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Interview no. 739

Ruth Kern

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Ruth Kern
INTERVIEWER: Pauline Dow
PROJECT: Women Attorneys in El Paso
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Attorney, El Paso

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

College years in Chicago, her move to Texas in 1946 and the problems encountered trying to find a job as a lawyer. She started her family law practice in 1967 and explains why she has more female clients than male. She recounts how her membership in the all-male El Paso Bar Association depended on her agreeing not to attend the annual dinner meeting where off-color skits were traditional. She tells about her political career, discrimination against women attorneys, and the founding of the Women's Bar.

Length of Interview: 45 minutes Length of Transcript 30 pages

RUTH KERN
by Pauline Dow
El Paso, Texas
November 26, 1984

PD: Okay. Let's see. I'd like to start off with just some basic information.

RK: Okay.

PD: Would you state your full name?

RK: Ruth Kern.

PD: And the date and the place of your birth?

RK: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, August 22, 1914.

PD: Okay. Your marital status?

RK: Divorced.

PD: The number and the ages of your children?

RK: 3 children. One of them is (pause) 47 and other two are 35. They're twins.

PD: They're twins. What courses did you take in order to prepare yourself for law school?

RK: I went to the University of Chicago. I did my pre-law there and just -- I didn't have any particular major at the time.

PD: So when you were in college, counselors didn't sort of -- sort of try and direct you to take courses which you didn't or were unable to -- okay. What was your family's reaction to your decision to attend law school?

Ex-Feminist of the Year nominated for

By Sonny Lopez
Staff Writer

Her numerous awards and recognitions are reflective of her commitment to women's rights and include her award in 1979 as Feminist of the Year. Now she has been nominated to the Women's Hall of Fame by the El Paso Commission for Women.

Ruth Kern, El Paso attorney, was born in Chicago in 1914. She received her bachelor's degree in pre-law from the University of Chicago and her law degree from Kent College of Law. She passed the bar exam in Illinois, stayed in Chicago for a year after graduating and then moved to El Paso in 1946.

"I moved to El Paso because of my son, but now I wouldn't live anywhere else. I'm a desert

rat," Kern said.

Kern opened a private law practice in 1967 and has been working since.

"When I was in college the only choices women made were nursing and teaching, I didn't want to do either. I was the only woman in law class; it (law) was just not a thing women did in those days. In 1946 when I came to El Paso nobody would hire me as an attorney, but I was divorced in 1967 and I went back to law. In '67 when I tried again, there had been no progress, so I went into private practice. It's been 18 years and I love it," Kern said.

Kern added that she was the only woman in town with a private law practice, but that maybe Wanda Cremer could be considered because she worked at the District Attorney's office.

"I got half the community property when I divorced and I opened an office and it just took off. The first year I didn't make any money, the second I just about broke even and after that I got into the black the third year," Kern said.

Kern has applied her professional expertise in law to creating awareness and change for those who need a strong advocate. She has been a champion of women's rights under the law for 15 years.

"I do fight for women's rights and I address issues that concern older women. Not too long ago it took five or six of us to form a Women's Bar in El Paso—we used to take judges to lunch. Now there are 50 to 60 women attorneys in town," Kern said.

Kern specializes in family law, discrimination suits, draft and



Ruth Kern

military law. She has been active in numerous community and professional associations including: the El Paso Bar Association, the National Organization of Women, the El Paso Women's Bar Association, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Older Women's League.

She has also served on the boards of the Transitional Living Center, the Family Service Agency, the El Paso Legal Services and has been a member of the El Paso Community College Board of Trustees since 1982.

"I'm a very happy woman. My children are grown up, I have beautiful grandchildren and I love my law practice.

"I don't feel my age at all and I intend to practice law until I can't make it to the office anymore," Kern said.

RK: At the time I decided to attend law school was when I finished at the university and (pause) that was in 1940, '39; I can't remember exactly. And at that time, women either were teachers or nurses and I didn't want to be either, so I decided I'd go to law school and by that time I was divorced and I had my older child, I was living with my mother and she was unhappy with my decision.

PD: And your father?

RK: He didn't have any input.

PD: Okay. Did you have a boyfriend or were any -- at the time or your friends -- how -- your friends, how did your friends react toward or did they --

RK: I don't know. I just said I was going to do it and it was okay with them.

PD: Okay. When you applied for law school, did you find any problems with the administration; did you encounter anything --

RK: None at all.

PD: Nothing at all. Okay. Was there a quota system?

RK: No.

PD: Was there scholarship money available to women?

RK: No. I went to both the pre-law and law school part-time. I worked full-time; I put myself through college and law school, so I earned my own money and paid my own way.

PD: How did other law students react to you -- the male students? Were they encouraging or discouraging?

RK: They -- I was always the only woman in any of my classes (pause) and I was accepted. Nobody seemed to think it strange that I was there. They just treated me like the rest of the students; both the faculty and the other students.

PD: So the professors included?

RK: Yes.

PD: Was there any -- could you tell the difference -- were they encouraging or just normal?

RK; Just normal.

PD: Do you feel then that men and women were graded with equal fairness?

RK: In law school?

PD: Yes.

RK: Sure.

PD: When you were called upon to recite, there was no feeling of --

RK: No, none at all. I got chewed out just like the male students and there was no difference at all. Law school back then, at any rate, was similar to the television series about law school.

PD: Paper Chase?

RK: Yeah, Paper Chase. It was exactly the same and I'd be treated exactly the same as the male students.

PD: So no roadblocks --

RK: None at all.

PD: -- then in law school?

RK: No.

PD: Did the faculty or the administration in law school counsel you maybe into any particular field of law?

RK: No. I don't think certainly -- then certainly in a night school, which is where I went to, there wasn't any counseling. Now, you just decided yourself what courses. And of course with law you have to take -- when you finish law school, you have to take the bar and when you take the bar, you have to cover all the subjects in law school, whether you've taken them or not. So, you can't really specialize that much in law school. I don't think you can today, but I don't know. I understand that there are larger offerings of courses now than

there were when I went to school, law school. We had all basic courses and now, I understand, they have extra courses in Family Law and Civil Rights and all that. We didn't have that.

PD: You just had sort of a general --

RK: We had general basic courses and that was it.

PD: Okay. Were you ever discouraged then from court room law or did you ever think about that or --

RK: I never thought about it and was neither encouraged or discouraged. There wasn't any counseling.

PD: Okay. When you graduated, what type of legal position did you apply for?

RK: Well, I worked for a labor attorney at that time (pause) and didn't last very long. I didn't stay in Chicago very long after I passed the bar in Illinois, which was in '46 and I moved to Texas. I had a couple of jobs there in Chicago with attorneys; a labor lawyer and a general practitioner, but then I came to Texas and (pause) then I ran into difficulty getting a job as an attorney.

PD: In Texas?

RK: In Texas, yes.

PD: So when you came to Texas, then, what kind of a job

did you get?

RK: Well, I had put myself through law school and college as a secretary and a legal editor I was for a while, too. So, when I came to Texas, I tried to get a job as an attorney, but, of course, I wasn't licensed in Texas; I was licensed in Illinois, but I don't think it made a bit of difference, because nobody would even talk to me about a job as an attorney. They looked at me as though I came from another planet. They never heard of a woman attorney and they weren't particularly interested in finding out about me. So, I went back to being a secretary, because I had three sons to raise and I had to earn a living. So, I became a secretary in a law firm.

PD: How many years did you stay?

RK: Well, I worked as a secretary in a law firm and then I worked for the County Judge and then I got married and stopped working. And I didn't go back to the law until I got divorced and this was 1967. Then I took the Texas bar and actually practiced law. And then even in 1967, I ran into difficulty getting a job.

PD: Still?

RK: There still were no female attorneys. There was one in El Paso at the time and she was in the District Attorney's Office and I didn't want to do prosecution. I could have had a job in the County Attorney's Office, which was also prosecution, criminal prosecution, but I didn't want to do that either. So, I worked for a private attorney for absolutely no money at all and then I quit that and went into private practice. That was the only way I could actually practice the kind of law I wanted to practice.

PD: Let's kind of go back a little bit. When you were married, did you ever think about going back to practice law or what was your husband's reaction to that?

RK: Well, you know, I got married in about -- I was married about 18 years and at that time the myth was still prevalent that if you married, that was the -- you lived happily ever after and I didn't particularly want to go on with law; I wanted to raise a family and be a housewife, which I did during that whole period. But then when I got divorced and my children grew up, then I decided I had to go back to work which I didn't mind at all because I feel that staying at home, it was harder work

than working in an office by far and so I couldn't decide whether to go back to law or to teach or what to do, so I took some courses at UTEP. I took some teaching education courses and found them pretty mickey-mouse so I decided I didn't want to do that and I took some accounting courses because I thought I might want to be a tax accountant or a tax attorney. I enjoyed that, but it didn't stay with me. So then I decided to study for the Texas bar and I did that. I took it and passed it and started practicing, and I'm delighted that I did. I've enjoyed every minute of.

PD: Great. How do your children feel? Do they support you in your career?

RK: Oh, absolutely. They have all along. They're very proud of me as a matter of fact.

PD: When you stopped working for this other attorney here and went into private practice, was it general practice?

RK: Well, when you first started out on your own, you take anything that walks in the door. That's always true, unless you have some particular -- it depends like if you've worked for the District Attorney or the County Attorney, you might go into criminal defense, because that's where your experience is. But,

generally, when you go into private practice on your own, you take whatever walks in the door and that's what I did. And you do a lot of work for relatives-- free, while you build a practice and then gradually my practice has evolved into a family law practice for the last seven, ten years, something like that. I am pretty most exclusively a family lawyer.

PD: Have you had -- if you had a chance to do it all over again, would you direct your energy towards one specific field of the law or would you do the same as you have done?

RK: Well, really --

PD: Had you had the chance.

RK: Really, you don't have much choice. Of course, if you get hired by a big firm, then you get assigned to some particular area. My younger son is now an attorney in Washington, D.C. and he is with a large firm and he is doing labor law. That's where he was assigned; in fact, he requested that. And so then you specialize, but if you're a sole practitioner, just starting out, you can't help but take what walks in the door because,-- no matter what it is, because you need to earn a living, but then now I've come to where I don't do anything but family law and anything

else that walks in the door, my partner handles. He does all the business law and all which I don't like and --

PD: But you like family law?

RK: Oh, I like family law and I'm a specialist and certified by the State Bar as a specialist. I think there are about ten of us here in town who are specialists in this particular area. And so -- yeah, I enjoy it. I wouldn't want to do anything else.

PD: So do you feel then that you're well on your way to reaching a personal goal or --

RK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I have felt I have reached a personal goal; I'm earning a good living; I'm practicing law in the field that I enjoy.

PD: There's a question that I sometimes have a hard time asking, but as a woman, I know that I sometimes feel like when I accomplish something or I achieve something, I feel like I'm doing it not only for myself, but for the sex as a whole. Do you feel that maybe you --

RK: Oh, yeah, definitely. I've been involved in the women's movement ever since its beginnings, so I'm very conscious of (pause) of the professional women

like myself and other woman attorneys as kind of helping other women achieve and opening doors for other women.

PD: So do you feel that -- that lately the last ten years or so, do you feel that you've been treated fairly as a lawyer or do you still feel some kind of discrimination?

RK: Oh, no, I've been treated fairly. When I first started practicing in '67 here in El Paso, the reaction of the other attorneys -- male attorneys was that I was pursuing a hobby and playing with the law, but they were serious and it was a career with them. You know, they treated me as though my interest in my actions in law were frivolous. But they don't any more; they haven't for a number of years, because I'm a good attorney. I work very hard and I have occasionally beat them in court and in fact more often than not. Of course, in family law, you don't win or lose; you get more or less for your client. The only thing you win or lose is custody. There are so many aspects that involve visitations in court and if you properly -- and all that, so it's a balancing of equities and I do very well for my clients. I work very hard for them and I enjoy doing it. So at first they treated me as though I weren't

serious, but they don't any more and haven't for a long time. Then at first the judges treated me differently; they treated me very courteously and never chewed me out in court, so I had an edge. But that's been gone for a long time, too. I get treated exactly like the other attorneys, male or female and I get chewed out in court just as men are chewed out and I have for a long time.

PD: So then you've been treated fairly as a lawyer and as a woman, too?

RK: Sure.

PD: Okay. Do you -- I -- I know the answer to this question (coughing). Do you consider yourself a competitive person?

RK: I am not competitive in any area except the law. In games or who makes the most money, I could care less. I don't care if I ever win or lose; I don't care how much money anybody else makes, it doesn't matter to me. What I do like to do is a good job for my clients, so in that sense, I am competitive, but that's the only way I am competitive.

PD: Not more against men as against women?

RK: No, no. I represent my clients whether they're male

or female and I try to get the most I can for them.

So, I'm competitive in that sense only.

PD: Okay. Speaking of your clients, do you get any more women clients than males?

RK: Oh, yes.

PD: So you feel that women come to you because you're a woman?

RK: Without a doubt. In fact, I -- I'm always a little surprised when a male client comes because there are so many male attorneys and so few women attorneys, that I would rather expect that they would go to a male. But I have a number of male clients and I suppose maybe 10 percent of my clients are male.

PD: But the 90 percent are female?

RK: Female, yes.

PD: That's interesting.

RK: Maybe 20 percent are male and 80 percent -- anyway, the largest percentage by far are female and I think that makes sense, because I can empathize with a female's problems more easily than I can with a male's problems and I think that's true in a male attorney; he can empathize more with a male client than with a female client. And I find when

I have a male client, I have to consciously shift gears and remember that this is a male and I must represent him and think about his needs and his priorities rather than his wife's. I'm not sure all male attorneys do that. Maybe not all female ones do either. I don't know. I always make a very conscious effort to try to step in the shoes of the male client so that I can do the best job for him. Whereas with a female client, I don't have that problem; I'm there already.

PD: Already in that position.

RK: Yeah.

PD: I see. Okay. (Pause) How about politics? I know that you said that you were very active and still are in the women's movement. Did you ever consider running for a political office?

RK: I did run, I've run three times. I ran for County Court at Law Number Two once and lost. I only got 700 votes. And then I ran for the 327th District Court and I lost that by 7,000 votes. And then just three years ago I ran for the Community College Board and I am on that Board I was elected by 8000 majority, I think. I'm quite political.

PD: Do you feel that maybe you'd run again for district judgeship?

RK: No. I sat on the Municipal bench for a while, quite important, I was a substitute Municipal judge and I decided that I didn't like it at all, so I was rather glad at that point that I hadn't won either of those races for judge because I didn't like being a judge. You're insulated; you don't talk to anybody. You just sit up there and you judge, which is the way it has to be, of course. But I enjoy talking to clients and having that interplay. You can't do that as a judge, so I would never run for judge again or accept an appointment.

PD: You would not?

RK: Definitely not.

PD: Any other political office, say, county elections?

RK: No. No, I'm not going to run for anything again. That's behind me. I'm not going to run any more. I will work for other candidates and I will encourage women to run for office and I will certainly work with them and do everything I can to get more women in public office, because I think women need to do that, but I think I've done my bit in that area. When I ran for County Court at Law Number Two, I think I was one of the first females to run and I feel

like I opened some doors for doing that, even if I lost, I think it was worth it. But I think now enough women run anyway, but not enough, really, because women in public office are still a minority; we need to have more of them. So I'll be glad to help and encourage, but I'm not going to do it again myself.

PD: I've tried to ask -- I've really--the questions here that I've really thought about and I've tried to ask as generally as I can. If there's anything else that you'd like to add just about -- let me ask one other question about income. Do you feel, maybe because I know in my research that I've done on women lawyers starting off and expecting they'd get about \$15,000 less at least than her male counterpart and so --

RK: In --in law?

PD: Right.

RK: I don't know. I don't know what other lawyers make.

PD: So you feel that you -- you were -- your income is close to that -- well, you said you don't know what other lawyers --

RK: Well, no, we don't -- of course, we don't know what other lawyers make. I know what my son makes in

Washington, but then that's an entirely different area. He makes more money than I'll ever make and he's just been out of law school a year. But that's a high wage area, whereas El Paso is not.

And my partner, who is male, and I make exactly the same amount of money and I think -- you know, the large firms -- if you're in a large firm, you might make more, because they have a different kind of clientele. They have large businesses and insurance companies and corporations and things like that, that pay their fees without fail. You know, no matter what they get paid, and they get paid at a high rate, whereas when you're in private practice like I am, in a small firm, our clientele is entirely different. We deal with middle class people generally and many of them have difficulty paying our fees and many of them don't pay us because they -- for one reason or another. So, if we could collect our accounts receivable, we'd be in great shape. But that's true of all small firms and single practitioners. We all have large accounts receivables. And we -- you know, we have individual clients, one-time shots, whereas in a large firm you'd have corporations you would service year after year after year after year. And insurance companies and

all that. Whereas we don't, so we don't make as much but, then, we have other satisfactions and I don't think money is that important anyway.

PD: Well, then just to follow up on that question, because you have had experience with other women lawyers and you know other women lawyers and I'm not that familiar with that, do you know, say, another female lawyer who is employed with a firm?

RK: Oh, yeah, there are female lawyers here in town who are with the big firms.

PD: Right. Do they make more or less money or is there any difference than maybe her male counterpart in that same firm?

RK: I would think not.

PD: No.

RK: In fact, it would be illegal if they did.

PD: Right. Maybe even -- I'm going to interview some of these women and I'm just wondering if they get some -- sort of the lesser cases or something like that. I guess I'll --

RK: Well, one of them is going to be a partner or is a partner (pause) I don't know -- I know almost all of the attorneys and when I first started practicing, I was the only one really. Then the one who was in

the District Attorney's office left shortly after that and married Guinn -- Judge -- the late Judge Guinn, who's also dead now -- had retired by the time I began, so I was alone for a while and when there were five or six of us which was in about five or six years after I started, we started a women's bar and we knew each other quite well, the five or six of us, because we stayed just us for a long time and then all of a sudden it blossomed so now we must have about seventy women attorneys in town, because the law schools now have a third to a half female enrollment. So every time a class graduates, we get more female attorneys, which is great. So it's changed completely, but I don't know what they make. I don't think they're discriminated against. The discrimination of the large firms was very evident up until five or six years ago when they had none in the three large firms in town and none of them had a single female and now they did hire -- each hired one as sort of a token, and now they have hired more so they're getting into the men's group thicker --

PD: They're definitely still the minority, definitely?

RK: Oh, yes, definitely, yes. But then women in law are a minority. You can't expect a law firm to have as many women as men, because if we have 70 -- approximately 70 women here, there are about 700 men attorneys. But you can't expect half of their attorneys to be female. There aren't that many of them around --

PD: Right.

RK: -- in the first place.

PD: Right. Going back to this women's bar, that's really interesting. Were you the founder of that?

RK. Yeah, yeah. Janet Reusch*^{*and I founded it}-- Janet is now the United States Magistrate and she's been here almost as long as I have. Oh, she went away for a while and came back and Janet and I started it and then Cathy Barnes was one of the first and, who else, can't remember, there were five or six of us. Some of them have dropped away. We used to have a table for lunch and we'd see -- we started it so that we could see each other because we were all busy and we never got to see each other. So we started the women's bar and we had lunch once a month and then in the beginning, we'd just sit around the lunch table and we invited judges to the one each month to talk

to us and just to sit with us and have lunch and talk and then gradually we grew and grew and we had to have a big room for our monthly meeting.

PD: That's great. Now what year was this? Or just approximately. That's really interesting.

RK: I suppose about '50 maybe no, it would be later than that. Probably '54.

PD: Someplace in the '50s, late '50s.

RK: Late '50s, I don't remember. I know for a long there wasn't anybody. Janet came to around the Viet Nam era. During the Viet Nam era, I did draft counseling almost exclusively, because my son, my youngest son, was a conscientious objector and he was denied that status and so I got real interested in it and I counseled him and I counseled all of his friends and gradually increased and almost my entire practice was counseling -- draft counseling at that time. And I never had a client drafted. I got real good at it and stalling was the name of the game and I got very good at that and I always could figure a way that they wouldn't have to be drafted. There was usually some way -- it was all legitimate, you know, it wasn't draft evasion; it was using the deferments

that were available in a legitimate manner. My son never did get the conscientious objector status but he fell into the holding category eventually and never got drafted. Well, we had two draft notices, but we got those postponed and delayed and that was what you get. And that was fascinating.

PD: That sounds fascinating. Not having a single one of your clients drafted.

RK: Not a single one. Then I got into getting people out of the military who were already in. People would become conscientious objectors after they were in the military so I did a lot of that, got a lot of them out. There were only two that I didn't get out of all of those. I never really believed that they were conscientious objectors. You see, in the first place, they just didn't want to go to Viet Nam, for which I couldn't blame them, but they were not conscientious objectors and I lost those and -- because I always used to ask my clients, you know, if -- if this is denied and you are not granted the status, what will you do. Well, they'd either go to jail or leave the country, if they were truly conscientious objectors, but these two -- they were friends and they went off to Viet Nam, so I knew that I was right.

They had not been conscientious objectors.

PD: Right.

RK: But I got everybody out that I attempted to get out except those two. Because they were truly -- I told them I didn't want to handle them unless they were truly conscientious objectors because it's a disservice to everybody else who might truly be one.

PD: Right.

RK: So then I did some court martials and one thing led to another. That was rather interesting too.

PD: How were you treated as a woman lawyer in military?

Because I mean that must have been--

RK: Oh, that always through them.

PD: I'll bet.

RK: I enjoyed that. I'm anti-military and I really enjoyed that. I did an appeal in the Court of Military Appeals went up to Virginia to talk to a General one time and he fluffed me off. I hadn't -- hadn't had that experience for quite a while, but I recognized it and I won the appeal in the Court of Military Appeals and I hadn't handled the original court martial; I just handled the appeal, but my guy had been sentenced. It was the marijuana possession case and he had been sentence to serve time in Leavenworth and I tried to keep them from sending him there until the

appeal but I was unsuccessful in that. By the time I won the appeal, he'd already served all this time which is absolute nonsense.

PD: Sure.

RK: But we won that appeal. I knew I would, so I tried to keep him here because the law seemed to me to be quite clear, but I don't usually do criminal stuff. At that time I was still taking interesting things that walk in. Now when they walk in, I give it to my partner because he does the criminal -- I don't. But I -- I did all of that and that was interesting. I've never liked business law or corporation law or any of that stuff, although I did teach it at UTEP when I first started -- I didn't have any money coming in from my practice, so I taught at UTEP. I taught business law so that I could have some income. But then when my practice grew and got going, I quit. Although I did enjoy teaching. I'd like to teach, but not business law. I'd like to teach women's rights or family law. I do guest lecture over there in sociology classes and in the criminal justice area.

PD: Sociology

RK: Family law. In criminal justice, I lecture on family

law, too and I tried to get a course going on women's rights, but I didn't manage to do that. I would love to teach that.

PD: Oh, that would be great.

RK: I'd really love it.

PD: The women's studies program at UTEP is expanding.

RK: Yes, maybe eventually I can get hired to do that.

Just part time I wouldn't want to give up my practice.

PD: You mentioned something about maybe some day wanting to write a book. Do you think you'll do that?

RK: My kids keep telling me I should, but I intend to keep on practicing law. I'm not going to retire.

So, I don't think I'll ever have time to write a book.

PD: Well, this is a start, because I'll transcribe it and certainly give you a copy of it. But, you know, it's something to have so we can have a written history and it will be used.

RK: Well, good. Since it's going to be historical, I'm trying to think of things that happened when I was the only female around practicing law. Of course, in Chicago, when I went to law school, I was the only female in my classes. However, there had been females before me and they had a sorority that anybody who

registered in the college -- The Chicago College of Law, this is where I -- any woman who registered was automatically asked to belong, so I did belong and would never join a sorority that was discriminatory. But this one was not. You registered, you got asked. Period. So, I joined that and we used to have lunch every Saturday so I had a support system group of other female attorneys. They were already in practice in Chicago. That was very helpful. I didn't feel so alone. But as far as classes were concerned, it was never that alone.

PD: One question: How about when you came to El Paso or in Chicago, did you attend conventions or luncheons or bar associations where only men were there and of course the women were in minority or even today when you attend, say, lawyer's conventions --

RK: I have a very funny story about that. I -- in Chicago, I -- the only bar association thing I went to was that women's group. They didn't -- I never got involved in the Chicago Bar Association; if there was one, I don't remember that. I don't think there was. The bar association in Chicago had its own building and owned a restaurant and attorneys used to eat there

in kind of like a private club and I used to eat there a lot. But it was on an individual basis. But I don't recall any meetings there, if they ever had any. But in El Paso, we have a big bar, the El Paso Bar Association and when I was the only woman around, I applied to join that and I was told that I would be accepted, but I had to agree not to go to the -- they called it (pause) it's an annual meeting at which they have skits, it was skits rather off color. So, I agreed that I wouldn't go to that, because I don't particularly like off color stuff anyway and then, so, I became a member and used to go to the meetings every month and was the only woman there, but that didn't bother me. I was used to that. Then, when I ran for office, I decided I would go to the cocktail party preceding the dinner and the skits because I needed to do a little campaigning so I went and I had made up my mind that I would just go to the cocktail party and the dinner and then I'd leave. Well, they started the skits in the middle of dinner, so I wasn't going to get up and leave so I sat and it embarrassed the other attorneys sitting around me. It didn't embarrass me, but it embarrassed them terribly. I was the

only woman there and skits were definitely off color and I -- I was amused by it only because it was like the kind of stuff that you'd hear and see and talk about in high school. It was real juvenile stuff, off color juvenile.

PD: And the lawyers put these on?

RK: And I found these men never grow up, you know? And I was amused by it but everybody was embarrassed, except me. And then the next year, several of us went and now -- now everybody goes, so I integrated the dinner, that annual dinner meeting. And I did it not intentionally, but I could have gotten out but I decided that was ridiculous, I hadn't finished my dinner, so I was just going to stay. And now the women attorneys participate in the skits and they're not -- well, they may be a little sexy occasionally, but they're not vulgar and obscene any more. We cleaned them up and they're still funny. They're still fun. They really take, you know, all the funny things that happen among the lawyers and judges and cases during the year, they capitalize on them and it can be really funny.

PD: And so the lawyers put these on, right? They get up

and participate --

RK: The lawyers do it, yeah. It's kind of like the -- the newspaper people have one every year at which they lampoone people in the community and this thing that the Bar has we lampoone each other. Funny things happen. You know, there are in jokes but sometimes they're a little off color, but they're nothing like they were before when I went to these things. So that was discrimination, but --

PD: Oh, I would say that definitely it is.

RK: They wouldn't let me join unless I agreed not to go. But now everybody goes, so -- yeah, times have changed a great deal.

PD: I hope you continue to do it and will continue --

RK: Oh, yeah. I'm 70 and I get Social Security. When you're 70, you can collect your full Social Security even though -- and you could work full time and make as much money as you want to make, so I'm now collecting Social Security and working full time. Which makes it fun, sure, because I wouldn't take it before because I was working. But now they insist that you take it. They won't let you delay it any more--you have to have it-- so I'm getting it.

So now I make -- I have all of that income as well as my own. And I suppose -- now you have to pay tax on Social Security too if you have additional income, so I'll probably be taxed on it--this is the first year that I've had it so I don't know how much tax I'll have to pay on it. But I intend to practice until I can't come to the office anymore.

PD. I remember one time I attended a women's caucus and you were being given an honor, I don't remember what it was I forget.

RK. Yeah, I've had alot of them. I was Feminist of the Year one year and I prize that award very much. And once I was Woman of the Year in Law and once Woman of the Year in Civil Rights and once the Elected Official of the Year and that's about it. I give alot of talks to women's groups any time they ask me I'll go--any group, but mostly it's women's groups that ask me and a I talk about women's rights or whatever they--I'll give instruction. I do alot of educational talks thats what I do. I try to make them interesting and humorous, but mostly I try to educate women on their rights. And family law is interesting to women because, you know it's what happens to you and so they really want to know that too. So any opportunity I have to talk to women's groups I seize. I've been doing that for years. That's part of the women's movement too, I think, to educate women.

(END OF INTERVIEW)