yep.

[00:30:07] BL: And the advice I always give 'em is, "It's better to have a job—the best way to find a job is to have a job." And particularly in Washington.

SL: You bet.

BL: You know, 'cause if you're on the Hill, then your exposure to what happens on the Hill and how it—you know, what happens. We always called it the campus, you know. "What's happenin' on campus?" [*SL laughs*] You'd meet other people on campus who, in turn, you know, will usually share with you, "Well, there's an openin' in so-and-so's office," or "They don't have any

openin's, but their chief of staff is great, and he'll—he always knows where the other jobs are, so get an interview with him, and then he'll plug you in with other people," which is exactly what happened. Yeah.

[00:30:47] SL: So what office did you first land in?



BL: I first landed in—my first job was in Congressman Bill Alexander's office, from east Arkansas, our congressional district in Helena, Phillips County. And I went in—they—I was a staff assistant in the front office, answerin' phones, typin' up letters, you know, just whatever needed to be done. And it was a great place. I loved it because I saw so many people from home. You know, it . . .

SL: Comin' to see him.

BL: Yeah. Oh yeah. I mean, you know, it made me feel like I was at home, but I was doin' somethin' that was new and different, and you know, so many people that came in knew Mother and Daddy, or they knew my aunts and uncles, or you know, they knew a lotta my family from across the state. It was just wonderful. It was wonderful to be there and to be a part of Arkansas and then to watch government. You know, I—I'd really had not thought much about government before then, and then all of a sudden it's like, "Oh my gosh! Is this not incredible that

these people come here from our home to represent our views and our ideas and, you know, our thoughts and"—you know. It was great. It was great to see government, you know, from that perspective. And it was where I also realized that our government had become reactionary, and that was somethin' I disagreed with. I didn't believe government should just react to crisis. I thought government should be proactive in moving us in directions and moving us forward in places, whether it was education or business or job growth or, you know, science, health care, to be proactive as opposed to just reactionary. [00:32:40] Because, you know, if you wait for the crisis to happen to react to, then you're that much further behind the eight ball, and it's so much harder to correct and so much harder to change and make right. But you could see, slowly—I could, for the several years that I was there—I was on the Hill—I worked on the Hill for, you know, I think, two years or so. But you could see it getting more reactionary, and that was a concern of mine.

[00:33:15] SL: Now, who made up the Arkansas delegation at that time?

BL: Let's see. It was Bill Alexander and Beryl Anthony, Ed—I think Ed Bethune.

SL: Really?

BL: Wasn't Ed from . . .

SL: Fourth Congressional District?

BL: No, second, wasn't he?

SL: Oh, maybe so.

BL: Beryl was from the fourth. And Bill was from the first. John Paul Hammerschmidt and Ed Bethune.

[00:33:49] SL: Had Pryor already been . . .

BL: Yeah, he was in the Senate . . .

SL: He was in the Senate . . .

BL: . . . by then. That . . .

SL: . . . by the time you got there.

BL: Well, no . . .

SL: No.

BL: Yeah!

SL: He was . . .

BL: In [19]82?

SL: Yeah. I guess that's right.

BL: Was it in [19]82? I think . . .

SL: Yeah . . .

BL: . . . I think . . .

SL: . . . that—that's right.

BL: . . . that's right.

SL: He was in the Senate by then.

BL: Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh.

BL: Uh-huh. He and Dale both were. But it was a great delegation, and it was very interesting. I mean, it was an interesting time.

[00:34:17] SL: Tryin' to think—well, first of all, it is exciting to be on that campus. I mean . . .

BL: It is.

SL: . . . and there's so much—I don't know. There's such a buzz, a political buzz, going on up and down those halls and in and out of those offices and behind those doors and all this . . .

BL: Well, and it's . . .

SL: . . . hubbub, and it's a . . .

BL: . . . and it's—sometimes it's a rush; sometimes it's a slow, methodical, you know, hearing of questions and answers. And then all of a sudden, it's like, "Okay, well, there's an amendment up, and you gotta vote." And everybody's in a hurry, you know.

[00:34:58] Mr. Alexander's office—Congressman Alexander's office was very interesting. His chief of staff, Bill Miles . . .

SL: Okay.

BL: . . . was an amazing guy. And when I was there, right before I

left or maybe it was a little bit after I left, they reinstated the rank of commodore in the navy.

SL: Okay, I kinda remember that.

BL: And he got the rank of commodore.

SL: You're kidding me.

BL: It was amazing. But he was just a wonderful guy. He was a perfect chief of staff because he was very meticulous, comin' from his military background, you know, in terms of how things were done. He wanted everything done shipshape. But he was very thoughtful, particularly to young people that were comin' through, and he realized—I think he realized what he had there, that there was some clay that he was dealin' with that could be molded and shaped into, you know, thoughtful public servants. He was great. He was a great inspiration to a lotta people, I think.

[00:36:03] SL: So did you stay at the front desk the . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . whole time?

BL: Yeah. I did.

SL: So that's a pretty pivotal position [*unclear word*] . . .



BL: Well, it was great, and I have to say I learned a lot because when I started my own office, you realize that the front desk is

the first impression.

SL: That's right.

[00:36:19] BL: And first impressions are really important. First impressions—it's not just the person that's—you see when you walk in the front door. It's the person that's answerin' the telephones and makin' sure that that call gets to the right place or that their question gets answered. It's the person that's usually foldin' and stuffin' the mail, which means if your letter gets in the wrong envelope then, you know—it's just a lotta things that really are the first impressions that people have. And so when I started my office, everybody went through the front office. Everybody I hired started at the front desk at some form or fashion . . .

SL: Well, that's . . .

BL: . . . so that they . . .

SL: . . . a good policy.

BL: . . . knew—they spent some time at the front desk to know how important each job in that office is because I—you know, in my congressional offices, I wanted the staff to feel like a family. I wanted 'em to feel like a team. And the best way to feel like a team is to really have respect for everybody's position that needs to be played and to know that, to know that that first

impression at the front office is critical. And even if you're the chief of staff, whoever's answerin' those phones at the front desk, they've gotta get routed to the right person. You know, there needs to be a thoughtfulness and a politeness and a cheeriness and a, you know, an attention to detail that makes that person whose office it truly is, that constituent whose office that—it belongs to them—that they feel at home and they feel proud of the treatment, as well as the, you know, the work that's bein' done, so . . .

SL: That gets lost.

BL: . . . it's a good thing.

SL: That gets lost that the people own that place, you know.

[00:38:06] BL: Well, it's interesting because you'd—I mean—and course, from the time I started in a congressional office in 1982 to 2010, where it wasn't just phone calls you were gettin'. It was, you know, emails and tweets and . . .

SL: Texts.

BL: . . . texts and—oh my gosh! The volume of information that was comin' in and the need to try to answer it in a respectful and polite way was unbelievable. You know, there just was never enough staff, and you could never pay 'em enough . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . because you had a budget, you know. And we're a small state, which means our budget is less than other states that are bigger. And that, I mean, that makes sense in many instances. I mean . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . California's got, you know, how many millions of people to . . .

SL: Eight—seven, eight.

BL: Somethin' like that.

SL: Yeah.

BL: You know . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . we've got 2.6, so . . .

SL: Right.

BL: But it's—but it was somethin' you don't wanna lose—I didn't wanna lose. And I tried really hard not to. But it was something you see and you notice.

[00:39:13] SL: So you were there for two years.

BL: Mh-hmm. I was on—I was—worked in Congressman Alexander's office for two years, and I just wanted to do more substantive things, and there just really wasn't room to grow there. I probably shoulda hung out a little bit longer, but I thought,

"Well, I'll go see what else is around." And so I went to work for a law firm. Downtown Washington. It was a Louisiana-based law firm. I—but I think I—I'm tryin' to think. Before I got—before I landed that job, I think I worked for two or three months in some retail [*laughs*] to pay the rent.

SL: Right.

[00:39:57] BL: Those are the other good experiences you get is learnin' how . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . you . . .

SL: Hardscrabble [*unclear word*] . . .

BL: Yeah. Oh yeah, the hard—you get . . .

SL: Just to make the bills.

BL: You gotta pay the . . .

SL: Get the food.

BL: Yeah. You gotta pay the rent. You gotta pay the electricity.

You know, those are things that are important to learn.

[00:40:14] SL: So you got hired at a law . . .

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . firm.

BL: Mh-hmm. They had two or three lawyers from Arkansas, a couple of folks that were there from Arkansas, which I was

delighted about. And then several from Louisiana, which I got to know better, and then—I tell you another—one of the managing partners at the firm was Vicki Kennedy. She was Vicki Reggie Raclin at the time. [00:40:37] And they had three women in that law firm that were managing partners or . . .

SL: That's . . .

BL: . . . that were a part of the . . .

SL: . . . that's . . .

BL: . . . partners, too.

SL: . . . different.

BL: Well, then it was.

SL: Yeah.

[00:40:47] BL: It was great, and it was a great example for me to see both them hard at work, but the respect that they garnered from their male colleagues. And I can remember those women—all the time, they would say, "Aren't—you need to go to law school. You need to go to law school." And I said, "I know I do, but I just don't wanna go back to school right now. I'm too curious about other things and I, you know, I just—I"—and then by the—by, you know, the next year or so, it was like, "I don't wanna go back to school, you know. I figured I—I can figure this out without havin' to go to law school." So anyway, I regret

that. I wish I'd gone to law school but—'cause I think it may have given me some of the basics that woulda been, you know, more helpful in terms of Washington and Capitol Hill. But I had some brilliant attorneys on staff. [00:41:46] And they were great. Not only did they understand, you know, the legal side . . .

SL: The fine print.

BL: . . . of things. Huh?

SL: Not only did they understand the fine print, but they . . .

BL: They understood the fine print, but they also understood and believed how important it was for us to have the conversation because I was seein' it really more from a, you know, a true constituent's point of view in many instances, as opposed to the fine-tuning of the fine print.

SL: Bigger picture.

BL: Yeah. Mh-hmm. So it made for a good team.

[00:42:18] SL: So how long were you with the law firm? And do you remember—what was the law firm's name? Do you remember?

BL: Yeah, it was Broadhurst, Brook, Mangham, Hardy and Reed . . .

SL: Okay.

BL: . . . was the firm.

SL: And that'll save Joy a question a little later.

BL: Yeah.

[00:42:30] SL: So how long were you there?

BL: I was there several years, and then there was a gentleman that was a tax attorney who kinda was of counsel there. And then I went out with him separately and worked for him. He was just a sole practitioner, so it was just the two of us—and worked with him. He was a—still is just a doll 'cause he's a wonderful guy. He's a—straight out of—he used to play guitar for Earl Long.

SL: Is that right?

BL: Yeah, he was on a . . .

SL: Well, you got—we gotta have this guy's name.

BL: I know.

[00:43:07] SL: Who was this guy?

BL: Ted Jones. Amazing . . .

SL: Ted . . .

BL: . . . amazing man. Brilliant tax attorney. Put himself through law school and got an LL.M. at Georgetown and just—amazing individual. He was great to work with. And then after that I left and went to work with a—not a law firm, but a government-relations firm, Pagonis and Donnelly. So it was a good group. We—I wasn't there very long. I think I was there about a year, and then I came home and ran for Congress.

[00:43:43] SL: Okay, so how long were, then, were you in DC before you ran?

BL: Nine years.

SL: Nine years. And so you got a pretty broad picture of the cycles that . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . go on . . .

BL: Oh yeah

SL: . . . with government and inside government and outside government but still within that Beltway, so you were totally ensconced in the process, in a way. I mean, you weren't on the floor clerking or any of that, but . . .

BL: No, but you learn the process, and you learn—you know, that was one of the things that when I came home to run—of course, I was runnin' against one of my former bosses, Congressman Alexander, who I'd worked for. It was the race that I chose to run and was at my home, the First Congressional . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . District, and I told him—I said, "You know, I promise you I'll be ladylike. I'm not gonna be ugly. I—I'm grate"—and I was—have been truly grateful to him for the opportunity he gave me to really begin that journey of learning about Congress and

seeing it in awe of the unbelievable government system that it is, the freedoms that it allows us, the interaction it allows us with our government. I mean, those are phenomenal things that people across the globe dream about. [*Laughs*] I mean, they really do. [00:45:14] I mean, I can remember the first time I ran, and I remember, you know, sayin' to people that "I just believe I have somethin' to offer. I have somethin' new and different, another perspective, both being a woman, but being younger and having worked on Capitol Hill, I'm not gonna come at it at a—you know, with a zero knowledge. It's—you know, I know the committee systems. I understand them. I know how they work. I know the committees I wanna be on if I'm elected. I know why." [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

BL: "And what they do for our district and" . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . "and our state," and you know, so I think in the time when people were really concerned, and it was—you know, I certainly didn't win the race because I was anything spectacular. It was a tumultuous time in Washington in 1992. That election year was the Year of the Woman.

SL: Yep.

BL: There were more women elected. It was a—the largest class, incoming class, since 1940 . . .

SL: Freshmen.

[00:46:16] BL: The largest—it was a big turnover, so it was—you know, there was a discontent with constituents out there, and I was out there and believed in, you know, who I was and what I had to offer. And I told people—somebody said, "Well, do you think you can win?" I said, "Sure! I don't assume I'm gonna win, but I've gotta believe. If I believe in the system of government that we have, of course I need to believe that I can win. I can offer myself and work hard and tell you what my goals and values and ideals are and how we can work together to make things better." And you know, it's funny because I told you before what my mother's rules were. Mother's rule always was if it's rude or dangerous, it's not allowed. *[SL laughs]* Daddy's rule was that he hadn't raised a bunch of whiners. And I may have told you that, too. He said, "I don't wanna hear you complainin' about things that you're not willin' to work hard to make better." And as I said, havin' been in Washington and seeing what was goin' on and feeling that frustration and disappointment that we were becoming a reactionary government, reacting only to crisis. And I was complainin' about

that. I was like, "Why aren't we talkin' more about how we want education to be in the next ten years instead of just sayin', "Well, we gotta react to this crisis" or "We gotta react to that crisis" or—you know, why aren't we talkin' more about where the future of health care is gonna be and, you know, technology and, you know, the tax code for job creation, and those kinda things, and you know, I realized I couldn't complain about it if I wasn't willin' to do somethin', you know, to try to work hard and make it better. And so that's, you know, that's when I decided—I thought, "Well, now's the time, you know. There's no better time than the present. If you're gonna do it, do it now."

SL: Now . . .

BL: I wasn't married. I didn't have children. There weren't all of those things that, you know, might have made me think twice about whether or not I was gonna run and whether it was the time or whether I should.

[00:48:23] SL: You mentioned something that's very, very interesting to me. You said that you went to Bill Alexander . . .

BL: I did.

SL: . . . and told him that you were going to run. Now, I know in past that that was a common courtesy that folks did.

BL: Oh yeah.

SL: I don't know if that's true anymore, but how did—I mean, was it hard to get to him to tell him that you were going to run?

BL: No, 'cause I'd worked in the office, and I knew . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . a lotta the staff, and I just called and said, "I'd like to stop by and visit with the congressman for just a few moments, please," [*SL laughs*] and . . .

[00:49:01] SL: Do you think he saw it comin'? Had he . . .

BL: No.

SL: . . . heard?

BL: No.

SL: He—it . . .

BL: No.

SL: . . . caught him off guard.

BL: Well, and I didn't catch him off guard on purpose. It's just that there was really no reason to start talkin' to a lotta people.

Nobody knew, you know, that I would—or thought that I would have a prayer of a chance.

SL: Right.

BL: But I didn't want to start my process. I mean, my process was extremely [*laughs*] basic. I mean, it was—I had a borrowed computer, which was totally antiquated, [*SL laughs*] and that

was in [19]92, so there weren't—it's not like they were very sophisticated to begin with. And you know, I had a couple of directories. I had an east Arkansas phone directory. I had a Rotary directory. I had a Chi Omega directory. I had a few others, you know, where I would just go through and find names and start sendin' out letters and callin' people and—but I didn't—you know, mine was gonna be a very basic approach, and I didn't wanna start that and then somebody, you know, in a . . .

SL: Let Bill know that . . .

BL: Yeah, just say . . .

SL: . . . something was brewing.

BL: . . . that to him that—yeah, "Did you know she was doin' that?"

[00:50:02] So I wanted to tell him first. And I went in there and had—and I have tremendous respect for Bill Alexander. Mr. Alexander—Congressman Alexander served for twenty-four years. That's a long time as a public servant. And you know, he had offered me and afforded me tremendous opportunities. I'd learned so much in his office. I didn't want him to think that there was anything bitter or that I was gonna be ugly or any of that. That I, you know, that I just felt like I had somethin' to offer, and this is where I wanted to do it. And you know, I—and I don't think he felt threatened in the least. I mean, I was

comin' from nowhere. I was . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . you know, a young, single woman, which, again, was a huge part of my craziness, I guess. I don't [*laughter*]*—*I mean, you know*—*but you know, most of the women that served had just served*—*you know, there were a few that had served on their own. Some had served takin' over their husband's . . .

SL: Right.

BL: seats, but you know, there just weren't that many. [00:51:08] Pat Schroeder had come into her own there. I'm tryin' to think of a few others. But*—*and Arkansas had had*—*Judy Norrell, her mother, I believe, had been a congresswoman. Is that right? I'm tryin' to think. I don't have my history on all the women in the House. I think there were two women in the House from Arkansas before . . .

SL: And then . . .

BL: . . . me.

SL: . . . sena*—*the senator . . .

BL: ?Remember what?*—*and Senator Hat Caraway.

SL: Yeah.

BL: Hattie Caraway. [00:51:36] So*—*but anyway, he was very, very polite, very pleasant, you know. And course, I started this

campaign in September, [SL laughs] and I think three weeks from the May primary somebody ran a poll, and they said, "Oh my gosh, who is this—who's this girl out there [laughter] that's"—you know. And I'd just been workin' hard. I mean, I'd—you know, my theory was if there are two or more pickups gathered, I was gonna stop and talk to 'em. And . . .

SL: Well, and you loved doing that.

BL: I did. I—and I love people. I love visitin' with people, and I felt very much that that was the—what the job was about was to talk to people about, you know, who we are and what we're about and where we—what we want our country to be like. And I spent a lotta time doin' that, and it was the great part of the job. And . . .

[00:52:32] SL: Well, did you sense that Congressman Alexander was vulnerable at all? I mean, were—I mean, there's got to be—there's usually some indicator that, you know . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . that there's some vulnerability . . .

BL: I really didn't.

SL: You didn't?

BL: I don't remember thinkin' that he was vulnerable, necessarily. I just know that several people had run against him in the past,

and I just knew that it was the right time for me. [00:53:01]
You know, if I was ever gonna do somethin' like this, it was now.
And I had the wherewithal in terms of the shoe leather and the
energy to do a grassroots campaign, and I did most of it. It was
me and Mother and, you know, a few other people, and that was
about it. It would grow. It, you know, it grew to—well, I had—I
didn't have any money. You know, I think I raised—oh, what did
I raise? That first raise was, like, seventy thousand dollars.

SL: Wow!

BL: Eighty thousand dollars, maybe.

[00:53:42] SL: That wouldn't get by for a month now.

BL: I know. And I had been so cautious about the money. My dad
had said—he said, "I—I'm behind you. You do—we're gonna do
whatever we can. But do not" . . .

SL: Don't go in debt.

BL: . . . "go in debt over this. Do not." He said, "I've seen too many
people who have been, you know, ladened with debt and it
just—it's awful." And so my Uncle Thad was the—Mother's older
brother was the mayor, and he said, "Well, let me tell you how I
run my campaigns." [*Laughs*] He was real cute. He got a
calendar, and we circled the date and worked backwards. We
circled May, the May primary date, and then worked backwards

from that and figured out if we wanted to do any television whatsoever, it would have to be very inexpensive and to get the—any kind of a buy, we'd have to buy it early, and we could only buy a certain amount. So we bought back each day when we got a critical mass so that I couldn't spend my money. It was already spent. And I bought back my TV and my radio from the last—what? For the last ten days. And so every dollar I raised, I put 75 percent away. So that was my goal was to put 75 percent of every dollar I raised away for the last three weeks.

SL: Right.

BL: And . . .

SL: That's good.

BL: . . . it was good advice.

SL: Yeah, it was . . .

[00:55:07] BL: It was good advice . . .

SL: . . . good advice.

BL: . . . because, you know, I could do a lotta the legwork and the, you know, the shoe leather up until then, and I did. I, you know, I didn't—if there was an ag auction out there, those auctioneers would every now and then let me get up and take the microphone, and I hit garden clubs and Rotaries and Kiwanis meetings and Lion meetings, and you name it. So . . .

[00:55:32] SL: It sounds like it was perfect timing then, and there's no question that you were a fresh face. I mean, you were from out of nowhere, really.

BL: Oh yeah.

SL: But at the same time, the Lambert family was pretty extensive, as far as relatives and involvement in the community and all across your district, so . . .

[00:55:54] BL: Well, Daddy used to always say, "The best gift a man can leave his children is a respectable name." And he did that. My dad was well loved by all of his college buddies and friends that he grew up with and business people and associates. He was always fair, and he was always pleasant. And . . .

SL: So the name was good.

BL: It was a good name and it—you know, he said, "We don't have a lotta money. It's not like I can bankroll this campaign." He said, "I'll give you a little bit of money, and," he said, "and I would recommend that from your savings that you decide an amount that you want to put into it." And he said, "And you don't—and you do that and don't do any more." And he said, "That not only will hopefully save you from spendin' all your money and your savings," he said, "'cause after this is over, win or lose, you're still gonna have to live."

SL: Yeah.

[00:56:43] BL: He said, "But it will also help motivate you to raise your money and to, you know, and to engage people to be a part of the campaign." He said, "And that'll pay off more than anything." And he was right. And course, David Pryor's best advice to me—he said [*SL laughs*—he was so cute. I remember I thought he was gonna tell me somethin' about polls or somethin' really fancy-schmancy about campaigns, you know. And he said, "You know, the best thing is to be happy." He said, "Enjoy what you are doin'." He said, "You have to enjoy it." He said, "It's too hard of work." He said, "If you're not enjoyin' it, it's not worth it." He said, "But if you're not enjoyin' it, you're not happy." He said, "If you're not happy, people don't like you." He said, "And I gotta tell you. They can agree with you on every issue, but if they don't like you, they're not gonna vote for you." [*Laughter*] And he was right.

SL: He was right.

BL: He said, "If you"—you know, and so my goal was to enjoy it. I had started out on this journey because I enjoyed—I had a great respect for my government, and I'd fallen in love with it and how I had interpreted it to be. And of course, I loved the people of Arkansas, and I still do. I love my home. And so what was

there not to enjoy?

SL: Yeah.

[00:58:05] BL: You know, as long as I reminded myself every day that that's what this was about, and it was. And I had a ball. You know, we started the—what was it? The Innkeepers' Club 'cause I didn't have any money. And so whenever I would travel to far places, I would find Mother's and Daddy's friends from college who lived in Jonesboro or North Little Rock or up in Heber Springs . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . other places like that, Blytheville, Osceola, and I would stay with 'em. And so I had my bedroom in Osceola at Miss Martha's house, and there was a friend of Mother's from church that lived in Heber Springs, and I had a spot at her house. And then over here in North Little Rock 'cause the district then came all the way over to Cabot.

SL: Oh, I didn't know that.

BL: That was the first—see, [19]92 was the first redistrictin', and the First Congressional District had grown a tremendous amount.

SL: Right.

[00:59:04] BL: So it now had Cabot because Cabot's in Lonoke—it had Lonoke County—added Lonoke County. And so I stayed in

North Little Rock with the McCords and then Buddy and Martha Murray in Wynne. They put me up a time or two. And it was just—it was wonderful. You know, it—because not only did I get to stay with people in the community—I wasn't stayin' at a Best Western or a hotel or . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . whatever. I was stayin' with families, and they could tell me about people. They could tell me what the sentiment was, you know. "Well, I had coffee at the cafe day before yesterday, and lemme tell you what they were talkin' about then." Or you know, "People are real worried about this, and we hear it at—in our Sunday school class, or we hear it at our supper club, or we hear it"—you know. And . . .

[00:59:51] SL: So you'd wake up to politics. You'd go to sleep having had a conversation at wherever you were staying about politics. It was all about what the people—you were really—it was a grassroots thing.

BL: Oh, it was a grassroots—but it wa—it came from people who, you know, were friends of Mother and Daddy's. They were contemporaries. They knew my family. They knew my aunts and uncles. You know, they knew where I came from. They knew, you know, very closely the people who had nurtured and

molded and shaped me. So even at—bein' a young, single woman, it—staying with them gave them enough confidence to be able to go out to some of their friends and say, "She's okay."

SL: This acorn fell close to the tree.

BL: Exactly.

SL: Yeah.

BL: You know, "And she's, you know, she's not some little upstart. She's not crazy. [*Laughter*] She's—you know. And you know, she's—she may not be"—well, I was thirty. I mean, you know, she said, "That's—she may not be forty-five, fifty. She may not be, you know, in a law practice or whatever, but she's wise to the world a bit, and you know, she's got a fresh approach, and she's thinkin' about things." So it was great. [01:01:17] You know, it—that's—you know, I—I'm findin' with my own children—and Mother and Daddy were really good at it—but a really great gift you can give your children is to introduce them to your friends . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . to expose them to your friends. You know, the people that you have raised your children with, people you've gone to college with. You know, it's just like we t—in talkin' about buildin' that relationship in a marriage when you're goin' through

things, you know, you—you're freshmen in college together. It's a whole strange, new world, or . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . you know, you're—you go to boot camp together or, you know, you—raisin' your—in the PTA together. But I mean, the people that you—you're goin' through those years with are people who come to know you, and you, in many instances, you have very similar approaches to, but there's differences. And it was—that was a great experience to get to meet and to know my parents' generation and their friends in a way, you know, that allowed me to interact with 'em. It was great. It was a great—that was a—it was a fun time. I—and just to the, you know, to the advice of Senator Pryor, it was great. I had a wonderful time travelin' the state.

SL: So was it . . .

Trey Marley: Scott . . .

SL: . . . just . . .

TM: . . . we need to change tapes. Excuse me.

SL: Oh, okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:02:47] SL: Okay. [BL laughs] So this thirty-year-old, single, young, beautiful woman decides to [laughs] run for the

congressional seat, and you had, I think, the grace to go to Bill Alexander and let him know that you were going to run and that there would be no animosities or ugliness, so that's a classy thing to do. And then you got out, and you just worked yourself really hard.

BL: I did.

SL: And you built a grassroots campaign. The people signed on as it grew. And you ended up winning the primary. Now, back in those days, I think other than John Paul . . .

BL: Yeah, it was pretty Democratic.

SL: . . . if you won the Democratic primary, it was usually—I mean, it—you could be expected to have the seat. So were there others in the race besides you and Bill?

BL: No.

SL: No? It was just the . . .

BL: No . . .

SL: . . . two of you?

BL: . . . I don't think so. There was just the two. But—although it was back then when, you know, you—if you won the Democratic primary, you were, you know—it was somewhat of a given, I guess, to some people to believe that. But you also have to realize that that was the election before the Contract with

America. So there was that same kind of—there was a brewing of, I don't know, discontent among constituents in the [19]92 election. And so when I won the primary, all of a sudden people were like, "Oh my gosh, we've gotta keep the seat. We've gotta keep the seat Democratic." And of course, Bill Clinton was runnin' for president, as well. So the Clinton machine was off in New Hampshire and in other—Iowa and other different places really workin' hard.

SL: Arkansas Travelers.

BL: Arkansas Travelers. Yeah. So a lot of the Democratic base and the Clinton machine, the Democratic machine, of Arkansas was really focused on that presidential election, and so the Democrats were very focused on makin' sure that we didn't lose that seat. So it was interesting 'cause people who didn't know who I was or didn't really care who I was before, after I won that primary, started callin' me and sayin', "What're you doin'?"

[*Laughter*] We gotta keep this seat."

SL: Right. Uh-huh.

[01:05:12] BL: And so it was good. I—there was one media guy who I worked with who was great, Jim Duffy.

SL: I know that name.

BL: He was a—yeah. Jim was from Louisiana. But he had come to

me before the primary and said, "You know, you could probably do this." He came about—it was about four or five weeks out, I think, and said, "You know, there's a poll out there that is really amazing." And he said, "You can do this." And I said, "I know I can. That's why I been workin' my tail off, [*SL laughs*] you know."

SL: "Thanks."

BL: I said, "I'm not assumin' it's" . . .

SL: "Thanks, Jim."

BL: . . . "gonna happen, but I"—you know. [*SL laughs*] So anyway, he wanted to help me with my media, and I told him—I said, "I just don't have any money. I just—I don't have that kinda money." But he was wonderful, wonderful to work with, and worked with me through my entire—every election I ever ran because I told him—I said, "I don't wanna be somebody else. I don't want somebody to try to create me into somethin' I'm not. I wanna be who I am because that's what I wanna continue to be if I am fortunate enough to get elected." And so we did. But anyway, he helped me. Got the campaign focused on the general election and were suc—we were successful, which was really interesting. And successful in a time when, again, the rest of the world, unbeknownst to me, had been focused on the Year

of the Woman. [*Laughs*] You know, I guess, if nothing else, my naïvete was probably my strongest asset [*laughs*] back then.

SL: Yeah, there is that.

BL: I was naive enough to think that "This is what you do."

SL: Well, it kept some things from getting in the way.

BL: Exactly. It did.

SL: Reduced your options and . . .

BL: Mh-hmm. It . . .

SL: Made it simple.

BL: I think the naïvete of it kept me simple and kept me focused on what it was that I wanted to do, and as I said, I think that was my—probably my best asset.

[01:07:09] SL: Well, now, so who was your opponent in the general?

BL: Oh gosh!

SL: Or did you have one?

BL: I—oh no. Yes, I had one. Oh, I can't belie . . .

SL: It's okay . . .

BL: I can't remember.

SL: . . . because, you know . . .

BL: It's in the history books somewhere.

SL: [*Laughter*] It's in the history books. Unfair question, Scott.

BL: I ca—I can't. For the life of me, I can't pull it out of the air.

SL: Well, it'll come in a minute.

BL: Yeah, yeah.

[01:07:30] SL: It'll come in a minute. Okay, so, gosh, you win the primary, and you win the general. So you're on—you're goin' back to Washington.

BL: Well, and it was hysterical because it was such a huge class. I mean, as I said, this was the largest incoming class in the con—in the House of Representatives since 1940.

SL: Wow!

BL: There was 114 of us. So out of 435—I mean, there was a big turnover in the House of Representatives. And so they did regional—these regional press conferences to kinda—to talk about, "This is the new class from the southeast region," or the southwest region, or the—so anyway, I remember I went to Atlanta and—I went down to Atlanta by myself, and they had us all up there in a big huddle, you know, kinda—they were—they couldn't interview you, really, 'cause there were too many of us, you know. But I [*laughs*] remember callin' home, and I told Mother—I said, "Watch for me," I said, "'cause it's gonna be on"—I think—I don't know what it—maybe CNN or somethin' . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . I guess. [01:08:47] And so afterwards I called her back. I said, "Did you see me?" She said, "Yeah! You had on that yard sale suit." [*Laughs*] I had—I had bought a suit at a yard sale.

SL: Before you left. [*Laughter*]

BL: And she was so funny. I said, "You're right, Mom. That's what I had on. I had on that yard sale suit." But anyway . . .

SL: That's good.

BL: It was great. And then we got to Washington and in—I guess it was in late November, and there were so many of us they didn't know what to do with us. So they cleared out the cafeteria, and they issued everybody a small table, a chair, a file box, a phone, and I think that was it. And they just lined us up in the cafeteria. And so you've—your box quickly filled up with resumes 'cause you were hirin' people. They were—and we were all new. And of course, I had probably as much or more experience than most of those people because I'd worked on the Hill and I knew people and—you know. So anyway, it was interesting. It was a—then they—so we set up down there, and I had a couple people helpin' me and started hirin' some folks. And then they took us on a trip to Boston, and it was this just kind of a retreat type of—and it snowed. We got snowed in in Boston, and so they loaded us up on a bus, and they took us to

see this movie. It was an Eddie Murphy movie. I can't remember the name of it, but he was this guy that just ran for Congress on a whim because his name was Thomas Jefferson.

SL: Oh yeah.

[01:10:28] BL: Whatever. I can't remember. And of course, it just made it—we all looked at each other like, "Oh my gosh, is that what they think we are? They think we're just a bunch of silly people that just ran for Congress 'cause we didn't have anything better to do?" I mean, [*laughs*] I just remember it bein' such a downer. We were comin' back from the movie, and we were all loaded on this bus. We all looked at each other like, "Oh, great! They just all think we're, you know" . . .

SL: You started to feel like you had been to a cattle call and . . .

BL: Yeah, and . . .

SL: . . . and . . .

BL: . . . and that people thought we were just all, you know, crazy people that just did it 'cause . . .

SL: They think . . .

BL: . . . just for the heck of it, you know.

SL: I bet they're in . . .

BL: And you're like, "No, we worked our tails off to get here!"

[*Laughs*]

SL: I bet their intentions were to have y'all have fun . . .

BL: Absolutely.

SL: . . . and laugh.

BL: It was their intention.

SL: But it didn't work that way.

[01:11:13] BL: Yeah, it just—well, the movie, the way the movie came off, it was just like, "Oh my gosh!" So anyway—but we get back and we—there's this process. They have this beautiful, old, mahogany box, and it has these—they look like poker chips, but they're these little, ivory disks that have numbers on them.

SL: M'kay.

BL: And that's how you choose your seniority in the House is by number. And now in the Senate, it goes by any past service that you've had . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . so—but anyway, in the House—well, I thought they had said we were gonna pick 'em at 12:30, and it was 11:30, and [laughs] so I showed up at 12:30, which is pretty notorious for me. I'm not very timely, unfortunately. But I show up at 12:30, and there's three of those disks left in the box out of a hundred and fourteen.

SL: Wow.

BL: And one of 'em was, like, 100; one of 'em was, like, 60-somethin', and the other one was number 3.

SL: Wow.

BL: And I got number 3. And I—those guys—first of all, I was a young woman, and nobody knew who I was. I was an old staffer, you know—somebody's former staffer. And they were like, "I can't believe you showed up an hour late, and you get number 3," [*laughs*] you know. So it was for choosin' your offices, basically, so I got to choose real early and get an office that I liked.

[01:12:42] SL: So what building were you in?

BL: I was in the Longworth.

SL: So it—and that's interesting. Not everybody would know that, you know, when you win a seat, you don't move into the office . . .

BL: Oh, no.

SL: . . . of the incumbent.

BL: Nor do you get their furniture . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . or their files . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . necessarily.

SL: Right.

BL: I didn't get anything. I got nothin'. But I had, again, worked enough—you know, obviously, the more senior you are, the better furniture [*laughs*] you have, the bigger the office you have.

SL: Right.

[01:13:15] BL: And—but I selected a small office because I liked its location. Somebody—I had asked a member that I'd gotten to know what—you know, he said, "Choose an office that's closest to where you vote the most frequently," he said, "because that's where you walk a lot." And he said, "You don't wanna be clear across campus if you vote the most on the floor or you vote the most in committee, and dependin' on where your committees were." And so I selected a—the—an office that was very close to the Ag Committee, which is—was my first choice, and very close to the floor, so I could get there quickly enough. And then it wasn't too far from the Energy and Commerce Committee, which is probably where I voted the most. But I wasn't sure I was gonna get Energy and Commerce. [*Laughs*]

[01:14:08] SL: Yeah, now, so . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . the—is it the Speaker that determines what committees you

get put on? How does that happen?



BL: Well, in the House it's a little bit different. I mean, in the Senate it's usually the leader, the par—the Democratic leader, majority leader or minority leader or whatever. In the House you go through this process with a regional caucus. And then the folks in your regional caucus are the ones that actually help you. And it depends on who is the Speaker of the House and who is the, you know . . .

SL: Whip.

BL: . . . whip and what have you because they all do it a little bit differently. But usually and ultimately it's the Speaker that'll pull the strings and make it happen for you. But I had some great people that I went to in our little regional caucus. And I said, "I really—I want the Energy and Commerce Committee, and I want the Ag Committee." And [*laughs*] they said, "You don't—the freshmen just don't go on Energy and Commerce." It's like the primo—it was Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means and Appropriations were the three top committees that you could get on. They said, "This" . . .

SL: Right.

BL: "Freshmen just don't get on those committees and particularly when you've got a freshman class like this." And then they said,

"Well, we might have to put some freshmen on there" . . .

SL: Ah!

BL: . . . "because it's such a big class." And so then I started talkin' about the fact that you don't have many rural people on there; you don't have any women on there; this is a critical spot for things like health care, Social Security, blah, blah, blah.

[01:15:38] And so, anyway, I ended up getting on—I—it was a tough fight and Chairman Dingell—one of the freshman in my class was Bart Stupak. And he had really—the chairman wanted Bart on there, and I ended up gettin' on and . . .

SL: And he didn't.

BL: And he didn't. And I went, boy, I went [*snaps*] right over to the chairman, and I said, "Mr. Chairman, I know I'm not your first pick," I said, "but I promise you, you won't find anybody that works harder on this committee than me." And I said, "I wanna work with you and learn from you." And to this day, John Dingell is one of my best friends. He's a great guy. I saw he and Debbie the other day comin' home to Arkansas. They were on their way to Michigan and just—he has been a wonderful mentor to me, just a tremendous example in the way that he works with others. You know, he stands his ground; he works hard; he knows his stuff. But he knows how to work with others

and in a bipartisan way. But he was a great mentor to me—still is. He still acts the same way. I was at a lunch with him the other day and [*SL laughs*—but to hear him talk was—you know, it was great. But—so anyway, and then I got on the Ag Committee, which I wasn't supposed to because you're not supposed to have two A committees. [01:17:00] But nobody else ever wants Ag.

SL: Really!

BL: Well, it's—they—people are scared of Ag.

SL: Well, why is that?

BL: Well, the issues are complicated and it—for a very small constituency, you know, farm programs, trade issues, nutrition issues, all of those different issues that come with Ag are complicated issues that pe—that take time to learn and understand. And it's for a very small constituency. Most people figure it's a very small constituency, but I love it. It's my passion, so you know, I wanted to be on Ag. And they put me on Ag because, again, they didn't—they had so many new members and not very many people wanted Ag, so I was given an exception to get two A committees. And then I was on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, as well, which I loved. But they—after I left they eliminated Merchant Marine and Fisheries

on the House side, so—but it was a great time. I mean, it was—I was curious. I was really workin' hard to fit in and to be a part of this new team and family that I was now a part of in the House of Representatives. And some of 'em I knew, some of 'em I didn't, and build in an office that I felt like would be very attentive and responsive to the constituents. And it was very—but it was also great because I—havin' been a staffer, I know I never will forget. [01:18:34] I told my—I was comin' through the hall late one night, and we'd just gotten there, and we'd just gotten our office. And there was this big, gorgeous chair out in the hallway, and there was a guy from the, I don't know, one of the service groups. And I said, "Well, how do you get a chair like this?" And he said, "Well, whose is this?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. It's just out here on this dolly. Does it belong to somebody?" He said, "Well, if it doesn't have a piece of paper on it that says who it's for, it's fair game." I said, "You mean I can have it?" And he said, "Yeah, I guess so. Doesn't have anybody's name on it." So I was like, "Okay." He said, "But I'd take it right now if you want it [*laughter*] because tomorrow" . . .

SL: That's so . . .

BL: . . . "somebody else'll get it." [01:19:14] And so I just wheeled it in my office and just put it—you know, but it was funny 'cause

you just—if you, you know, learn to work with and love and respect the whole team on Capitol Hill, not just your colleagues, but . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . your staff and the people . . .

SL: All the support services.

BL: . . . that paint the walls and . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . the people that, you know, figure out the phone systems and the people that print your stationery, and you know, they're great people, and they're dedicated public servants to gettin' things workin' and goin' and happenin'. And they are great. The Capitol Hill police—oh my gosh! Such wonderful people and so dedicated. A great law enforcement. It—you know, they're just a—it was a wonderful environment. And I [*laughs*] remember the—my office manager came, and she said, "Well, it's gonna be two or three months before they can get to paintin' our office." And I said, "Okay, well, that's fine. We'll be able to handle it." And I said, "But make sure they know how much we appreciate 'em." And she said, "Well, what is that"—and I said, "Well, you know what? Orange juice and doughnuts is a great thing for folks that start work at four o'clock in the mornin'. And you

know, maybe"—[*laughs*] and sure enough . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:20:20] BL: You know, but I said, "Please let 'em know that we're willin' to wait and we're—and you know—but if somethin' comes available and somebody changes their mind or whatever, we—we're ready to go whenever they are." And you just build that kind of, you know, you build that kind of camaraderie and workin' relationship with everybody that you work with. One of the guys in the paint shop got to be a very—Frankie was a very close friend of mine. Used to bring me tomatoes. [*SL laughs*] He had a wonderful tomato garden, and he always brought me fresh tomatoes and—just one of the sweetest guys in the whole wide world. So it was a great experience. I loved it.

[01:20:58] SL: You know, yes, you had been in Washington, DC, for several years, and you're aware of all the things that go on. But as a congressperson, all of a sudden—now, I would think all of your social time, all of your free time, is now commandeered. I mean, you've—I mean, there's event after event. There's things that are going on with a group of legislators that you probably oughta be there for. There's the lunches, the dinners, the events, the social events, in the evenings. So all of a sudden your dance card is totally full. Is that . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . I mean, did . . .

BL: It's—it was busy. There's no doubt. [01:21:43] And my husband and I had started dating before I ran. I was contemplating running for Congress. I never will forget tellin' him. He—we were talkin' about whatever. We'd just kinda started datin' for—been datin' for three or four months. And I said, "Well, I—I've been really kinda noodlin' around with this idea about runnin' for Congress." And he was like . . .

SL: Noodlin' around. [*Laughs*]

BL: . . . he was like, "Are you serious?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I really am. I really am." So we dated through the campaign, and you're right. I mean, all of a sudden—course, he was livin' in Kentucky at the time and workin' at the medical school there. And I was goin' back and forth. And so, anyway, that first six months—but we got engaged. You know, we talked about it, and he says, "Look, it's—this is a whirlwind, and we're—we gotta get on the same page. We gotta do it now." And I said, "Okay."

SL: Oh!

BL: And we . . .

SL: Oh!

BL: . . . got engaged . . .

SL: Okay . . .

BL: . . . we got eng . . .

SL: . . . okay.

BL: We got engaged in May of 1993. And we got married in August of [19]93. And see, I had just been elected . . .

SL: In November of [19]92.

BL: . . . November of [19]92. Was installed in January of [19]93, so [19]93 was a busy year. I got installed in the Congress; got engaged in May; got married in August. And [*SL laughs*] we—he was—had moved then to—he had left Kentucky and gone to work at the University of Mississippi medical school. Was teachin' down there and workin'. And so we spent our first Christmas in the call room. He was on call [*laughs*] Christmas Day, so we were in the call room at the University of Mississippi medical school. He was deliverin' babies and . . .

[01:23:40] SL: Was there a little, plastic Christmas tree in the . . .

BL: No.

SL: . . . corner? Nothing.

BL: There was nothing.

SL: Nothing. [*Laughs*]

BL: A lot of really awful food in the . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . lounge . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BL: . . . [*laughs*] is what it was.

SL: Yeah.

[01:23:51] BL: But I had several cousins down there. There's a picture over there—our first Christmas card. We took it in front of her mantel. We were down there for somethin'. I can't—well, he was livin' down there. We had our home here in Arkansas, in east Arkansas, and so he had a condo down there, and I had a—he had an apartment down in Mississippi, and I had an apartment in DC. And then our house was out on—over at—just south of West Memphis . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . in Crittenden County—or St. Francis County. And so anyway, he would drive. He would get up at four in the—three—he'd leave at three or four in the mornin' on Monday mornin's and go down . . .

SL: To Mississippi.

BL: . . . and be there in time to do his surgeries. And then I would work all day Mondays in Arkansas, and then I would leave either Monday night or Tuesday mornin' and fly to DC. And we would be in session Tuesday, Wednesdays, Thursdays. And then we

would meet back in West Memphis on Friday and . . .

SL: That's crazy.

BL: It was crazy. It was crazy.

SL: Well, I wanna know . . .

BL: He was so funny, though, but one of his friends says, "You know, I don't know, but if I only had to see her three days a week, I'd probably still be married, too!" [*Laughter*]

[01:25:08] SL: Well, now, I wanna know how you guys met.

BL: Well, we met in Washington, actually. He was doin' his residency in North Carolina, and I was workin' in Washington. And he would come up—he was on call, like, two or three weekends a month when he was doin' his residency. So he only had, like, one weekend a month off, and he would come up to DC lotsa times to watch Razorback games, and I would go hang out and actually was with a lotta his good friends from college and stuff. And so that's where I first met him.

[01:25:41] SL: Isn't there—there's a bar there in Washington, DC, that always has the . . .

BL: Hawk 'n' . . .

SL: . . . raze . . .

BL: . . . Dove.

SL: What is it now?

BL: The Hawk 'n' Dove.

SL: The Hawk 'n' Dove.

BL: Hawk . . .

SL: And it . . .

BL: . . . 'n' Dove.

SL: . . . always has the Razorback games.

BL: Well, it did then because he and his buddies would tip the bartender very heavily to move the satellite. Back then, you had to move the satellite to get whatever—Jefferson sports or whatever.

SL: Right. Uh-huh.

[01:26:02] BL: And so they would always tip the bartender heavily, and we'd get the Razorback games, and [*SL laughs*] so that's where I first met him. But we didn't start datin' till years—a couple of years after that. But we kept in touch, and it was interesting because, as I said, when we met—when we had our first date, I told Mother and Daddy, and they were just so relieved. Oh my gosh, I found a good Arkansas boy, [*SL laughs*] you know. But Daddy was just for sure I was gonna marry a Yankee, and he was just worried to death about that. [*SL laughs*] And you know, it—'cause I was livin' up there in the North. I said, "But," I said, "Daddy, it's Washington, DC."

SL: DC is the South.

BL: "It's Virginia. It's, you know, it's not, really, not that north."
Anyway, and then, come to find out, our mothers were sorority sisters.

SL: You said that . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . in the earlier interview.

BL: Yeah.

SL: How . . .

BL: Well, it was . . .

SL: . . . serendipitous . . .

BL: . . . funny because when I . . .

SL: . . . is that.

BL: . . . I called home and told Mom and Dad—I said, "I had a date with the nicest guy from Little Rock." And "Oh, yay! Who is he?" [*SL laughs*] And I said, "Steve Lincoln." And Mother said, "That is Pert and Benji's baby boy. I just know it is!" And sure enough, it was. [*SL laughs*] Pert and Ben, my mother- and father-in-law. And she said, "Well, we were sorority sisters. We were pledge sisters." And my father-in-law was an SAE at Fayetteville, and my dad was a Kappa Sig. So they were in the same class, but they weren't in fraternities together.

SL: Right.

BL: But anyway . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . it was great.

SL: Small world.

[01:27:24] BL: It was a small world, and that's how we met. And he—you know, I think—he has been amazing. He has been an amazing partner. He's been an amazing husband and father. His—you know, when we left—[*laughs*] we got married in Helena, it was cra—oh gosh, it was like pandemonium over there because they invited their entire graduation class of 1949 or whenever they graduated [*laughs*] from Fayetteville. So it was like a big party. I mean, you know, they had a tennis tournament and a golf tournament. They had a picnic. They had a dance. They had a barbecue. It was [*unclear words*] [*laughs*] like . . .

SL: Right.

BL: "Is anybody here for us?" [*SL laughs*] But when we left and we drove away, we had talked about it because so many of—almost all of our friends were already married 'cause we were thirty-three. And he said—Steve looked at me, and he says, "Not a day too soon and not a day too late." He said, "We found

each other at a perfect time." And you know, I think—I don't think it was probably anything he ever imagined would be that he would be married to a woman in the United States Congress.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

BL: But—and he, you know, he said [*unclear words*], "I don't think this is probably what I ever thought was gonna happen, but you know, it did." And he's been a—he's just been a rock ever since. He's been a rock for me, so it was great.

[01:28:54] SL: So how many years is that, now?

BL: Nineteen.

SL: Nineteen?

BL: Mh-hmm.

SL: That probably puts you guys in a minority, I bet . . .

BL: I don't know.

SL: . . . to be married that long.

BL: Well, it's a—it's interesting because, you know, we just—both of us grew up in such, I don't know, normal Arkansas families, you know, that had been around Arkansas forever. And it's just probably not somethin' that you think of. You don't think that you're gonna be in Congress or . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . you're gonna be in the Senate or you're gonna, you know,

do these things. And we just kept doin' 'em, you know. And when I ran for the Senate, you know, I went to Steve, and I said, "You know, I've had several people call me and, you know, ask me if I'm thinkin' about it. And I kinda really haven't but, you know"—'cause Dale wasn't gonna retire. And then in July he announced he was gonna retire and he wasn't gonna run. And so all of a sudden the seat was open. And I had stepped down and didn't run for reelection in the House because we'd just found out we were pregnant with twins.

SL: Right.

[01:30:10] BL: And so it [*SL laughs*] was a great thing, and we knew what we needed to do. I mean . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . you know, we wanted to start a family. We knew that, and we just didn't expect it to come [*laughs*] two at a time. And that was really a shock because we, you know, we really had kinda thought about it and envisioned that I would be able to go back and forth to Washington with, you know, a diaper case and a briefcase combined and, you know, at—sometimes when I needed to and . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . you know, Mom and Dad were close, and his mom and dad

were close and that we would still be able to do what we were doin'. But when we found out it was two, he looked at me, and he said, "We re—we gotta talk. [*SL laughs*] We gotta figure this out," [*laughs*] he said, "'cause this is not really gonna be an option to be able to travel with two like that."

SL: Right.

[01:31:00] BL: "And you know, those are choices that we really have to think through," and we did. And we knew, too, that at my age, I hit all five of the categories for an at-risk pregnancy. And so we decided that it was most important that we had one shot at gettin' these boys into . . .

SL: Get it right.

BL: . . . the world—mh-hmm—safely and do it right. And so I announced I wasn't gonna run in January, and it was great. I mean, it was the right decision. I loved what I did, and I loved my job. I loved bein' in the Congress, but you just know when you've made a right decision, and it was the right decision. You know, [*laughs*] you know Arkansas politics as good as anybody, and you don't run for reelection if you can't be horseback and eatin' barbecue and coon and . . .

SL: That's [*laughs*] right [*unclear words*].

BL: . . . you know, ridin' on—in eight different . . .

SL: Watermelons and—yeah.

BL: . . . parades on the Fourth of July. And . . .

SL: That's right.

BL: . . . the boys were due—they were due the first week of July and were—ended up—came two weeks early but—which is really not early for twins. But they—you know, he—Steve said—he said, "You're just not gonna be able to do those things. You shouldn't be doin' those things." And so we made the decision . . .

SL: Not to . . .

BL: . . . not to.

SL: . . . do the campaign.

BL: Not to do the campaign.

SL: So . . .

[01:32:20] BL: I finished my term . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . which was great, and the boys were born in June, mid to late June. And I was out the last of June and all of July . . .

SL: July.

BL: . . . which is not that much because usually there's a brea—a twelve-week—twelve-day break in July for the Fourth of July.

SL: Right.

BL: And then they go out in August. So by the time Congress came

back in September, the boys and I could travel, and they went back with me. And it was an election year so—and it was a presidential election year. Was it—that was [19]96. That's right. It was [19]96.

SL: Right.

BL: So we weren't in late—session wasn't late that year in the fall. So I went back and finished up the votes and finished up my term with the boys. That was cute. That was—then they'd—oh, lord have mercy, they didn't know what to do with babies in the US House of Representatives. I had a sip and see. Invited all my colleagues to come to a sip and see, and I never will forget Ralph Hall, Congressman Ralph Hall, from [*laughs*] Texas—he said, "Blanche, what is a sip and see?" I said, "Ralph, this is where you come by, and I'm gonna give you somethin' to sip on, and you are gonna see my beautiful babies, and you're gonna tell me how beautiful my babies"—"Oh, okay. Sip and see. [*SL laughs*] I got it. I'll be there."

[01:33:48] SL: That sounds so good, doesn't it?

BL: It was great. They—and they all—my colleagues all came by, and they were all so sweet. The—you know, being pregnant in the House of Representatives was hysterical because it was like havin' [*SL laughs*] 434 big brothers.

SL: Yay. [*Laughs*]

BL: You know . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . some of 'em teased you. Some of 'em were pamperin' you. Some of 'em were just like, you know, "Move it. Come on. Just—you know, we gotta go." It—they—it—but it was like they were all very sweet and very thoughtful to me and very—just very genuine and loving in their own ways 'cause it was just not a usual thing.

SL: Right.

BL: There was two of us that were pregnant at the same time, and I think it was the first time—it was the second time they'd ever had anybody pregnant in the Congress.

[01:34:37] SL: Was it—do you think it helped you get stuff through that you [*laughs*] couldn't . . .

BL: No.

SL: . . . you had trouble getting through?

BL: No. But it was really sweet because I think what it did was it humanized a little bit for them the issues that we were talkin' about, and it allowed them to talk about the humanization of the work schedule. You know, 'cause I can remember sittin' there, and I was exhausted, and oh, they were just up there—people

were just gabbin' about, and they were talkin', talkin', talkin'. I was like, "When are we gonna vote on this?" I said, "I have got to go pick up the cleanin'. I gotta go to the grocery store. I gotta"—you know. And [*laughs*] one of my colleagues looked over at me and said, "You need a wife!" [*SL laughs*] I said, "I know! I am the wife!" [*SL laughs*] I got—you know, this is it. The—come on. Let's get on with this. We know—everybody knows what's gonna happen. Let's do it and move on."

SL: Everyone wants to talk, though.

BL: Yeah, they do.

[01:35:26] SL: You know, before we leave the House, what was your—list a few of the things that you were proud of that you did shepherd through or that you got done when you were in the House. Is there anything that you can point to that kind of, you know, confirmed the reasons why you ran in the first place? I mean, do you feel like you did something not just for your constituents, but for the nation, I mean, as a whole?

BL: I think there were things that I did both for my constituents in terms of agriculture and the farm bills that we worked on. I—there was a move afoot to—you know, in terms of the farm bills, to kinda put farmers on their own, and you just can't do that, not when a world's starvin', and they deal with too many

variables. So I feel like I really stood up for farmers and tried to bring agriculture and agricultural producers, you know, together in terms of being better understood by environmentalists and by, you know, metropolitan areas and others. That was a big effort in the House and in the Senate, as well. I also think some of the women's issues that we talked about, everything from breast cancer research to, you know, equal pay, you know, just showin' that women were in the workforce now, that they still wanna be mothers and they still wanna be good mothers and good wives, but they also have to, you know, help . . .

SL: Provide.

BL: . . . provide. And you know, it was everything from welfare reform, which I was on the welfare reform conference committee, where we talked about, "Yeah, we can cut, and we can bring greater responsibility, but don't forget the human nature of it. You know, don't forget that if you've got a single mom that's raisin' two kids and workin' three jobs, you know, she's worked—she's doin' everything she can. But if you cut off any—all of her benefits, then, you know, you" . . .

SL: What happens?

BL: . . . "what happens?"

SL: Yeah.

[01:37:46] BL: She can't work any more. She can't, you know, she can't work four jobs [*laughs*] and still be the kinda mother that you want her to be, which is there for her child when they're, you know, challenged or tempted or any of the other things.

SL: Sure.

BL: So those were things—bein' on that welfare reform conference I think was very helpful. I was also on the telecommunications conference, which was—I was there for—on the rural side of things. And it was kind of unusual to be a conferee at that early of a stage in your career 'cause conferees were usually the more senior members. But I was on the conference, the telecom conference, on behalf of rural, the rural communities, because most of the se—more senior people were from urban areas, like Boston. [01:38:30] And I never will forget Ed Markey, you know, layin' in about this, that, and the other. And I said, "Well, I gotta tell you. Unless Turkey Scratch, Arkansas, has the same entrance ramp onto the information highway that Boston does, you know, I gotta have a problem with this because, you know, [*laughs*] we need to grow, too. And that's probably places where we need to grow even more, where kids need more education from telecom—you know, the telecommunications industry and the, you know, distance learning and all the other

kinda things that we can do." So I was—they used to call me Blanche Rural Lambert on the committee 'cause I always brought up the issue of makin' sure that, you know, folks that live in rural America were gonna get the same kind of a benefit and the same kind of shake, when, you know—and I told 'em—I said, "I understand that, you know, it takes—there's less infrastructure there, and there's gonna take more time to get the infrastructure out there, but you gotta put us in there. You gotta make sure that we're listed there, too, and that we're gonna get it. Maybe it's a couple of years later, but we're gonna get it." And those were things that I worked hard on. And of course, President Clinton's budget. I mean, that's what put us back on track. It put us back on track. We ended up with a surplus. We eliminated our debt, and it was a tough vote. It was tough work comin' up with the kinda compromises that we needed to come up with a balanced budget, but we did it.

[01:40:07] SL: So now, how long were you in the House?

BL: Four years.

SL: Four years.

BL: Mh-hmm. [19]92 to [19]96. I didn't run in the [19]96 reelection year.



[01:40:21] SL: So Dale announces when that he's not going to run

again?

BL: He announced in the summer of [19]97, July of [19]97. And I announced that I was gonna run—I wanna say the end of August or the first of September. And everybody said, "Well, that was quick." And I said, "Look, you're either in, or you're not."

SL: Right.

BL: You know, everybody kept sayin', "Well, we're gonna do an exploratory committee." I remember—and I said, "You know, I don't need to explore. I—I'm—I feel like I can do the job. I feel like I can do a good job, and I wanna do it. And I'm gonna get out there and show the people of Arkansas that, you know, that I can." I remember I went out to campaign once for Amy Klobuchar in Minnesota. [*Laughs*] And she was talkin' about—she'd called me about runnin', and I said, "You should run. It's—absolutely!" She was a prosecutor and a good, thoughtful public servant. And [*laughs*] she said, "Well, I'm—I was gonna do an exploratory committee." And I said, "Honey," I said, "where I come from, when you talk about exploratory committees, people think it's a—you're talkin' about a surgical procedure, you know. [*Laughter*] It's not—you know, you're either in, or you're out." You know, you do these exploratory committees and you—people just wonder, "Well, are you really gonna do it or not," you

know. You—people need to know that you mean business and you're gonna be out there. And it was a tough race. It was a four-way primary with a runoff with the attorney general and then a Republican state senator in the fall in the . . .

[01:41:59] SL: So . . .

BL: . . . general.

SL: . . . who all was in the primary? You member?

BL: Yeah, it was me and Scott Ferguson, Dr. Ferguson, from West Memphis. Great guy. And Nate Coulter.

SL: Oh yeah.

BL: And Winston Bryant . . .

SL: Wow.

BL: . . . who was the attorney general at the time.

SL: Yeah, and been there for a while.

BL: Yeah. He had great statewide name recognition and I . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . and, of course, mine was just from the First District but—so it was a four-way primary, which was tough . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . and then a runoff with Winston Bryant in the runoff. And then the general election was State Senator Fay Boozman.

SL: Wow. Small . . .

BL: And . . .

SL: . . . world.

BL: Well, it was—what was amazing was that I had three campaigns in less than six months. So you had—raisin' money was just awful. [*Laughs*] I mean, you had to ask people to give to you three times . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . which, you know, some people are—will do it, but some people get pretty exhausted.

SL: Well, sure.

BL: But it was a great challenge, and it certainly showed me what it takes, you know, if you're serious about what you're doin'. So—but it was a—lookin' back, again, I frequently say, "My husband's a saint," 'cause he let me run for the Senate in a race like that. I mean . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . it wasn't a shoo-in.

SL: Right.

[01:43:37] BL: You know, it was a hard slog through primaries and runoffs and generals with twin two-year-olds. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right.

BL: And it was—I remember I was—my—workin' with the schedule

on the campaign, I made sure that I was either—if I had an evening event, that I didn't have a morning event. But if I had a morning event, then I didn't have an evening event the night before. And that was tough. I gotta tell you. The toughest job in any of these campaigns . . .

SL: Is schedule.

BL: . . . or congressional offices is the scheduler. They've gotta work wonders with both your personal life and then your campaign life and, if you're a sitting member, your congressional . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . schedule. And they've gotta make it all fit and be pleasant about it, [*laughs*] you know. It's like, "No, sir, he can't—she can't meet with you because"—you know. It's like, "I am so sorry. She really wanted to meet with you." You know, she'd love to be able to say, "She's got ten things in that hour that she's supposed to be doin', you know." So it's a—it's an incredibly tricky and tough job. But I worked—I had great family support when I was runnin' for the Senate with the boys. And none better than my husband. He was a—he was tremendous and still is.

[01:45:10] SL: Well, you know, and gosh, the seat that you were taking, running for Dale Bumpers, I mean, my gosh . . .

SL: Huge shoes to fill, and I never was able to fill those shoes. But you know, it was a great honor and a privilege, and I got there, and it was so funny 'cause, you know, on the floor they had to give Dale an extra long cord on his microphone . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] 'Cause he walks so much.

BL: 'Cause he walks so much. He'd get up from his desk, and he'd start talkin' and very eloquently continue on. But he would walk around, and they needed—he needed an extra long cord. So—but it was a great race, and I learned a lot and enjoyed every minute of it and was very proud and honored that the people of Arkansas gave me the opportunity to serve 'em in the Senate. It was a new day with—for me as a young woman, and I mean, I'm still the youngest woman ever elected to the Senate, and it was quite interesting, you know, to come be sworn in. The pictures of—you know, Al Gore had to hold one of the boys. Steve had one of the boys, and Vice President Gore had the other boy, and I had my hand [*laughs*] on the Bible and one up and [*laughs*] . . .

SL: How beautiful is that?

BL: It was a family affair.

[01:46:24] SL: That's so beautiful. You know, Dale and David both, they saw the animosity growing across the aisles. They—I know

that David was feeling that he might could very well do more outside the Senate. So you were kind of—you were getting thrust into something that it was not like it used to be in the old days. It had already started to affect the spirit. The bipartisan thing was fading quickly.

BL: Well, and Dale said that to me. He said, "I'm proud of you. I know you're gonna do a great job." He said, "I just wish you could have known the Senate that I knew." He said, "You know, course, I had great friends on the Democratic side." He said, "But I had great friends on the Republican side, too." He said, "And it's not because we agreed on policy." He said, "It's because we raised our kids together." He said, "We had to sit through band concerts and football games, and [*SL laughs*] you know, we barbecued on the weekends together, and we got to know each other." And of course, that is what's missin' now because when you know somebody, you know, you don't have to agree with 'em on everything, but you respect who they are. And when you respect them, you are so much less likely to violate them, to be ugly, to be mean and treacherous, which is what a lot happens now because they don't know each other. You know, I made it a point when I came, and there was a—there was efforts, and there still are efforts, to . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . create greater bipartisanship and greater fellowship among members. And I told Steve—I said, "If there's anything we can leave here, hopefully it will be that we worked in a bipartisan way." And I said, "When they have these dinners, we're gonna go, the spouse dinners and the family dinners and"—and he was a trooper. He—he's . . .

SL: It's so critical, too, because not all spouses are like that.

BL: Hm-mm. And he did. He went to all of 'em. He got to know—you know, it was hard because, [*laughs*] you know, the spouse club had always been women, and much of what the spouse club did, he would get invitations, and you know, it'd be a fashion show and a luncheon. [*Laughter*] And he'd be like, "They don't really think I'm comin' to this, do they?" And I said, "Well, sweetheart, you can go if you want." He said, "I gotta go to work, you know." And I said, "I know." I said, "Well, maybe, you know, maybe you oughta find some of the men spouses." And course, back then it was Frank Snelling, which is Mary Landrieu's husband. I'm tryin' to think who else. But later on, it was quite interesting. You had Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, and there were a few others that, you know—Diane Feinstein's husband. And I said, "Well, you know, maybe y'all should do a

spouse event and, you know, watch a basketball game and drink beer and invite the women spouses."

SL: There you go.

BL: See what, you know, see what . . .

SL: You bet.

BL: . . . happens.

SL: Come to the man cave.

[01:49:34] BL: But it was just [*SL laughs*]*—it—for him, it was—he did a great job at it. He did what he could do by comin' to all of those events, and we did it as a family. You know, on retreats we took—we always took the children, which were—it was always a great topic. You know, and there just weren't that many small children, you know. So we were always usually the ones that were with the small children. But it was . . .*

SL: Right.

BL: . . . it was a good thing. And we made our level best to really reach out, and I'm still tryin' to do that. I still try and invite a couple of colleagues, Democrats or Republic—and Republicans to dinner or somethin' like that, to kinda pull 'em together. I remember when we first got there, Chuck Robb and Lynda Johnson—Lynda . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . Lynda Robb, they invited us to dinner at their house with—I think it was, like, three other couples, maybe, a couple of Democratic couples and a couple of Republican couples. And it was so nice. Olympia and Jock, Olympia Snowe and Jock—her husband, Jock, and I want to say Evan and Susan Bayh. I'm tryin' to think who else. There's somebody else that was there. But it was interesting because we all got there, and when we left, it was really early on, and I thought, "Oh, this is great. This is how it's gonna be." Anyway [*laughs*] . . .

SL: And it never happened again, huh?

[01:51:04] BL: Well, there was an occasional somethin' where you . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . could kinda do somethin'. But—and it's not as much that people don't want to do that. It's just that there's not time, you know, because there's so many technologies so—you know, there's so many flights. You can be home in two hours. Your constituents know it, you know. You can do teleconferences, or you can do, you know, TV shows, or you can do all this other stuff. And then you've gotta do fund-raisers 'cause if you're not raisin' money, then you're not gonna get reelected and—you know, so all of that stuff. And for me, I had small children. I

wasn't gonna miss that. And one of the things that, ultimately, people, I guess—or tried to fault me for was takin' my children to Washington.

SL: Yeah.

BL: But I wouldn't have missed those years for . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . anything.

[01:51:55] SL: I don't see how that is even—begins to be an issue.

BL: Well, it's just everybody is different, you know. And most of the families' children were older, and they were—a lot of 'em were off at school. You know, everybody has to do what's right for them. But particularly as a woman with a husband who had his own profession, you know, both of us working, if we weren't all in the same place, we—neither one of us would have ever gotten to be . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . you know. But as it was, I got to see all their plays. I got to see their piano recitals. I got to see their soccer games. You know, I got to put 'em to bed at night. I got to read stories with 'em. You know, those are the things you don't wanna miss. And to be honest with you, people had to know that made me a better senator. But at the end, it was like, "Well, you know,

she's left Arkansas. She moved her kids up there." You know, we stra—we stayed really true to our roots. We always have. We love Arkansas. It's always home. People used to ask Bennett, you know, "Where are you from?" And he'd say, "Well, I'm from Arkansas, but I go to school in Virginia." [Laughter]

SL: There you go.

[01:53:10] BL: You know, 'cause we spent—we—we've always spent holidays and summers. I did very little international traveling because Dad was sick, and then my mother-in-law was sick, and my boys were small. And those were things in life that you don't . . .

SL: You don't turn your back on.

BL: You don't turn your back on. And you know, I made sure that—Dale had said—he said, "You know, one of the great ways to meet your colleagues and to build those relationships is through these—through your trips, through the international trips." And I knew that was gonna be tough for me, so I knew I had to double up and figure out another way to build those relationships, and I did. I sat on the floor and talked with my colleagues, you know. I'd have lunch with 'em. I'd go down to the little lunchroom and sit and have lunch with 'em and felt like I made a lotta friends, Democrats and Republicans. And

hopefully added to the decorum of the body and brought some civility to it and some fellowship to it, as well. It was our main obj—it was an objective of ours, and that was important for me and for Steve.

[01:54:18] SL: What were the committees that you got when you got in?

BL: Oh, well, again, I just—I went crazy. [*Laughs*] I got over there, and course, in the Senate it really is the majority leader that does it. And you know, they—he confers with the chairmen of the committees, and I knew I wanted Ag and Finance—were the two main ones I wanted. I also wanted Energy. And so they said, "Put your top five. List 'em one through five and put your top three up there." And I put Ag, Finance, and Energy, and I didn't put anything else. [*Laughter*]

SL: You didn't want anything else.

BL: And so the majority leader called me and I—he said, "First of all, nobody puts Ag as their first choice." [*SL laughs*] And I said, "Well, that's my passion." And he said, "Well, I mean," he said, "you'll probably get Ag 'cause it's—nobody's—nobody ever fights over Ag, you know." But—and he said, "It's a great committee." He said, "I'm on it, and it's good for some states." He says, "But it's not one of those that"—he said, "You should put what you

really, really want number one." I said, "Well, I really want Ag." I said, "But I really want Finance, too." And I said, "You don't have any women on Finance." I said, "You need more rural folks. You need some folks on Finance." And I said, "David Pryor was on Finance." And he said, "Yes, and he was good member." And I said, "Well, you need another Arkansan over there then." And it was interesting because there had only been one woman on the Senate Finance Committee, Carol Moseley Braun. She was there for only a year.

SL: Right.

BL: That last year she was in the Senate, she was on the Finance Committee. I think it—I think that's right. I think it was only a year. It may have been two, but I think it was one. [01:56:02] And so I think they realized that they did need a woman 'cause, I mean, issues like childcare, Social Security, health care. Course, trade and taxes, they think those are men's issues, but we had every bit as much input on those as, you know—particularly taxes. But anyway, so I got on Finance, which, again, as a new member was just unheard of. And I got Ag, and I got Energy. I had to, actually, I had to take a leave of absence from Energy to get on Finance. I didn't get on Finance right off the bat. I got Energy and Ag, and they said, "Well, just hold on.

Hold onto your horses. Hold on. Just hold on." And [*SL laughs*] then when Finance came up on the next year, I got it. And I said, "Well, I'll take a leave from Energy, but I'm just takin' a leave of absence," I said, "'cause when the numbers switch back, I want my seat back on Energy." And I did. I got my seat back on Energy. But those were the issues I—that—issues I liked, and the committees I like. And I was also on the Special Committee on Aging, which Senator Pryor had chaired . . .

SL: Sure.

BL: . . . which was a wonderful committee, and I loved it, just loved it. I worked with Herb Kohl and so many others over there on everything from housing to Alzheimer's to Social Security to you name it—health care.

[01:57:22] SL: So did you have to leave one to get on the other, or did . . .

BL: I had to leave Energy temporarily to get on Finance because they had to be able to have enough committees for everybody.

SL: So . . .

BL: Course, I later found out that the more senior members had more committees than they were supposed to have. That got to be a very contentious issue, and Senator Mark Pryor worked very hard to try to solve that problem for people because new

people comin' in were s—feelin' so frustrated because they couldn't get onto good committees but it—they couldn't even get one good committee, but that was because the more senior members had three and four and five committees. So Mark worked really hard on that to try and kinda—in his perfectly gentle way . . .

SL: Yes.

BL: . . . to do it without upsettin' anybody's applecart.

SL: I know. [*Laughs*]

BL: Yeah.

[01:58:20] SL: And I wish he'd just whup some people sometimes.

[*Laughter*] Listen, were you the only woman on these committees?

BL: I was the only—well, Olympia Snowe came onto Finance with me at the same time.

SL: Okay.

BL: So the two of us came on there together. On Energy—Mary Landrieu was on Energy.

SL: Okay.

BL: And I think that's all. Surely there was an—a Republican on the Energy Committee, a Republican woman. But Lisa Murkowski came after me. She's the ranking member there now, but I

can't think.

[01:58:57] SL: Were—did you ever sense or experience positions being gender based on any of those committees?

BL: Not really. I mean, I used it as an argument lots of times when I wanted on a committee. But I never felt like—I mean, I just think that, ultimately, the leaderships realized that they had to have diversity on all the committees . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . not just on, you know, Small Business or EPW or whatever. They needed diversity on all the committees, and that certainly was—boded well for me. It was to my advantage. But—yeah, no, it was—I was very fortunate to get on those good committees, and I loved workin' on those committees.

[01:59:51] SL: So how many terms did you serve as senator?

BL: Two. Two terms in the Senate, so twelve years.

SL: So in your mind, what was the—what were the most contentious issues that you had to face as a senator?

BL: Hmm, well, there were a lot of 'em. I mean, I think everything from budgets to, you know, prescription drugs for seniors to, obviously, the economic crisis in 2008 and 2009. You know, health care was a big issue. Education, No Child Left Behind. Trade issues would become pretty polarizing. ?Gee, I? . . .

[02:00:48] SL: You could almost say what wasn't . . .

BL: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . by that time.

BL: Well, and particularly in the Senate.

SL: Yeah.

BL: You know, the Senate was definitely the—it's the saucer to the teacup. I mean, it's—you know, the volatility of the House spills out of the cup, and it comes to the saucer, where it cools, and they always called the Senate the saucer, where all the turmoil and the—all of the animosity and the, you know, the conflict that occurred in the House would try to settle and cool in the Senate so that hopefully cooler minds prevailed and compromise was worked out. But it's—and I guess I saw a glimmer of that when I first got there because the House had become—I mean, I was in the House durin' the Contract With America and . . .

SL: Gingrich.

BL: . . . Newt Gingrich and all of that, you know.

SL: A lotta people point to that as the beginning. But it had really kinda been brewing a little bit before that.

BL: I think it'd been brewin' a little bit before that, but it was, you know—well, that—my class in [19]92 was 114 people. That was a—quite an upset of folks . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . and so when I got to the Senate, I think there was a little bit of that camaraderie left or that bipartisanship left, thanks to people like Bob Dole, who I work with now. You know, he had worked with Clinton to try and figure somethin' out of how they did deal with Newt Gingrich.

SL: Right.

BL: But it was growing, you know, at a—I won't say a rapid pace, but certainly a pace in terms of the polarization in the Senate.

SL: It just kept gaining instead of [*BL coughs*] . . .

BL: Excuse me.

SL: . . . retreating or . . .

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

BL: Oh.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:02:49] SL: Okay. We're on our third tape. Now, we've only got about forty-five minutes with you here. So—and we're—we've gotten you to the Senate. And so I wanna talk a little bit about your Senate career, and I think we oughta talk about your last Senate race a little bit . . .

BL: Sure.

SL: . . . as painful as that may be.

BL: [*Laughs*] No.

SL: And then I wanna talk about . . .

BL: It's all a part of it.

SL: . . . what you're doing now and where you think you guys are headed in the future, but that's a lot to talk about in the last forty-five minutes.

BL: All right. I'll try . . .

SL: But . . .

BL: . . . to be better.

SL: . . . I'm gonna try to keep this . . .

BL: Goin'.

SL: . . . keep this movin' 'cause I want us to all be happy about this [*laughter*] when we're done. [02:03:28] Okay, so we're in the Senate now, and you've—you had a pretty good, positive first dinner experience in a bipartisan way that kinda had your hopes up, but you could see that there was some polarization happening, and you kinda just watched it continue to happen, despite your efforts to be, you know, bipartisan and to encourage that kind of camaraderie. It was something that I know had already frustrated Senator Bumpers and Senator Pryor. And it—and that sentiment that Bumpers gave you, "I

wish you could've known the Senate I knew," kinda hits the nail on the head. They all—they saw it comin'. And you got injected into it with the best of intentions.

BL: Yeah.

SL: Did . . .

[02:04:18] BL: Well, and I think, you know, seein' that—you know, both seein' the examples before me—I mean, whether it was Bumpers or Pryor or Fulbright or McClellan, and the stories from some of the more senior members about their relationships with those guys, was amazing. I mean, Joe Biden was my seatmate and [*SL laughs*] him tellin' me an encounter with Senator McClellan which changed his life after he'd lost his wife and a child in an automobile accident right before he was sworn in.

SL: Right.

BL: And he wasn't gonna—he told 'em he didn't wanna be a senator, and he just wasn't gonna be sworn in. And he met McClellan in the elevator and had a conversation with him, and he said, "And it changed my life," you know. McClellan shared with him—he said, "You know, I've been through some of that, too." He said, "I've lost a child. I've"—you know. And you know, so listenin' to them talk about the relationship that had existed, I think it just made me want to redouble my efforts to try to conquer this

issue of bipartisanship and, you know, to really try to be the kinda senator that encouraged other senators to work with me in a bipartisan way. And I think a lot of that was—came from, you know, wanting to accomplish things, to get results, my willingness to compromise, not on my principles, but on details and things that, you know, really—and it really wasn't as much compromising as it was looking for consensus, finding the place where you could start together, and then, little by little, moving out so that you pulled in more people, you know, and finding the people that you could start with in the middle, you know, the Saxby Chamblisses, the Mike Crapos of the world, the Orrin Hatches, Dick Lugar, people who were there because they wanted to get things done, and findin' that consensus in the middle, and then starting to move out and bringing along your side, the Democrats, or reaching out to some of the Republicans.

[02:06:45] It was a challenge, and it was fun. It was worthwhile. It was somethin' that you felt like was good and productive, and that's, you know, that's how you wanna feel. You wanna feel good and productive about things. And that's what we did, or it was what I tried to do, and I felt like I—you know, I was one of thirteen, fourteen Democrats that voted for the Medicare Part D, prescription drugs for seniors. I—you

know, here we were in the twenty-first century [*laughs*—a health care program for seniors that didn't have drug coverage? You know, it was a critical part of their quality of life. Did I get everything I wanted? No. But it was about 85, almost 90 percent, of that bill was somethin' that I was supportive of. Was I gonna fall on my sword for the last 10 percent? And there was about, I think, ten or something—it was either ten or twelve of us. I can't remember how many Democrats voted for that, but I was a part of that. And I got—you know, people on the Democratic side got on to me. You know, but it was always that way, you know. Look where you—and find what you can agree on and then build out from that.

SL: Expand from there.

[02:08:03] BL: And it was, you know, it was great. I worked hard on those types of issues. The problem, really, I think, in many instances has become that legislators are forever lookin' over their shoulders because . . .

SL: Campaigning.

BL: Huh?

SL: They've gotta campaign . . .

BL: They gotta campaign.

SL: . . . all the time.

BL: And there's money. The money is just a huge part of it. It's awful. I mean, and it's comin' from places you don't even know. You know, so funny, people used to give you such a hard time about PAC money, takin' PAC contributions. It's the most highly regulated, highly transparent form of contribution that you can [*laughs*] take is a PAC contribution. It's limited in amount. It's completely published. Whoever gives to that PAC—that—all of that information is there, as opposed to super PACs and all these other special committees and things like that where you don't know who the—who or where the money's comin' from. But if you're not at least raisin' some money to show people that you're serious about what you're doin' and that you're gonna run again, then you might as well give up from the very beginning. But then, eventually, as money has become such a big part of it because, I mean, people—you know, whether it's TV ads or radio ads or mailers. [02:09:32] Oh my gosh! The last campaign was phenomenal. I mean, the number of mailers. People were gettin' three and four mailers a day in their mailboxes against me from other people, which some of 'em we didn't even know where they were comin' from, you know. And the money that came from outside of our state. You know, I went up there to work for Arkansans. I went up there to try and solve problems

for this country in ways that I thought, ultimately, Arkansans wanted to see things happen. I was very fiscally responsible. I was always—just almost always number fifty in the Senate, regardless of whether the Democrats were in control or the Republicans were in control. I was the quintessential moderate, focused on trying to, you know, cut spending, create a great—greater fairness in the tax code and, you know, make sure that we were payin' down our debt. And so it was—it—but it's hard when, as I said, when you've—you're lookin' over your shoulder to see what's gonna be happenin' in those campaigns. And it very rarely was stuff that was comin' from inside your state. It was more than likely things comin' from outside your state.

[02:10:49] SL: I should—I should've made note of this before we started. Trey is nephew to John Boozman.

BL: Oh good!

SL: So . . .

BL: John and Cindy—Cathy—are wonderful people.

SL: They are wonderful people. But I just wanted to . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . say that as . . .

BL: Well, and I—is—I've said that to them. I've said it to everybody else. I said, "You should definitely go see John. He's a great

guy." He and Cathy are just delightful people, and you know, to be honest, the \$14 million that the labor unions came in and spent on me in—against me [*laughs*] in my primary was, you know—that was as much a part of my campaign as the millions of dollars that came from the Republicans.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BL: But it was . . .

[02:11:35] SL: You know, we were talkin' with Lee Williams Friday, and he says, after his interview, he says, "You know, I just can't believe the Arkansas people would not keep Blanche in because of her position in agriculture," especially your constituents that, you know, you made a big difference, and you were positioned to continue to make a big difference in your constituencies.

BL: Well, it's—and it was—I—it was exciting. I mean, you know, the Ag Committee's one of the older committees in the Congress because, obviously, agriculture was one of our very first industries. And so in its 184 years, I was the first woman and the first Arkansan. And it wasn't just that. It was somethin' that I was passionate about, you know. There've been some chairmen that weren't exactly passionate about the stuff that they were talkin' about in—oftentimes.

SL: Right. They got saddled with it or somethin'.

BL: Well, or, you know, they just gain their seniority from certain things, and that was the committee that they were most senior on to become chairman. You know, you have several—it'd be like me bein' chairman of the Energy Committee or—course, I was—had really gained a tremendous amount of seniority in the Finance Committee. I think I only had three, four—four ahead of me in the Finance Committee. So I had gained a lotta seniority pretty quickly, but yeah, it was a great opportunity and a great opportunity for a state that's largest industry is agriculture. But I did what I could with it while I had it. I felt good about that.

[02:13:27] SL: Yeah. Did—I mean, that last campaign had to be totally different than all the others.

BL: Oh yeah. Well, it was. It was brutal. It was—you know, I was—they came at me from both sides in the campaign. People were frustrated about health care. It had been sensationalized to the point that people were just—I mean, they were furious. They were rabid. They were—I mean, people were just, you know, totally angry about health care. And it was unfortunate 'cause so much of it was just because it—they were frustrated and didn't know. I mean, the health care bill wasn't perfect. No bill's ever perfect, but quite frankly, you know, I never went up there to create a work of art. I went up there to create a work

in progress because if you go back to what I learned in the House, it was that I didn't wanna govern by crisis. I didn't wanna wait till crisis. I didn't wanna wait for our government to just react to a crisis. I wanted us to be proactive. And you know, one of the reasons that you have five-year bills—you know, you have a five-year highway bill and a five-year education bill and a five-year farm bill—is that you will work together and come up with what's good and thoughtful legislation, both rules and guidance and, you know, laws that work. And then you work through those five years to determine what doesn't work. You know, what does work, let's do more of. What it doesn't work, let's improve and change and, you know, move forward. [02:15:05] Technology changes. Goodness gracious, just think of the amount that technology has changed in a five-year period, of what you can do. Whether it's, you know, GPS and satellite graphing or, you know . . .

SL: Mobile . . .

BL: . . . telecom issues . . .

SL: . . . mobile communi . . .

BL: . . . or—yeah.

SL: Yeah.

BL: I mean, so many of those things. So you know, people that

want immediate gratification, they want immediate solutions, are gonna be disappointed because that doesn't happen. You don't pass a law one day, and it's not like takin' a pill that's gonna cure you for tomorrow. I mean, you work through it. And health care was that way. Ag bills were always that way. Education should've been that way. We haven't reauthorized a ESEA bill in seven, eight years. If I was a mother of a first, second grader, I'd be furious. Of all the things that we should've learned from No Child Left Behind of what worked and what didn't work, we haven't used that knowledge to make our education system better. We've just kinda plodded along with what we've got.

[02:16:20] SL: Well, there's also—when you pass a bill or—and a law comes into place that's effective for five or six years, people can plan and . . .

BL: You're right.

SL: . . . and . . .

BL: Certainty.

SL: . . . and there's some—yeah, there's some consistency.

BL: Predictability. Mh-hmm.

SL: And you know what's going to happen the next year and the next year and the next year. And you know what's—you find out

what's not working and when it—when the time comes, you make those appropriate changes, and it continues. And now we're talkin' six-month stopgap . . .

BL: Well . . .

SL: . . . solutions or one years . . .



[02:16:50] BL: The worst possible thing coming out of Washington right now is uncertainty. It's the uncertainty of whether or not it's gonna take one year or five years to get the regulations promulgated through the agencies for everything from the Clean Water Act to education to taxes to health care to, you know, financial reform regulation. I mean, it's whether or not you're gonna even reauthorize a farm bill, *[laughs]* you know. Whether you're gonna have a new one. Are you gonna extend an old one. But that kind of uncertainty and the kind of volatile financial circumstances that we find ourselves—economic circumstances that we find ourselves in is—you just—people are paralyzed. They're pare—businesses and industries are paralyzed from that uncertainty, and that policy turmoil that's created by this uncertainty, it just paralyzes people. Whether you're, you know, whatever. I mean, whether you're tryin' to grow a small business or run a major corporation or, you know, figure out your taxes. *[Laughs]*

SL: Building a highway.

BL: Buildin' a highway. Exactly. And every year that you just extend that highway bill and you don't reauthorize those things, the price of steel goes up. The price of concrete goes up. The price of labor goes up. The price of all of those things go up. So it's just, you know, the—that, to me, is why it's so important to look for consensus because if you don't find the consensus and you don't create—if you don't build out from that consensus, the kind of—the number of people that you need to move forward, you just stay put. If there's anything people in Arkansas know is that when somethin' is stagnant, it rots, you know. Whether it's a dead [*laughs*] animal or whether it's a pond or whatever, but if it's stagnant and it's not movin' forward, if it's not—it—the—it is gonna become rotten. It's gonna deteriorate. It's gonna rot.

[*Laughs*]

[02:19:10] SL: And the things grow out of it are not gonna be pretty . . .

BL: No. [*SL laughs*] That's right. And so . . .

SL: . . . or healthy.

BL: . . . that's why to me it is so important to have that bipartisan, you know, that bipartisan approach, that effort to just work and get along and find the common ground. I mean, Senator

Boozman, who's in my seat now, when he came to the House, I called John and said, "If I—if there's anything I can do to help you acclimate yourself to the House of Representatives, let me know." He came over, and I walked him through the office and showed him—you know, I said, "This is how mine's set up. You may wanna do it different, but you may see somethin' here that you like. You know, we'll be workin' together." Reachin' out to people and—you know, that's important, and in a delegation or in the body, but just realizin' that if you're not willin' to work together, there's just gonna be this continual turmoil of policy and people and attitudes that creates a stalemate, and it's just not healthy for the country.

[02:20:26] SL: You know, I always like to go back to the dining table or to the lunch table or to the breakfast table. And I've always had this belief that when two people put their feet under the same table and they break bread and they come out of it stronger and better, it teaches them that if they'll just get back to that table, they'll have a good time, and they'll feel better about themselves and each other. And I just don't see—I don't hear of that happening in an informal setting. Either someone's—they're all too busy. They've got too many things pulling on 'em this way or that way. But they also get

demonized now for . . .

BL: Well, and that's it. I mean, you're right. It's time, you know.



It's funny because—I think it was Frank Luntz. I was visitin' with him one time, and I said somethin'—he said somethin' about the most important thing he—what did I think was the most important thing in Congress, and I said, "Time." I said, "And it's also what the American people want more than anything. They want more time. They want more time to be with their families. They want more time to be a family. More time to enjoy themselves in the outdoors. More time—you know, and what are the things that bring them more time? You know, it's a good job that pays well enough that maybe they only have to work one job instead of two; you know, a good education so they can get that good job. What are the things that bring them time, that allow them time to be able to do the things that they wanna do? You know, that's critical. [02:22:18] He—we were talkin' about what are the things that you do with your time. And course, for me, I was balancin' my time, but Steve and I made a conscious effort to try and sit down to dinner as a family with the boys. At a minimum, our goal was five nights a week, but our minimum was four. And it meant planning.

SL: It meant saying no to other things.

BL: And saying no to other things. It meant, you know, on Sunday nights I had to look in the freezer or go to the grocery [*laughs*] store and make sure there was somethin' that for four nights we'd be able to, you know, put together pretty quickly. For them it meant sometimes waitin' a little bit later for me to get home. We used to do that as children. Mother always wanted us to sit down at the table together, and so we'd have to wait till Daddy got home from the farm. And Steve grew up in a house where they ate at five-thirty, six o'clock, and so it was . . .

SL: And you all were eatin' at eight.

BL: Oh yes! [*SL laughs*] I know. [02:23:16] So you know, but those were things that were important, but we were talkin' about what are the things that give you the kind of time together. One is worshipping together. Do you worship on a regular basis together as a family, whether it's, you know, at your church or your synagogue—where—you know, do you worship together? Do you sit down and eat meals together? You know, do you read together?

SL: Read the same things.

BL: Do you—well, or do you read and discuss? Do you . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . you know, when the boys were little—oh gosh, I can

remember how I did—it was just the highlight of my day to come home and crawl up in bed, and we read a couple of series of books together. And now it—a lot of it is at the dinner table, talkin' about what they're reading in world history or European history or what they're reading in English literature or what they're read—you know, the . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . things like that.

SL: Sure.

[02:24:13] BL: But to talk about that or to read together, to just expand your minds together. And you know, it's those kinda things that, you know—they don't just happen. You know, it's like a marriage. A marriage just doesn't happen. You work at it. In a family you work at it. You—you know, and relationships in the Senate, you work at them. They don't just happen. But they take time. And when your time is consumed with havin' to raise money or to, you know, campaign or to, you know, do a lotta those kinda things, it's tough to build those friendships. And I think the American people have to determine what they want. Do they want a body that gets along and moves us forward and helps us be productive as a country? Or do they want a body that's gonna be stagnant and fighting and at odds,

you know, with one another continually because they don't know one another? And some of that has to come through the kind of money that's spent on campaigns. The other is expectations. You know, used to be for Dale and David, you know, they could spend weekends, some weekends, with their colleagues in Washington or with their families because getting home was expensive, and it was time consuming. Nowadays, you know, you can get a flight and be there in two hours, and the expectation is is that you will. You know, I had a group one time that called the office and wanted me to speak on a Wednesday night, and we were in session. And my scheduler said, "Well, do you know they're in session? There are possibility of votes in the morning, and we're not sure when the—you know, when they will get out that evening?" And you know, and they said, "Well, there's a flight at" . . .

SL: "We've got one" . . .

BL: . . . "five thirty."

SL: . . . "booked for you." Yeah.

BL: Yeah. "We know there's a flight [*SL laughs*] at five thirty, and there's time—an hour's time change. She can be here at, you know, seven somethin' and, you know, and then turn around and catch the last flight out or the first flight in the mornin' and

be there by nine and"—and then you're, like, "Yeah, and if every group had that expectation, you'd be worthless." [*Laughter*]
You'd think—that's all you would do.

SL: Yeah.

[02:26:44] BL: You know, so you—you know, creating that balance is really critical to getting the kind of public servants and statesmen that you want to make the kind of decisions that need to be made. And we've created a world—and it's not just legislators and public servants.

SL: It's . . .

BL: I mean, it's our families. It's, you know, how we get along with one another. It's our communities. You know, the—all of those things are based on how we choose to spend our time. And you know, I made choices. There's no doubt. I made choices that I was not gonna miss bein' a mother, and I wasn't gonna miss my children's upbringing. And I wasn't gonna miss, you know, the last years of my dad's life. You know, much of that was at home, and I could do it while I was still bein' a senator. One of the things I learned watchin' home health and other things, you know, as my father, you know, spent the last years of his life in our home was health care. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah.

[02:28:03] BL: You know, my children in public schools. You know, I just—I never will forget when we started the boys in preschool, we put 'em in a co-op. And we had to teach.

SL: Yeah.

BL: And . . .

SL: What a great idea.

BL: What a great idea. Well, let me tell you. My husband came home after his first day of teachin' at co-op and looked at me and said, "I'm gonna have to miss work tomorrow." [*Laughter*] He said, "I'm exhausted. I'm wiped out."

SL: Yeah, yeah.

BL: He said, "Six hours with fourteen 4-year-olds"—and he said, "And she's gonna do it again tomorrow! She's gonna get up every day this week and show up, you know, just as bright and cheery and, you know, principled and disciplined and, you know, anxious to help 'em grow." He said, "I couldn't do it but one day!" [*SL laughs*] And you know, but you learn those things, takin' the time to be a family, to be a child and a daughter of a aging parent or—you know, so to ask elected officials to miss that, I don't . . .

SL: It's kinda selfish.

[02:29:13] BL: Well, it's not selfish as much as it is—it makes them

less of the representation—the representative that you want them to be. I mean, if you want them to truly represent what it is that families go through, what communities go through, what businesses go through—it's—there's a balance there that is critical, and you know, I didn't do a lot of international travelin'. I came home to Arkansas. Brought my boys home to Arkansas. My husband came home to Arkansas. I mean, we spent, you know, our holidays here. We spent our time in the summer. You know, Reece is a counselor down at the camp in Arkadelphia, and you know, they've done things, and this has been as much a home for them as anyplace. But the home that you create in your own home, I mean, around your dinner table, I mean, those are—I don't know. It's just—it's all about the time and how you spend it. And it's critical that there's a balance, I think, for families, for legislators, for . . .

SL: Constituents.

BL: . . . constituents. Mh-hmm.

SL: You know, it is a—kind of a . . .

TM: Scott, we're five minutes out. Just lettin' you know.

SL: Oh, we are . . .

BL: Thanks.

SL: . . . five minutes away . . .

TM: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . from—at 2:20.

TM: Yes.

[02:30:36] SL: Okay. So, Blanche, what are you doing now?

BL: Well, now I'm working in a public policy arena. I'm a public policy adviser. I'm working in a bipartisan and bicameral group. Myself and Senator Bob Dole, who is wonderful at eighty-nine.

SL: Yeah.

BL: He is just [*SL laughs*] absolutely fascinating and dedicated to work. He said his dad told him that "If you can get up and get outta bed, you go to work." And still just as bipartisan as he's ever been.

SL: Boy, I hope . . .

BL: Res . . .

SL: . . . somebody's gettin' his story.

BL: Yeah. Respectful of everybody. And then Congressman Billy Tauzin and Congressman Earl Pomeroy. Earl Pomeroy was in my class in the House in [19]92. Billy, I served with in the House with Energy and Commerce. And basically workin' with different people, different groups, clients, associations, and others to kinda think through policy. How policy does affect them, how it should affect them, how can they help affect policy in a positive

way that will keep us movin' forward through our economy, through our delivery of health care, our delivery of education or transportation or energy. All of those issues. Taxes. So at—it's interesting. It's working on a lotta the issues that I love . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . and the policy issues I love, but in not quite as organized a way because they just—it just kinda comes at—you know, from different angles all the time, as opposed to, you know, bein' able to say, "This is the policy we're lookin' at." As an elected official, you've got the policy. You've got the work of a committee. You've got the work of other members, and you know how to pull it all together. From the outside lookin' in, you know, there's a lot more variables. You kinda have to look and think about what angles to take in order to be able to reach a certain goal.

[02:32:48] SL: So you don't have the—it's not really—you don't have to deal with the political pressure. You're just dealing with the way things are, and this is the way you could approach this . . .

BL: Right.

SL: . . . to solve this . . .

BL: Right.

SL: . . . without having it branded.

BL: Well, and you have to be cognizant of the time that's involved. I mean, in that respect you do have to think about politics because you've gotta think about election cycles. And you also know that nothin' happens overnight. Nothin' happens quickly in Washington.

SL: Right.

BL: So you may start an effort on a policy dir—in a policy direction, like in an election year, and then all of a sudden it gets to be November, and the landscape's changed. You've got a new majority, or you've got new members. You may have lost the member that was championing your direction, or you may gain some new members that will be very helpful to you. So you kinda have to do—you do have to weigh some of that out in terms of how you're takin' the direction of that policy. But it is more forward-thinking, really, I think, than bein' on the inside . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . which is interesting 'cause bein' on the inside, you wanna think forwardly, but there's so many other pressures puttin' on you, whether it's the political or the campaign or the, you know, the differences in the members, like, you have the leadership

and other things. But from the outside you kinda—you think through it, and you try to figure out what it is ultimately your goal's gonna be, and then you build your consensus and build your support to get to that.

[02:34:38] SL: So you like it.

BL: I do. It's interesting. I miss the campus . . .

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

BL: . . . atmosphere, and I really miss my staff. I was so blessed with some wonderful, wonderful Arkansans that worked on my staff. They were bright and enthusiastic. They loved our state—still do. I still see 'em occasionally. And they were hard workers. We worked hard; we played hard. But we were a real family and a real team, and I was very, very, very blessed and honored to have such great people to work with, and I miss that. And colleagues—I miss my colleagues. But it is good. There's a two year—I came out of the Senate with probably the newest of bans, so I had a two-year post-Senate restriction.

SL: Right.

BL: And to be honest with you, it's a real blessing.

SL: Well, sure.

BL: Well, I think a lotta people worried about it, but it's a blessing because it gives you an opportunity to think through . . .

SL: Oh yeah.

BL: . . . what you wanna do, how you wanna do it. You know, how do you wanna affect things? And I think it's given me a good opportunity. I've had a good mentor in Bob Dole to, you know, to really think through how is it that you can really not only affect policy in a positive way, but how do you affect the process? You know, how do you reach out and remind people how important that bipartisan consensus building is to the ultimate end goal of the policy that you wanna reach? So that's been good. And you just have to take your time to—after, you know, almost twenty years of public service, you need to have time to kinda get your sea legs.

SL: Yeah.

BL: It's good.

[02:36:29] SL: You know, it's hard, once you've been in the Senate, once you've gotten to that point in a career, it's hard to imagine reentering the political realm, as far as a candidate goes, 'cause the Senate is such a vaulted thing and it's such a wonderful—or it used to be such a wonderful place and I . . .

BL: Well, and it still is.

SL: And there's still some of that but . . .

BL: It's also different when you leave. I mean, it's almost like drivin'

a car and you just slammed on your brakes, you know, because I wanted to serve again. You know, I obviously ran, and it just wasn't the—wasn't in the cards. But it was just this sudden thing that you, you know, you come to an abrupt halt.

SL: Yeah.

BL: And so you have to kinda readjust and think, "Okay, well, what am I—what—how can I make a difference now? What can I do to make a" . . .

SL: Right.

BL: . . . "difference?" And there was so much that we were doin' in that last year, and I was in the midst of all of that. Our nutrition bill, the financial reg reform bill, the health care—implementation of some of the Affordable Care Act, and things like that that were, you know, were goin' on, and so you know, all the time I was runnin' a campaign, I was still doin' 100 percent of what I had to do as a senator, plus what we were doin' as—you know, in a campaign. So that—as I said, that's like puttin' the brakes on, and it's different. You know, some of my colleagues chose to leave. John Breaux, you know, had a—you know, he—and we've—I've talked to several of 'em about, you know, the transition. And they say, "Well, it's all—it's different. It's different how you come out." But basically the transition, too, it

takes everybody, you know, a year or so to make that transition.

SL: Well, there's no question that . . .

TM: We've gone over just a little bit. Just lettin' you know we're at 2:24.

SL: Okay. [02:38:20] I—there's two things left. One, as a senator you did have power. I mean, it's a powerful group . . .

BL: Yeah.

SL: . . . of people. Some would say the one hundred most powerful people on the planet. [*BL laughs*] And so all of a sudden, you don't have that, and you've got to find a way to continue with your passion. And it sounds like to me, especially under the tutelage of Senator Dole, you've found that. And it's being cultivated and protected a little bit, and you're able to continue to try to make a difference as . . .



BL: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think we all have to get up every mornin' tryin' to make a difference. And there's no, absolutely, there's no question in my mind that that's what I wanna do is wake up every mornin' and make a difference in my children's life and my husband's life, my mother's life, people of Arkansas and this country. We've all got somethin' to give. We've all got an ability to make a difference, and it happens every day in so many different ways. You know, sometimes it is fightin' for a

piece of legislation or some policy, but sometimes it's also just speakin' to people in the elevator.

SL: Yeah.

[02:39:36] BL: You know, sometimes it's just bein' thoughtful to somebody. I stopped and picked up a lady on the road on the way back from Sheridan the other day that had run outta gas. And you know, she was on her way to a job interview, and she was like, "I can't believe I've run outta gas. This is my best opportunity for a job. Jobs are hard to find right now." I said, "We'll getcha there. We'll getcha there." You know, you—there are just so many things that each of us can do . . .

SL: Day to day.

BL: . . . every day if we just stop and think about it and slow ourselves down just a little bit. Think about time, readjust our time, so that we're not in such a hurry to do this or that, but more importantly, that we're really focused on the things that we need to do for one another. And you know, everything from bein' a senator to bein' a good neighbor to bein' a good mom, those all contribute to a better world at the end of the day. And you know, we are so blessed to live in this country. That first time I ran, I came home in tears, and I said, "Daddy, people out there are so mad, and they're so angry with their government.

They hate their government." He said, "Let me tell you. You just tell 'em. You tell 'em for whatever is wrong with our government, it is still the greatest country on the face of this earth. And if they don't like it, there're people outside the—this country that will handsomely pay for their citizenship but that we've all gotta work together to make it better." Times are changin'. The world is changin', and if we don't work together, we get consumed by all of those things outside of us that are happenin'. You look at what's happening right now globally, the anger that exists. We do not need to be a part of that anger, and we see it—I don't know. You see it being created in our own country . . .

SL: Yeah.

BL: . . . anger, so. But we've got a lotta opportunities, and I feel very blessed to be an Arkansan and very blessed to have had a wonderful opportunity to serve in the Senate and in the House and to serve with so many great, great other public servants, Democrats and Republicans, all of which, you know, I think, ultimately, really do want to make the world a better place. We just all have to realize that it's not just our way that's gonna make it, that it's gonna be everybody . . .

SL: Everybody's way.

BL: . . . puttin' their color—their—using their own palette, you know,
on the landscape to make it a better world and a better country,
so.

[End of Interview 02:42:14]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]