

Liz Abzug

Daughter of the Honorable Bella Abzug of New York

**Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript**

November 20, 2018

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

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Abstract

In this interview, Liz Abzug reflects on the life and career of her mother, the late Representative Bella Abzug of New York, from her roots in the Bronx to her campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1970s. Throughout, Abzug describes the way her mother's work as a pioneering civil rights lawyer, women's rights activist, and antiwar protester shaped her experience in Congress.

Liz Abzug provides a unique perspective on her mother's political career. She recalls distributing leaflets, making street-corner speeches, and organizing events for each of her mother's House campaigns in her New York City congressional district. She discusses her mother's inimitable personality and her prominent place in national politics during her time on Capitol Hill—and the way this affected her family's life at home in New York City. Abzug's oral history also describes her mother's many political battles in New York and in Washington and highlights groundbreaking aspects of her legislative agenda, which included bills related to financial independence for women, government transparency, and gay rights.

Biography

Liz Abzug was born in Manhattan. Her mother, the late Congresswoman Bella Abzug of New York, served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1971 to 1977. Liz Abzug grew up in Mount Vernon, New York, before the family moved back to the city, where they lived in Greenwich Village. She graduated from high school in New York City and attended Boston University and Hofstra University Law School. While in college, she worked for her mother's House campaigns as well as her unsuccessful races for a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1976, Mayor of New York City in 1977, and a potential return to the House in 1986.

Abzug worked in state government promoting economic development initiatives for New York's Urban Development Corporation. She was also the deputy commissioner of operations of New York State Division of Human Rights, a statewide rights enforcement agency. In 1991, she ran for a seat on the New York City Council. Four years later, Abzug started a public affairs and management consulting firm. She is the president of the nonprofit Bella Abzug Leadership Institute, which she founded in 2005. She teaches courses in urban studies and economic development at Barnard College, Columbia University, and lives in New York City.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov> and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, <http://history.house.gov>.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

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Interviewer Biography

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— LIZ ABZUG—

A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

MURPHY: It's November 20th, 2018, and this is Michael Murphy with Liz Abzug, daughter of former Representative Bella [Savitzky] Abzug [of New York], and a professor at Barnard College, Columbia University, and a former New York State government advocate for economic development, and deputy commissioner of operations of New York State's human rights enforcement agency. We are speaking today in her Manhattan office. Thank you for joining us for this interview that will be part of our ongoing *Women in Congress* exhibit to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the election of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress.

ABZUG: Thank you.

MURPHY: I wanted to start with your mother's life and career before she was elected to the House in 1970. Where was she born, and where did she grow up?

ABZUG: She was born in the Bronx on Hoe Avenue. She grew up in the Bronx—a real Bronx girl.

MURPHY: And what was her education background?

ABZUG: Well, she went to public high school in the Bronx—I think it was called Walton. She was raised by a single mom because her father died, actually, when she was 13 years old—suddenly, a heart attack. And she had a sister, so her mom raised the two of them. My grandmother was a very determined woman. She did everything she possibly could for Bella and her sister, Helene. And they didn't have much money, but she made sure she got the

finest of everything by working—the typical story of the single mom, even today. So she went to high school. She became the student government president at Walton in the Bronx, and she got into Hunter College [in New York City]—because at that time, it was an all-women’s school, and it was free, and she could afford it, obviously, because it was free. She didn’t have to worry about paying tuition. So she went to Hunter College and immediately became a star. They had a student government there, and [she] was already becoming very known because she was a progressive activist, politically. She appeared on the stage as the student government president with Eleanor Roosevelt—we have a picture of that—when she came to the school. And she did very well at Hunter. And then from there—should I keep going?

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: She wanted to go to law school. She wanted to apply to Harvard, but they didn’t take women then—this was in the ’40s. So she applied to Columbia, and her mother was glad. She said, “Look, what do you want to apply to Harvard for? You go to Columbia, it’ll only cost a nickel on the subway, and you’re here. I can help feed you.” But, anyway, she got in and got a scholarship to Columbia and was the editor of the law review there and in the second year of law school married my father, Martin Abzug.

MURPHY: Did she pursue a law career for any reason? What motivated her?

ABZUG: She always said, “I never knew a lawyer. I never knew anybody who was in the law—male or female—growing up. But I always had a very strong sense of justice and to make things right, and I always wanted to be a lawyer, from being a young kid. I don’t know where I got it from, but I guess my sense of justice and making things fair for everybody.” [This] was imparted to her by

her Russian immigrant parents—made her want to pursue a legal education and become a lawyer.

MURPHY: And that sense of justice from this immigrant from her immigrant grandparents, did that come from a political background? Did they have a political background?

ABZUG: Well, they were Russian immigrants. They believed that everybody should have an equal share and equal chance to succeed in America when they came here, just like they did. They were, I think, progressive leftists, but I don't think—when they got here, my grandfather was too busy working. He actually owned what was called, he called the “Live and Let Live Meat Market.” He was a butcher on 9th Avenue, and he called his butcher shop “Live and Let Live Meat Market.” So basically, I'd say they were socialists, but they came here, and they were just working and trying to get their kids into schools, just like the immigrant story that we have today.

MURPHY: What role did religion play in her upbringing and her career in politics?

ABZUG: She was raised Jewish Orthodox until she was around 14. And, in fact, so much so that when her father died—she was 13—she said the *Kaddish* for him for a year with the old men up at the *bima*, which girls at the time in the Orthodox—and today—are separated from men. They have to go upstairs or behind a curtain. But her grandfather—my mother's grandfather—was very progressive. He wanted her to be exposed to as many things as possible, so he made sure that she could say the prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*, with the old men downstairs, not behind a curtain, for a year. And she did that for her father. She said the prayer for a year, in the front of the synagogue, not behind a curtain and not upstairs, and she was 13 years old.

MURPHY: So that was a male space that she was—

ABZUG: Right, it was a male space that she broke through at a young age, and her grandfather—my great-grandfather—really supported that. He was the one who enabled that.

MURPHY: And when she went to college, she went to Hunter when it was all women.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: Did she see that as being excluded from elsewhere, or did she see it as a—

ABZUG: No, I think she saw it as a camaraderie, actually. It was free. It was a very good college as it is today. She welcomed it as a camaraderie. I don't think she felt she was discriminated against. I think people who got into Hunter—the women who went there—they were very happy they were going to college.

MURPHY: And there was a camaraderie with other women. There was an opportunity there that maybe was not elsewhere.

ABZUG: Right. She had a strong bond with the women who were her Hunter College classmates that remained throughout her life until the end. They'd go to 40th anniversary, 50th anniversary. They were very tight, the Hunter girls.

MURPHY: Did she ever mention anyone that she considered to be a role model—women or otherwise?

ABZUG: Well, Eleanor Roosevelt was one. Let me see. I mean, it's funny. And her mother because she was so hardworking and determined. I think that those were the two main ones.

MURPHY: And Roosevelt was a political figure even if she didn't hold an office.

ABZUG: Right, of course. She was the head of the UN [United Nations] Human Rights Commission. She was a senior advisor to FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt]. She ran a newspaper. And she was very outspoken about social justice issues, and my mother had a sense of fairness and fought against discrimination of all kinds. And that's what my mother did from a young age, so she related to that.

MURPHY: When she went into law school, did she determine that she was going to take up something like labor law?

ABZUG: I think she took—like you do in law school—the general coursework, and then civil rights and labor rights became of great interest. That's why when she first came out, that's what she did. It was along with her personality of fighting for justice.

MURPHY: Her career brought her into political discussions.

ABZUG: First when she graduated law school, she was a labor and civil rights lawyer. She represented a very famous case called the Willie McGee case.¹ She was 27 years old. One of the first big [postwar] Jim Crow cases where a Black man in Laurel, Mississippi, was accused of raping a married white woman whom he was having a consensual affair with. This became a cause célèbre for the legal civil rights movement across the country.

She was the appellate lawyer for four years on this case, from 1946 to 1950. She would come back and forth from New York to Laurel. She had threats on her life. She wouldn't get a hotel room. One night she had to sit up in a bus station all night. No one would give her a hotel room, because they knew

she was defending this man. And she argued the case. She stayed up in a bathroom stall at a bus station then went into court and argued the case. She stayed on the case for four years. It went up to the United States Supreme Court. It was remanded on a technicality, and he was electrocuted. But the trial at the lower level lasted about 10 minutes, and there was no evidence. No evidence of the rape, no rape kit—there was no such thing. So the progressive left movement organized around this case because it was one of the first big Jim Crow cases. And my mother was 27 years old. Also, at the time, she was married, and one of the times she went down there, she was eight months pregnant, and she had a miscarriage of the baby during that period.

So that is—talk about revolutionizing yourself in terms of civil human rights. That was an early experience that I think informed the rest of her life in terms of fighting against discrimination. Against all people, not just African Americans. It was really a tragedy, and they electrocuted him in a portable electric chair with a generator, and it was actually broadcast on radio.

MURPHY: That case—

ABZUG: She and her co-counsel, John Coe, wrote a petition for exoneration to President [Harry S.] Truman, which he denied.

MURPHY: And she was working that along with representing unions here in the city and building a legal career, trying to stay here in the city.

ABZUG: Yes, right. Labor lawyer.

MURPHY: So that work brought her into political issues. What about some of the other activism that she undertook before she got into politics?

ABZUG:

Well, she was always into fighting for school integration, and we lived in Mount Vernon, New York, which is one of the first integrated suburbs of New York City. And she and my father were very involved in school integration right after *Brown v. Board of Education* [1954] in the public schools. They wanted to make sure that Black and white children—particularly Black and white at that time—were in schools together. I went to a school that was not only integrated, but I think was majority Black students. And my parents were very adamant that we would be in an integrated environment for education. And we were. So that was in the '50s. After the Willie McGee [case], that was how she started to do political organizing.

Then in the '60s, there was the civil rights movement and the antinuclear movement against testing the bomb—the atom bomb. And my mother got very involved in that movement and the organization—Women Strike for Peace—that fought against nuclear testing that was happening in this country at that time. So much so that it was a national organization. She was spending a lot of time on it, organizing it. We used to have those air raids in schools when you were a kid in the '50s, '60s. They used to tell you, “Duck and cover under desks.” She told me and my sister, “Don't even bother. That's ridiculous.” We were drinking powdered milk because [in] regular milk at the time, in theory, was strontium-90. When the bombs were being tested, the strontium-90 that were kicked off of it went into the grass, and the cows were eating the grass, and so the milk was contaminated. And the women involved in Women Strike for Peace, which became a very strong organization, were fighting the government, were fighting for a nuclear test ban. And they were also personalizing it. They were afraid. They had us have powdered milk, no duck and cover in the schools, don't participate in air

raids—it's not going to help you. So that was her next level of political involvement.

MURPHY: Did that shape her view of conflicts like the Vietnam War in the late '60s?

ABZUG: Yes, I think that organizing in the Women Strike for Peace not only shaped her view, but it was an activist's way in which to begin to—and strategically understand how to—organize against the war in the '60s and to be an antiwar activist because she was already an antinuclear-testing activist after this. And because she had this space of Women Strike for Peace, she could organize women not only here but all over the country. Sort of a natural evolution of Women Strike was the antiwar movement against the war in Vietnam.

MURPHY: And Women Strike for Peace was a national organization.

ABZUG: Yes, it was.

MURPHY: It wasn't just here in the city. So this is a long history of activism in her professional and personal life—

ABZUG: Yes, people would say, "When did you know you were a feminist?" They always asked her that because then came the feminist movement. And she said, "From the day I was born." She was a political activist even as a kid. On the subways, she collected pennies for Israel when she was 13. She used to walk on the subways—you know, before it was Israel, as it was becoming a country, a nation-state—she was collecting in a box pennies for Israel. And she was a young woman—a girl. Not a young woman—she was 13 years old, 14 years old.

MURPHY: It seems like the city really shaped her outlook in many ways, living here and growing up here.

ABZUG: Yes, being Jewish, the city, the diversity of it. She worked—she was a little older—in her father’s butcher shop, collecting money. That was on 39th [Street] and 9th [Avenue], his butcher shop in Manhattan, so she got to experience a lot of Manhattan and other people from all over who came there. Her parents were really into music and into politics and—not straight politics, but in terms of the morals and ethics of progressive politics. And I think that she picked that up. She then took it and used it as an organizer.

MURPHY: That activism was directed in so many different directions, but she determined at some point that she wanted to run for public office.

ABZUG: First, before that—because of Women Strike for Peace and working against the war in Vietnam, she had the base, meaning the political base of Women Strike for Peace that were working—they were all organizers. They were activists—many of them suburban women who were married and had money. She decided after a lot of years of working for other candidates—men—that why was she was just doing that? She should do it herself. So in 1970, she decided to run for Congress. Straight out of the box.

MURPHY: Yes, that’s an interesting decision because there were plenty of local offices in the city, right?

ABZUG: She said, “I’m going to run for Congress. That’s the office that I want.”

MURPHY: And we’ll pick that story up in a little while. I wanted to transition briefly to your story, in terms of growing up with your mother in this career and how

that affected your family. So where were you born, and what was your mother doing at the time?

ABZUG:

Well, I was born here in Manhattan, but we moved when I was a baby to Mount Vernon, New York, as I said before. My grandfather had a house, and he thought they should try living in the suburbs. My parents were okay with it because it was a short commute—like 40 minutes to the city on the train. And they both worked in the city. So we lived in Mount Vernon, New York, for my first 13 years of life. That's where school integration—I went to the local public school, which was predominantly Black. Growing up, I was friends with Ossie Davis' and Ruby Dee's—the actors—son, and Sidney Poitier's daughter, Beverly. My father owned a women's blouse factory with his father at that time. He actually hired Sidney Poitier—before he was a known actor—into his business.

The blouse factory—A Betta Blouse—was what my father was working on, and being a novelist at night. My mother was practicing law—labor and civil rights law—so they just commuted in and out to the city. We had a woman who helped raise me, and for 23 years ended up living with us, named Alice, who had a very big part of our family's life. She wasn't just a nanny in the traditional sense—she was kind of like a member of our family in the sense that she cooked amazing food, meals, cleaned the house, but she ate with us, too. It was not like a service relationship. It was a relationship of family. She really used to say, "I all but had you," which is true. She really had a big impact on my life and on my sister's life and on my parents.

My father was an early feminist in the sense that this was a working, middle-class neighborhood, and not—most people didn't have mothers who worked outside the house. We were one of the few that had a mother who was not

only working out of the house, but she was a lawyer, which was unusual. Two percent [of all] lawyers were women at that time. My father was not averse—he was always going food shopping and doing laundry. He had no problem with that because he was a very self-confident man, and they had a very good, I think, soulful and strong marriage. All of that was discussed before they got married. So I think he didn't have any problem with doing those things, and my mother's mother was involved, obviously, in seeing us, and she was a great cook. My mother and father were not cooks. So this was great to have Alice and my grandmother—my mother's mom, Esther—doing a lot of the cooking and baking.

So Alice enabled them to live a life where all of us—but to them, for the commute in the city, my mother would go to meetings if she had to that were antiwar, peace movement meetings, and then to come home because she knew that we were being taken care of. She trusted Alice 100 percent.

MURPHY: What was your father's interest in politics?

ABZUG: Well, he was interested conceptually, but he wasn't so active as an activist. He was very strong politically progressive, but his interests were more in the arts. He was a novelist at the time they got married, and he wrote two novels: one was called *Spearhead* [1946], and the other was called *Seventh Avenue Story* [1947] about the fashion district. *Spearhead* was about the Battle of the Bulge. And he was already known before my mother was known, because these were published in the '40s, and *Spearhead* was an award-winning book. So that was his interest. Writing, reading, writing novels, and, later on, writing plays, which didn't go anywhere, but he did it when he was much older in life.

So he supported everything my mother did. He supported the causes 100 percent. He would go to some marches, certainly, during the protests against the war in Vietnam. We all went as a family. But he wasn't as directly—and he was very involved in this integration fight in Mount Vernon. But other than that, he would support her in all these causes.

MURPHY: So did your mother and father make these protests family affairs?

ABZUG: Yes, I went a lot with my parents to antiwar marches in Washington—the Vietnam War. But I also was an activist myself. I went to Music and Art High School, which today is called [Fiorello H.] LaGuardia [High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts], and I was one of the heads of city-wide High School Students Against the War in Vietnam—I was a co-head of the city-wide coalition. We would protest at Columbia during the '60s—'68 we were there. We would protest together in any antiwar march that was here, and I would go with my parents to Washington, particularly when they were tear [gas]-bombing us—the antiwar protesters at the Pentagon. In that time period, I was there with my parents protesting the war—and this was prior to my mother being elected to Congress.

MURPHY: At that point, had you moved back into the city?

ABZUG: Yes, we moved back to the city when I was 13 years old. We lived in Chelsea on [West] 16th Street in Manhattan, and then we lived in the Village, where they lived the rest of their lives and died.

MURPHY: Why was that decision made to move back into the city?

ABZUG: To move back into the city? Because my parents were tired of commuting, and they really were New York City people. Before they moved to Mount Vernon, they lived on the Upper West Side.

MURPHY: Okay, because a lot of people were moving out at that point.

ABZUG: Right, well, they moved out, but they moved back.

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: Yes, they didn't—they really wanted to be in the diversity and the culture and in the intellectual milieu—and the activist sense of—and the artistry and the theater and the movies of New York City.

MURPHY: Right. So she was here before she was going to run for office.

ABZUG: Oh yes, on the Upper West Side. My father grew up on Mosholu Parkway in the Bronx, so he came from a family with a little more money. They met, actually, in Florida. Both of them were on vacation. He picked her up on a bus coming from a concert and recited Shakespearean poetry to her—and this is no joke—and she thought he was nuts. And he pursued her and pursued her. She was on vacation from law school; he was on vacation from his job.

MURPHY: Did he go to college?

ABZUG: He went to CUNY [The City University of New York] and dropped out to go into the war, World War II. He was, like, five credits short. Never finished. Crazy.

MURPHY: I'm sure there's a lot of stories like that.

ABZUG: Yes.

MURPHY: So you're already living in the city and going to high school here. You were an activist. But then your mother decides to run for office. Did you get involved in that?

ABZUG: Yes. I was involved in every one of her campaigns, and there were about 10 of them. She won the primary—the first primary—the first win for Congress. It was a couple of days before I was graduating from high school. And at my graduation from high school, the *New York Times* sent a crew to film her and write about her. From that point on, I knew my life was never going to be the same because all the attention was on her. And you're a kid, you're in high school, you're graduating—you want a little bit of your own little acknowledgment. But it was big fanfare already. And she got quick recognition because of the dynamic person she was—how she dressed, how she spoke, and so outspoken—a larger-than-life character right from the beginning. And yes, I was involved in every one of her campaigns. I like to tell people, seven years of college and law school, she was either in office or running for office or running for a new office during those seven years. And I was involved in every one of those campaigns—for mayor, for Senate, for re-election for Congress. And I say mayor, I mean, New York—the first woman to run for New York City mayor, first woman to run for United States Senate in New York, and then re-election for Congress. Seven years, every year she was running for something. It was actually more than seven years, but I'm just referencing it against my college and law school.

MURPHY: What is it like to campaign for a family member?

ABZUG: Well, I was close to my mom. My sister—we were all a pretty close family. My father would campaign for her very intensely, too. It was great on one hand and hard on the other because she worked, like, 18-hour days, and she was very driven when she campaigned in the streets. Pressing the flesh, giving everybody a button, a shopping bag, because at the time that was how you got your publicity out. And it was very, very intense. How much can you cover? How many neighborhoods can you be in? How many people can you talk to within this grass-roots campaigning? And she wore us all out. Actually, one time on the Upper West Side, in a particularly bitter race, somebody was trying to—I'll never forget it. In a supermarket, I was trying to advance my mother—you know, advance her and to meet people, meet people, meet people—and this one woman didn't like that we were in there. And I guess she didn't like my mother, and so she spit in my face. I was very upset about it.

MURPHY: That's the perils of campaigning in New York City.

ABZUG: Right. Did you ever interview Gerry [Geraldine Anne] Ferraro's daughter, Donna Zaccaro?

MURPHY: No, not yet.

ABZUG: There's a picture of us all there [points to table], I can show you. But her experience—

MURPHY: Was somewhat similar?

ABZUG: Different, because her mother ran later, and she wasn't the dynamic—excuse me, she was. Gerry Ferraro was very dynamic, but she wasn't the street

campaigner that my mother was, and it was earlier. My mother got into office, like, 10, 15 years earlier than Ferraro.

MURPHY: So that kind of campaigning—can you outline your role in that?

ABZUG: Yes, I would often—well, a couple of things. Advancing means you would advance the candidate, so you would go into any place, and you would walk the street ahead of her, walk into a store ahead of her, give out buttons, say, “Come meet the candidate for Congress.” “Come meet Bella.” So I did that a lot. And then her mayoral race—which was in 1977—I was in law school, second year, and I was her scheduler in the summer. For three months I scheduled her, like, within 15-minute increments, practically. A schedule that ran so many events up and through and the night until about 10:00, seven days a week, 11:00. And I was actually a scheduler, and I actually learned how to do that mechanism—really the nuts and bolts of a campaign. Then I spoke for her—as a surrogate speaker—a lot, during all her campaigns because we always had surrogate speakers. I did that a lot.

MURPHY: Where would you go?

ABZUG: I would go to a rally—one of my first big speeches, which, many years later, making public speeches is natural to me. But the first major one I made for her campaign was the Legal Aid [Society] was having a strike for lawyers. Legal Aid was striking, and they were in City Hall Park. And my mother—I think I was first- or second-year law school—my mother said, “You’ve got to go speak. I have to do something else.” And so I did speak for her there. I was very, very nervous. I had to go on top of a sound truck and walk up a ladder on the side of a sound truck and go up there. Then when I saw the crowd—I mean, these were lawyers. I was starting to be a lawyer. I was a nothing, you

know? And yet, I had to come up and fight—represent my mother, but also deal with the issues. And it was a way of getting thrown into cold water quickly.

MURPHY: But campaigning for your mother—essentially your mother was your boss in that sense.

ABZUG: Yes, she was—you know, I was just like everybody else. Get out there, and do the work, you know? Of course, sometimes she would tip her motherly self, but mostly it was incredibly demanding on me and my father or my sister. And it was, “Do whatever you can do, and then some more,” because she would be herself so committed to the intensity of these street campaigns, particularly getting and reaching every voter. Don’t forget we didn’t have new media then. We didn’t have the Internet. Everything was either through person-to-person contact or television or radio. So really campaigning in the streets, even with megaphones all over—up and down Manhattan with Barbra Streisand. She had a lot of stars that helped her out because they saw her as so dynamic. That was the way you reached the voters.

MURPHY: Did you plan those events?

ABZUG: I helped plan those events. She had, of course, big staffs for both the Congress [races]—she had a fundraising committee for the Senate. For this mayoral [race], she had people dealing with the celebs [celebrities], who do special events and fundraising events. I was a part of that, too. I was a part of it all.

MURPHY: And these House campaigns, that model is you need to reach those people on those certain streets.

ABZUG: Yes, and each neighborhood.

MURPHY: Work on the map. Did she emphasize reaching block by block?

ABZUG: Yes, and door by door. Those days, when people ran for office, you would not only go block by block, but you'd go into apartment houses in her district—the first district incorporated the Lower East Side, and they had public housing on the Lower East Side. All the campaign workers used to go knocking on doors and giving leaflets to them door to door. And we've done that later in life— I did that in a few presidential races for [President Barack Obama and for John [Forbes] Kerry out in Ohio and Pennsylvania. But at that time, you had to rely on that kind of campaigning. Neighborhood by neighborhood, door by door, street by street, and do street rallies using a sound truck, going up and down the district to talk about the candidate.

MURPHY: And for a street rally, would you find a park or a corner?

ABZUG: We've done it at 42nd Street. We did them at 34th Street. You did them in Washington Square Park. And they weren't so uptight then about licenses. {laughter} But we did it with a truck and a megaphone, on top of a truck, with entertainers, getting people's attention. Right on [West] 72nd Street—we did a lot of rallies on 72nd Street.

MURPHY: Right in that plaza.

ABZUG: Yes, that was in the middle of the district.

MURPHY: You referred to her first district—the 19th District—many of the articles that describe this district talk about the diversity—

ABZUG: Yes, it was extremely diverse. It was Lower East Side, the Village—West Village, Central Village, Chelsea—Hell’s Kitchen, which is in the [West] 50s—and then up to the Upper West Side, and then up through Harlem, to the border of Riverdale [in the Bronx]. So incredibly diverse demographics. Poor people, more well-to-do people—Black, Latino, Jewish primarily at that time on the Lower East Side; and middle-class, upper-class people in the Village and in the Upper West Side. And people who spoke many different languages, so she had to appeal to—a big part of the district was Lower East Side. There were many Jewish people living there and Puerto Ricans at the time, so she really had to know the languages.

MURPHY: And how did that work? Did she have a background in that?

ABZUG: She knew how to speak Hebrew and Yiddish. And Spanish—she had taken some Spanish. When we were younger, as a family, we took Spanish lessons, so she had some sense of Spanish as well.

MURPHY: And did she campaign using those languages door to door?

ABZUG: Oh yes. Absolutely. And on radio—she did an ad on radio, in Yiddish actually. And she did use Spanish sometimes in the campaigning on the streets.

MURPHY: Those door-to-door campaigns, you were handing out flyers?

ABZUG: Flyers and leaflets.

MURPHY: Who produced those?

ABZUG: Oh, you pay for—the campaign produced the narrative. The press guy. I was involved, and a lot of people—campaign manager and the press secretary. It

was graphically done, and then it was produced by printers. And those were what you relied on—radio and those brochures—the most.

MURPHY: And at the first—

ABZUG: And ads for radio.

MURPHY: And in that first campaign, she doesn't have a local political base.

ABZUG: Right. She ran without—at the time, particularly in the '70s and '80s—and historically before that, we had Tammany Hall. People ran for office when you were part of a political club—very active in a political club. She did not come out of the political club world, whereby—for instance, the Village Independent Democrats, which is the club she related to because we lived in Chelsea and the Village, she was not a candidate of the club. She was an independent candidate. But what I mean is, she wasn't in the Democratic Party structure, where they were all behind her automatically. So she had to earn the trust of the Democratic leadership, Democratic activists, and voters, without having the benefit of a club that she had been involved in for a long time that would propel her.

MURPHY: And what about a campaign staff? This is a period when they were becoming more professional—there were communications managers. Did she hire people?

ABZUG: Yes, she hired people. She had to raise money—a lot of money—to hire a fundraiser, press guy, pollster, people to go in the streets, organizers, deputy campaign manager, campaign manager—all are hired, paid positions. Scheduler—except for me, you know? {laughter} All paid positions. And

you've got to raise money to pay for it just like we do today, except back then it was a lot easier and a lot cheaper to run for office.

MURPHY: You weren't paid for your work?

ABZUG: No, I was not.

MURPHY: So how did she develop her campaign aesthetic and her slogans?

ABZUG: She was really bright, really smart, and really charismatic, and had a great sense of humor. And was really prescient—ahead of her time in many ways politically and socially, in terms of civil and human rights issues. I think that she just came up with—and she hired people around her who were creative as well. They would stay with her throughout every campaign, by the way, from the first congressional campaign to the last congressional campaign—spanning the course of 15 years. She came up with these slogans because I think she tried hard to make something creative so that they would be unique, and they would hear her.

MURPHY: One of the most well-known slogans is the—

ABZUG: “This woman’s place is in the House”—which is the name of our documentary, by the way: *This Woman’s Place is in the House*. That’s the name of the documentary. The slogan which is on our campaign posters is, “This woman’s place is in the House—the House of Representatives.” Of course, then that slogan was used—and is used today—“A woman’s place is in the White House.” “A woman’s place is in the UN Ambassadorship.” “Secretary of State.” That was her slogan.

MURPHY: Did she come up with that?

ABZUG: Yes, she did.

MURPHY: And the other side of her image was her appearance, her hats.

ABZUG: She was always a very colorful dresser. She liked dressing in good clothes. Her mother was always buying her and her sister—even though she didn't have much money, she found a way to get them really nice clothes. And my mother had a sense of style.

How she started wearing the hat is an interesting story. When she was first practicing law in the '40s, women at that time, like Eleanor Roosevelt and other prestigious women, wore gloves and hats to show that they were distinguished. And my mother went to represent a client and went to a law firm once, to represent this client, and she said, "Hello, I'm Bella Savitzky Abzug from Kramer and So-and-So," and the receptionist said, "Okay. Sit down there and wait." So she waited and waited, and 20 minutes later, she got back up to the receptionist and said, "Hello, I told you my name is Bella, and I'm here from the law firm of . . ." And the receptionist said, "We're waiting for the lawyer." And my mother said, "But I am the lawyer." There were so few women lawyers at that time that the receptionist had no idea my mother was a lawyer. So she said, "I am a lawyer, and would you please bring me into the place where I have to meet with the client and the opposing side?" My mother said that after that, she started to wear hats, because she—first of all, she liked them—they looked good on her—and second they showed some distinctive character. I used to say to her, "It's what's under the hat that counts." And she would say, "Well, I kept wearing the hats, but I took off the gloves."

MURPHY: I saw a campaign button, it was a silhouette of her—

ABZUG: The hat. Yes, she was the first political candidate where they used an image of her profile, and only that, as her campaign button. Nothing on it. She also was the first candidate that I remember in modern history where they referred to her as Bella. You know how today we talked about Hillary or people—first name—particularly women? She was referred to as Bella, Bella, Bella.

MURPHY: Did she like that approach?

ABZUG: She liked that.

MURPHY: Did she seize that as a—

ABZUG: You see that picture over there of her putting her hand up to a truck driver [points to framed photo]?

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: Well, so many times, you would see people in the streets—cabbies, cab drivers, truck drivers, all sorts of people. “Hey Bella. Hey Bella. What a way to go. Go Bella.” You would see them yelling out at her and she loved that. She loved that interaction with people, with regular New Yorkers.

MURPHY: Did you find that working people were receptive to her message?

ABZUG: Very much so, because she was quintessential New York and grew up as a working-class, working girl who’d come from a poor family after her father died. And she understood all that you had to go through to survive in this city and to make a life as a working person and how it wasn’t easy. So I think people in the district, particularly big parts of the district, related to that—her first district.

MURPHY: How did women in the district respond to her campaign?

ABZUG: Well, at that time, there were very few women. When she was elected to the House in 1970, there were 11 women who were elected. Period. And no women in the United States Senate [from 1973 to 1977]. So it was very unique. And to see such a woman who could get angry, who could be out there, who could be vivacious, who would dance, who would play instruments—you see up there [points to framed photo]? There's an instrument she's playing on one of her campaigns, the banjo or mandolin? She would do it all, in that respect. I think people related to her because she was really a dynamic and fun-loving and smart person. And she was always ahead of the curve.

MURPHY: I think some women candidates in the early '70s even . . . you had Bella Abzug winning an election in 1970, and Phyllis Schlafly—

ABZUG: Right. Well—

MURPHY: In this district, it was—

ABZUG: But she wasn't elected—she wasn't an elected Congressperson. She was a leader of the anti-abortion movement.

MURPHY: Right.

ABZUG: She got a lot of coverage because my mother—there was a thing called the 1977 [National Women's] Conference in Houston, which was the first national women's conference with elected delegates from every state. My mother got a \$5 million appropriation when she was in Congress to run this national three-day conference of women from every state and territory in the country to talk about an agenda, a platform of action, of all women's issues.

So you had 20,000 women and observers come to Houston. And it was at that time when the progressive agenda—every issue related to women was being discussed and voted upon at this convention called Houston 1977.

Phyllis Schlafly was on the other side of town, fighting against the women, the NOW [National Organization for Women], all the women representatives that came from all over the country who were fighting for a feminist agenda. She was on the other side of town, holding a pro-life conference and fighting and saying some pretty bigoted things against all the women who were at the national conference. Schlafly was never elected to office, but there were other elected officials—women and Republican and Democrats—her colleagues. And by the way, at that time Republican women were pretty moderate, so they all got along.

MURPHY:

I was using [Schlafly] as an example in the sense of that reaction to the women's movement that she represented. Here in the city, did [Abzug] have to deal with that before she got to DC?

ABZUG:

Oh yes, well, the feminist movement—the second wave—started in late '69 and the early '70s. Of course there were many women who felt that the women who were in the feminist movement were too harsh, too aggressive—you know, either you were a lesbian, or you were hating men—and women and men both felt that way. The feminists and the second wavers had to overcome that, as did my mother. People would say sometimes, “I didn't even know she was married. I didn't even know she had children,” about my mother. But those were the early days when feminist women had to deal with all that reaction. And certainly my mother, as being as out there as she was, was an object of a lot of ridicule. And a lot of challenge on those levels—like, “You're too aggressive.” I mean, everything that Hillary [Rodham] Clinton

went through [in] her career from Senate to running for president, my mother—that was happening 40 years ago. “You’re too aggressive. You’re brash. You’re harsh. Look at the way you’re dressed.” Every one of those arguments started back then.

MURPHY: And especially in her first two races for the House, she was running against men who were—

ABZUG: Incumbent.

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: The first race was she beat a 13-year incumbent [Leonard Farbstein].

MURPHY: In the Democratic primary.

ABZUG: Right, exactly.

MURPHY: Which was very difficult to do.

ABZUG: It was. And she beat him.

MURPHY: And then in the second race, after redistricting, she was running against another incumbent.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: William Fitts Ryan. That dynamic is difficult to negotiate.

ABZUG: Yes, very difficult. Once she got elected the first time to Congress, soon after the redistricting was going on, they cut her district that she was representing into three parts and took away, basically, her district. Put one part to another congressional district [and] the other three parts went one each to other

preexisting congressional districts [for the 1972 election]. So if she wanted to continue in Congress, she was forced to have to run against one of these Congresspeople in those districts. The biggest chunk of her district that she represented was the Upper West Side and the Lower East Side. Fitts Ryan represented pretty much the lot of her district, so that's why she ran against him. And he was an incumbent who was appreciated and respected for also being progressive, Democrat. So it was a very nasty race. Also he ended up having cancer, and they weren't honest about it, and she didn't care. She was running to get back into the House, but many people blamed her for running against this man who was ill. He chose to run and not admit that he had cancer, so she lost the primary, but then got back in later. He died after the primary, and his wife—and there were other candidates—but that's how that race happened. It was pretty brutal. She had decided to run because she wanted to continue her leadership, but they left her with no district, so she had to pick someplace in which to run.

MURPHY: Yes. That 20th District that she ran in that year really was focused on the Upper West Side from what she had before—

ABZUG: Correct. It was really Upper West Side.

MURPHY: And she had parts of the Bronx as well.

ABZUG: That's right. Riverdale and the Bronx. Correct.

MURPHY: Was it a different type of campaign because you weren't down in the Village?

ABZUG: Yes, it was different and, in some ways, the same. It's still reaching people. There were more maybe celebs involved in terms of having Barbra Streisand involved and Louise Lasser and some of the, at the time, well-known actors—

Harry Belafonte—in the West Side. Then Riverdale and some of the Bronx—that area, Riverdale, is almost suburban in a sense. It's not—it's part of the city, but you had to reach people who lived in private houses and in apartments on the Upper West Side, and then you had to reach [residents of] NYCHA [New York City Housing Authority]—the district went through Harlem on the west, so you had to reach all the people who lived in public housing as well. So it was an integrated district, but it was a different kind of district. It wasn't as ethnically diverse as the Lower East Side, but the challenges were the same. How to reach the voters? At that time, we used posters. You'd go up lamp posts and put up posters all over the city. You'd slap them on everything and anything that you could find. You know, picture posters of the candidates. In the middle of the night, you would put them all up, and then the opposing side would come down in the middle of the night and take them down and put theirs up. Plastering them on buildings, on light posts, on everything.

MURPHY: Did you get a lot of local volunteers for these campaigns?

ABZUG: A lot of volunteers. That was a very big part of the ability to run for my mother and everybody is to get grassroots volunteers. But, at that time, all of her campaigns had a lot of local volunteers.

MURPHY: Did women—

ABZUG: Some of them were paid. Many of them were not paid.

MURPHY: Did you get women volunteers?

ABZUG: Tons of women volunteers. Because the Women Strike for Peace organization and all the organizing they did around that brought in a lot of

women to work. That was a base for my mother, and, plus, she was fighting for women's rights, and so you got a lot of younger women—and young men, some at the time were pretty advanced—who really came out. And because she was such an antiwar activist—and that was such a youth movement—you had a lot of young people working for my mom and admiring her. That's why they did it.

MURPHY: I read something about women who had families who were even volunteering to help out.

ABZUG: Oh yes, a lot of my mother's friends, who became later her close friends, were suburban women who had kids and were married and were teachers. They came in, and they were so impressed by how she was and that she could be angry and she could be soft and that she could be so vocal, that they really admired her. It opened up—sort of went contemporaneous to the feminist movement where suburban women were starting to see that they could have a voice—who were her volunteers. And they remained her friends to the end of my mother's life.

MURPHY: Did she help women take care of their children while they were campaigning?

ABZUG: Well, in the first campaign, which was in the old *Village Voice* headquarters that was in the Village on 7th Avenue and Sheridan Square, my mother actually had a daycare center in the headquarters. People who had kids—women who had kids or babies could leave their kids right there in the same headquarters in the daycare center while they were doing campaign work, which was very advanced.

MURPHY: I wonder if you'd find that today.

ABZUG: No, you don't find it. {laughter} You don't.

MURPHY: So when she moved on to the House—she was elected to the House three times. These campaigns were difficult, but then she faced a number of different challenges when she arrived in Washington, DC.

ABZUG: Right, oh yes. Who is this person with this big hat? This boisterous, loud, colorful woman. The challenges were from the get-go. The Doorkeeper of the House—they always have a Doorkeeper—he was a southerner, [William] “Fishbait” Miller was his name. He would tell her when she came to the chamber to take off her hat before she came in. And she would say, “I’m not taking off my hat.” He would say, “You have to. That’s protocol.” She said, “I’ll take off my hat when I’m ready to take off my hat.” So she would walk in and have a seat and then finally take off her hat.

There were a lot of issues. The pools in the gym [were not open to women]. There were not enough ladies’ restrooms, barely, near the chamber. The early women who were elected then had to fight for all that. We always say my mother integrated the congressional pool because a lot of men would swim naked, and she would come in there and say, “I want to swim.” And they said, “You can’t come in here. We’re swimming naked.” She said, “Well, then you’re going to swim naked. I’m coming in to go swimming.” Because she was a big swimmer for exercise. And then the fact that she was this person from New York City who wasn’t afraid to speak up and out and loud. Really the thing that they couldn’t beat her on was that she was a terrific—she knew the procedures and she knew the legislative process. It was one thing to attack someone on personality or on characteristics, it was another thing—they couldn’t get away with it because she was very well versed on legislative

tactics and the procedural tactics of the House and the law. So that no matter what, she would always be well prepared.

END OF PART ONE — BEGINNING OF PART TWO

MURPHY: We were talking about your mother's time in office when she arrived in the House. You said she was prepared with parliamentary procedure?

ABZUG: Correct.

MURPHY: So her work experience really prepared her for that, but were there things that she encountered there that she didn't expect in—

ABZUG: Well, yes, there were always things in Congress—

MURPHY: Yes, but in terms of—I'm thinking more she might have found unexpected relationships with other Members.

ABZUG: Oh yes. For instance, [Thomas Philip] "Tip" O'Neill [Jr.], the House Speaker, and Carl [Bert] Albert, who was also in there. But Tip O'Neill really respected her a lot, even though he was from rough-and-tumble Irish Boston—South Boston. So that was a really good thing. He wanted to make her [assistant] whip, which I can show you a picture here of her holding a whip that he gave her to make her the whip at the time. And then, of course, getting used to having Members from the South who were—but she had already been dealing with the South in the Willie McGee case and southerners. She knew how to handle them. But dealing with Members from the South who were extremely amused, threatened, and, I would say, intrigued by her. And then dealing with some of the minutiae of the discrimination against women—like I just told you before in the pool and the restrooms—and that the men were so dominant because they

outnumbered the women, like, five to one. She had to get used to that and try to work her way through it, as did the other Members at that time.

MURPHY: Reading some of the newspaper accounts of your mother's career, I was struck by the consistent references to the sound and volume of her voice. These articles talked about her "hoarse Bronx accent," and that these things stood out to people—they described her as having a "loud voice," and making "fiery declarations."²

ABZUG: And she did.

MURPHY: And she did.

ABZUG: She said, "You can call me brash. You can call me loud. You can call me soft. But there's one thing I'll tell you: whatever I do, I'm a very serious woman." She had a great sense of humor, but at the end of the day, she used that to charm people like the Southern delegation and the West—you know, the other congressmen—to get what she wanted to get done.

MURPHY: Did she feel like this outgoing personality was an advantage to her when she got [to DC]?

ABZUG: I think that was her personality. And do I think that her outgoing personality was an advantage? I think the fact that she had no fear was an advantage, and that she wasn't afraid of facing tough opponents because she was very self-confident, and because she believed that she can argue with the best with them, I mean, on the facts.

MURPHY: And that definitely made her very well known right when she got to DC, right?

ABZUG: Right. As soon as she won that election, first time, beat the 13-year incumbent, the *New York Times*—I told you, at my high school graduation they were following her just three days after she won the election. She got a lot of media coverage at the time because she was so dynamic and so different and such an amazement to so many women and men and because she spoke her truth.

MURPHY: Some politicians have an abrasive relationship with the press. Did she have a number of reporters that she sparred with?

ABZUG: Yes, I think that's right. I think she was great to cover because she was so dynamic and so challenging, with her sense of humor. So her relationship, I think, was very good with the press, even if they sometimes were tough on her. In reality, I think that they liked covering her.

MURPHY: Did that shape her relationships with other women Members when she arrived in Congress?

ABZUG: Well, there was a camaraderie because it was always only like 11 of them. So they bonded for sure. They were definitely bonding and had to because they were in such a minority. And I think they liked each other. The Members from California. There were some Members—Barbara [Charline] Jordan from Texas, Yvonne Brathwaite Burke from California. They really bonded as sisters in the army of the minority.

MURPHY: Yes, there were such a small number of women, especially when we think about the recent election.

ABZUG: Yes, 21, 22 percent today—[over] a hundred women elected [to the House] just now in the 2018 midterms.³

MURPHY: And they were just breaking 10.

ABZUG: Right. Forty years ago.

MURPHY: But there was still a distinct generational divide within the women in Congress. There were people like Barbara Jordan who had come in the '70s—very progressive. There was an older generation as well.

ABZUG: Yes, there was.

MURPHY: Like Leonor [Kretzer] Sullivan.

ABZUG: Right, there was an older generation. How did that work out?

MURPHY: Yes, how did that interaction go?

ABZUG: Well, I think that the newer Members were respectful of that fact that there were women who had been elected before them, but they came in as a dynamic group. The '70s was a very dynamic time as you know. Antiwar, lots of issues in this country—daycare bills that they proposed, consumer credit act that my mom proposed for women for equal credit. I think that the group that came in was elected at a different time, at a very fluid, political, and very progressive and activist time because they were fighting against the war, and because of the conditions across the country—socioeconomic conditions.

MURPHY: There were discussions in the '70s—the Congressional Black Caucus was founded.

ABZUG: That's right. Women's Caucus.

MURPHY: Yes, the Women's Caucus came about right after your mother went to run for the Senate.

ABZUG: Correct.

MURPHY: What were her ideas on that, and was there any discussion of starting that earlier?

ABZUG: Oh yes. But I think the Congressional Black Caucus was formed around the Civil Rights Act, if I'm not mistaken.

MURPHY: It was '71, '72—formally organized.⁴

ABZUG: Right. Okay. So it was a little later. So at that time—'71, '72—was [soon after] Title VII—anti-discrimination based on sex—was argued and passed [as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and] '72 was when Title IX passed [as part of the Education Amendments of 1972].⁵ So I think that, like in everything, there should have been the caucus earlier, but they couldn't get it together until later.

MURPHY: She was involved in the National Women's Political Caucus.

ABZUG: Yes, she was a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus that supported progressive women candidates of both parties to run for elected office. She was one of the three founders. So I think instead of the caucus in the Congress, they built a National Women's Political Caucus, which was a separate, [national] advocacy organization.

MURPHY: When she was in office there were two other women from New York State, but also New York City: Shirley [Anita] Chisholm and Elizabeth Holtzman. What was her relationship with the New York delegation?

ABZUG: Shirley and Liz, but Shirley in particular, and my mother worked a lot on different things together. They didn't always see eye to eye, but they worked together on a lot of issues. Liz, of course, Liz Holtzman was someone who was a young Member—really young Member—and my mother worked with her on the beginnings of the impeachment of [President Richard Milhous Nixon] and the investigation into Watergate. So the answer to the question is they were bound by common issues and by really important fights in the early '70s.

MURPHY: And there was an older generation—I mentioned Leonor Sullivan. Because your mother didn't come out of city politics in the same way that someone else might have—[by] going up the ranks towards congressional service. What about someone like Edna [Flannery] Kelly or other older—

ABZUG: And then there was Margaret [M.] Heckler, and then there was the woman from New Jersey who smoked the—

MURPHY: Millicent [Hammond] Fenwick.

ABZUG: Yes, Millicent Fenwick, whom my mother loved. Loved her.

MURPHY: Did she? Did she have a good rapport with her and were they politically sympathetic to each other?

ABZUG: Yes, they had a great rapport. I mean, she was a Republican, but she was a moderate Republican, and I think she was truly a feminist. So my mother and she had a very good relationship. And she had a great sense of humor and they appreciated each other's humor. They smoked a cigar—remember? Millicent Fenwick?

MURPHY: Right, the—

ABZUG: The thin cigars?

MURPHY: Yes, with the holder. Yes, she definitely had an image as well.

ABZUG: Yes, she did. I think they related to each other because of that.

MURPHY: The connection to New York is something I'm always interested in—there's a connection between district and then the DC office. How did that work? Was your mother traveling back and forth every weekend to New York?

ABZUG: Yes, she did. She had an apartment in Washington, and she came back on Thursday nights. My father never moved there. Our family never moved there. We lived in the West Village on Bank Street, and she would come back and forth—as many Members do. Not everybody lives in DC. And that was very tough on her and my father and on the family.

MURPHY: And this was not—today, everybody does this.

ABZUG: Yes. But at the time, it was unusual.

MURPHY: Did she take the train?

ABZUG: She took the train, and she flew a lot.

MURPHY: Did she feel like this was an imperative for her family life? Or did she come [to New York] all weekend to work in the district?

ABZUG: Well, no. It was important for her to come back and be with my father and us. And certainly my father loved theater, movies, going out to dinner. So they would do that, and then she would work during the days. Go into the district, go to meetings, go working on legislation that she had to work on. As you know, when a Representative comes back to their district, they have

to deal with their constituents and the needs of the constituents, so it's not like they're coming back for a holiday weekend.

MURPHY: Did she find that helped her every re-election campaign, the fact that she was here every weekend?

ABZUG: Well, I think that she felt that was extremely important not just for re-election but to represent the people.

MURPHY: Because in a sense, she was a nationally known politician.

ABZUG: Figure. Yes.

MURPHY: Some Members used that to work in that direction. Others move—

ABZUG: She tried to do both, which is why it was very difficult for her, personally. I mean, draining. She was a national spokesperson against the war in Vietnam. She was one of the leading spokespeople for the feminist movement and the civil rights movement. And then you're representing constituents, so it's bread-and-butter issues. She was big on transportation, trading in Westway [interstate highway project] dollars for mass transit dollars here, and really wanting to bring home to her constituents and her district services and resources that were needed.⁶ So she had a big, ambitious, and heavy load.

MURPHY: While she was [in the House], did you spend a lot of time in Washington?

ABZUG: I was still in college, and I would drive down sometimes and be there to see her. She had an apartment and nothing in the refrigerator, ever, {laughter} because she would eat at her desk late into the night. I went down there once with my boyfriend and my best friend, and we went to see her in action in the [House] Chamber. We were in the balcony, and I think one of us was

chewing gum, the other one had their feet up, and they came, and they told us this is a diplomatic House, you have to not do that. And as a freshman and sophomore in college . . .

With all her races, you know, I would come back from college. My boyfriend was very into working for her, too, at the time, and so we would come back and forth to New York City from Boston to help her out. And there were always fundraising events and—you see that picture of Barbra Streisand and her over there [points to photo]? Look how young she was.

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: She was the first star, celeb, to come to my mother and say, “I don’t know who you are, but whoever you are, I want to work for you.”

MURPHY: {laughter} And that—that image—once she got out of—once she won here and went [to DC], that image became well known across the country. We already talked about this a little bit in terms of her hats and her public persona, but associating with stars, that’s a different kind of campaigning than historically has been done.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: One thing I would like to ask is connected to the first woman in Congress, Jeannette Rankin.

ABZUG: Yes.

MURPHY: When she arrived in DC, the press was really focused on what she was wearing, what was her social life like.

ABZUG: She was a first. She was a first. I mean, any time there's a first, people are very focused on—and certainly the press and media.

MURPHY: Did your mother see this change in the six or seven years she was in DC—did that become less of her story in the press as she moved on through her three terms?

ABZUG: No, I think that one of the things about Bella was that she was covered consistently and repeatedly the whole time, not only through the three terms of Congress but every race she ran afterwards. And even after she became a private citizen in the '80s and lost her last race for Congress in '86—that was in Westchester—the press would follow her. Then it became more at the international level. She started doing work in development and women's environment and in terms of women's advocacy at the international level. So they followed her because she was a character to follow and had some really interesting ideas, and the way she campaigned and all—and the level of the campaigning and what she would say would be newsworthy.

MURPHY: And when she was here on the weekends—you just mentioned your parents going out on the weekends to relax—was there a sense that she was still a story on her personal time as well?

ABZUG: Yes, because when she'd go into restaurants—we had these favorite restaurants in the Village, particularly where we lived. People would always—how could you miss her? You see the hat, and they would come up to her and tell their stories to her or say, "I'm a big admirer." When we went to the theater as a family and to the musicals or plays on Broadway—I'll never forget this. The four of us would come in and sometimes they would applaud her. And we were just coming in as a family that wanted to go to the theater.

It was embarrassing, in a sense, for me and my sister. We had to get used to that.

MURPHY: Yes. So you enjoyed traveling to DC and seeing her in action, but did you also feel a sense of intrusion in the family?

ABZUG: Yes, it definitely felt like we were sharing our mother with the world. Not only with the public who didn't know her but with her friends and her associates who did. Everybody wanted a piece of Bella, and we were sort of at the side of that. Sometimes it was great, and sometimes you resented it.

MURPHY: Did she bring politics—I guess a better way of putting it is, was politics all-consuming for her? When you'd sit down to have dinner at night, were there discussions from work around the table?

ABZUG: Yes, it was pretty consuming. I mean, we talked about other things, but she often vented her frustrations, or talked about things that were happening that were unique, or legislation, or groups of people who were organizing, and those who may be organizing against her. My father was a real sounding board for her, and that was one of the reasons why they had, I think, a successful marriage because they both trusted each other and respected each other's opinions. And also us, too—she wanted to hear from me and my sister sometimes. Occasionally. {laughter} That's a joke.

MURPHY: Did your father offer political advice as in, "Maybe you should do this on this issue?"

ABZUG: Well, he would offer her his opinion, but he was not going to tell her what to do. He would offer her his opinion and was also worried about the level and

the intensity with which she was working all the time. He was worried about her health.

MURPHY: Yes. And how did he react to the public criticism?

ABZUG: Hated it. Hated it.

MURPHY: It must have been tough for him to—

ABZUG: Very tough for him to take public criticism of her. He wanted to, like, punch people out. Hated it. He was at that point a stockbroker, a financial guy, and they'd say to him, "Oh, what are you going to do? Wear the apron when she gets to the White House?" Or, "What are you doing? Are you going to carry her bags?" They'd make fun of him, and you know what? My father was a mature guy, and he [had] a good sense of self, so he could handle it. He could handle it. A lot of men might not have been able to.

MURPHY: That's a good way of transitioning—a lot of men in the House who were elected Members might not have been able to handle women in Congress—

ABZUG: Yes, exactly. And certainly people who were so outspoken—women who were so outspoken or independent.

MURPHY: Did she tell you any stories about interactions she had with Members who were resistant to her presence there?

ABZUG: Yes. She told us all the time about—recalled different things. There was a very old Congressman from Brooklyn, Emanuel Celler—she used to tell this story that he was talking about the Last Supper—so much was discussed at the Last Supper, and women weren't even at the Last Supper. And she would say to him, "Well, they might not have been at that one, but they're sure

going to be at the next one.” [They] challenged all her positions. Several of them just because it was coming from her as a woman, as a very radical feminist. They would challenge her and try to shout her down or silence her with insults.

MURPHY: And there were a number of older Members who were much older men.

ABZUG: Right. Much older men. And they weren’t used to that—they weren’t used to women speaking up like that.

MURPHY: At the same time she’s getting this resistance, she’s also—you mentioned O’Neill made her an assistant whip. She’s a prominent Member of Congress. She’s having input in many pieces of legislation. Did she find a way in?

ABZUG: Right. Freedom of Information Act.⁷ Equal Credit Opportunity Act.⁸ Title IX. The first Congressperson to introduce a national gay rights bill. Turning in superhighway funds for mass transit here in New York to stop the Westway from going through the center of the Village, to get the dollars for mass transit. I mean, a number of different issues—she was on the Government Operations Committee. She was someone who wanted to seriously do things. She didn’t want to just talk. She wanted to act and do and produce.

MURPHY: So there had to be some way to find a middle or negotiate that path, and I was thinking of—our office interviewed Congressman Ron [Ronald V.] Dellums—

ABZUG: He was great.

MURPHY: Yes, so several years ago, we talked to him. And—

ABZUG: They loved each other. They were good buddies. Friends and colleagues in the fight for the good progressive politics.

MURPHY: He recalled advice he received from your mother. He was a self-described radical as well. But he was encountering a lot of the resistance in work he was trying to do on Capitol Hill. And he said your mother told him, “Ron, we need to learn how to make friends with these folks to disarm them with friendship. You can’t win fighting against them.”⁹

ABZUG: Exactly.

MURPHY: And he said she was “absolutely right.”

ABZUG: Absolutely. And that’s what I mean. She would charm with her charm and friendship many of the southern Members who were extremely conservative—that’s how she broke down the barrier to have a conversation about legislation with them. She understood that you can’t just beat people with a stick—you have to charm them.

MURPHY: And that is a contrast to the kind of stories that you read at the time.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: This conflict is—

ABZUG: Well, there were a couple of stories that would tell the whole picture, but it’s true. Most of them would say she’s “Battling Bella,” and she’s confrontational. But then there were others that would say, “She wore this beautiful outfit, and what a contrary thing to her abrasive and aggressive personality.” But they could never challenge her intelligence. That’s the thing, at the end of the day, it’s your intelligence and can you get it done?

And she did. Nobody can dispute that—even the southern, more conservative Members were really intrigued to hear her because they thought she had a great mind and that she put things together like very few people did.

MURPHY: And that really drove her effectiveness with her legislative priorities, too.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: I guess we could start with the resolution about the Vietnam War. What I found interesting about this was the timing of this resolution. She did this right when she got in.

ABZUG: Right. She called for the impeachment of Nixon over the war on Vietnam right away after she was [sworn in]. Never before has a Congressperson called for the impeachment of a President right after they're elected—in their first month in Congress. And it was really gutsy—ballsy—for her to do that. She also represented one of the most progressive districts in the country, so it was easy to do that.

MURPHY: As an activist before coming to Congress, did she feel this was something she had to do right away?

ABZUG: Yes, she wanted to do it. She felt that she had a platform now that was a different platform, both—a national and a local platform that was much greater. And sure enough, it was covered—plenty.

MURPHY: So that was 1971. In 1972 she traveled to Paris with Patsy [Takemoto] Mink.

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: She traveled to meet with representatives from the North Vietnamese [government].

ABZUG: Right. Correct.

MURPHY: Did she ever discuss her goals for this trip with you or what she experienced on the trip?

ABZUG: No. I think my father was on that trip as well. They wanted to—it was a peacekeeping mission. That’s what it basically was. That’s what it was—and information gathering. But a peacekeeping mission—try to see if there was a way to negotiate an end to the war.

MURPHY: How did her peers react to that?

ABZUG: You mean congressional peers?

MURPHY: Yes.

ABZUG: Well, I think there was a delegation, so there was—it wasn’t just Patsy Mink. It was—

MURPHY: But some framed it as controversial.

ABZUG: Yes. But they were trying to reach a medium, trying to figure a way in which to negotiate some kind of peace agreement. So yes, of course it was going to be questioned, but that’s what they felt they should do.

MURPHY: And she must have been increasingly frustrated with the progress on the war.

ABZUG: Yes, it was escalating, escalating, and we wanted that to de-escalate and stop. It was the people of the United States who ended the war in Vietnam—after all the marches, over and over, one year after the next. I was at a lot of them,

so I can speak to it. Virtually, all the people pressured their Congresspeople, and it started building steam in the antiwar movement, and it became more of a populist movement. And ultimately, of course, Nixon getting impeached, that turned the whole tide.

MURPHY: But when she came in—definitely when she was running in 1970 and when she came into office in '71, it was still—

ABZUG: Oh no, it was raging. The war was raging.

MURPHY: No, but it was still unlikely to see such outspoken opposition from a Member of Congress.

ABZUG: Oh yes. Right, she was one of the few. Her and Dellums and Patsy Mink, but also there was a couple people from California—Yvonne Brathwaite Burke. And a couple of people—you could count them probably on your hands. But yet, the Congress wasn't as—when you look today at the Congress it gets logjammed. Now, thank God, we just had some great new Members get elected, so it's going to look more like the '70s did when the new Members came in. But up until now, it was so partisan, so conservative, you couldn't legislate. Couldn't do anything. And, at the time she was in, it was a lot more open to bipartisanship and working together across the aisle, as it will be probably now with our new Members that—I don't know how bipartisan it will be, but there will be more new Members that are going to be progressive on their agendas.

MURPHY: And was her opposition to the war on pacifist grounds? On anti-imperialist grounds? What was motivating her opposition to the war?

ABZUG: Everything. And the resources. Why is all this money—millions and trillions—going there when we should bring it home and have support in our housing, daycare, healthcare, job creation. I mean, there’s a question of resources, too. And militarization. She was very anti-military.

MURPHY: Those economic issues seem to be at the heart of a lot of the things she tried to do while in Congress. Like you mentioned Equal Credit Opportunity Act before—

ABZUG: Yes, that was her bill.

MURPHY: And she also introduced childcare legislation.

ABZUG: Yes, she did. By the way, Shirley Chisholm worked with her on that. And that was really passed, but that was vetoed by the President. Can you imagine that national daycare/childcare bill in 1971, 1972, all those years back? And if it had passed and had happened . . .

MURPHY: That makes a big difference in women’s lives.

ABZUG: Yes. Would have.

MURPHY: And so both of those, I think, are federal legislation that’s designed to affect individuals.

ABZUG: Correct. Local policy, local lives, families’ lives.

MURPHY: Can you explain the significance of this Equal Credit Opportunity Act?

ABZUG: Well, prior to that act, women couldn’t get a credit card in their own name. They had to get a credit card under their husband’s name. And my mother thought that was outrageous, so she introduced a bill saying a single woman

or divorced woman could get a credit card in her own name. I have a few jokes about it, like she did this commercial for American Express. She mocked the whole thing that she could only get it in her husband's name. And this really was a turning point because if you can't get credit—it's not just credit cards. Credit for loans. Credit for housing. Credit for a business. How can you have a chance at equality? How can you have half the population not getting a right that the other half gets that's considered a basis of the economy?

MURPHY: Yes, a lot of this is trying to level the playing field?

ABZUG: Yes, she was trying to level the playing field. Totally level the playing field. And that was very important. Freedom of Information Act. One of the first things she did when she drafted that was ask for her own CIA/FBI files. {laughter} And that's the "Sunshine" law that had open transparency.¹⁰ Now that was, again, 40-some-odd years ago. We still fight about that.

MURPHY: Were you with her when she got that file? Did you talk to her about what was in there and how she reacted to this?

ABZUG: Yes, but she said they were always following her, from college days forward. Always tracking her.

MURPHY: So she had a personal stake in opening up this—

ABZUG: Yes, but I mean, of course she had a personal stake in it, but—

MURPHY: But this was designed to—

ABZUG: —to open up government. Transparency. To open up the executive. To open up the Congress. To open up the agencies, so that people would have the

right to know what was going on, whether it was investigating individuals, groups, or just what these agencies were up to.

MURPHY: Another aspect of her time in office was the struggle over the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment. Was she confident that the amendment could be ratified? Was she thinking about this over the long term?

ABZUG: I think they all did. But she knew it was going to be a rocky road because of the insurance industry, because of the Phyllis Schlaflys of the world, because you needed the constitutional amendment—you needed the three-quarters or 38 states. And now all these years later, we're very close to getting it ratified. Did she think it was going to happen automatically? No way. No way because it was pushback to the feminist movement and to equal rights. It's one thing getting a piece of legislation passed in the Congress, it's another thing getting a constitutional amendment.

MURPHY: I read that she was on the Senate Floor when the Senate was voting on that. So she was right there in the middle of all of this—

ABZUG: I didn't know that.

MURPHY: I read some articles where they seemed like they thought it was going to be faster than what actually happened. But another major issue that she took up while in Congress was the Equality Act of 1974.¹¹ It was—

ABZUG: Right. Considered unbelievable. Nobody could believe that she was introducing that act, you know, anti-discrimination against LGBTQ people. She saw it as a natural extension of civil rights—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, which bans discrimination against women. Anybody whose civil and human rights were being abridged, between employment and public

accommodations, in credit, in marriage, in any kind of institution, she saw it as just unlawful and discriminatory. And [she] was not afraid—people thought she was crazy, but one of the first Congresspeople to ever campaign in gay bars. She campaigned in what was known as the Continental Baths, which was a very big place where gay men would have baths and disco—party and all. She would campaign in there because these were her constituents—the Village and Chelsea—and she took those risks.

Part of being a leader is taking risks and being ahead of the curve in terms of trying to push the envelope in a logical way. And she did. So people thought that was crazy. At that time, it was like so hush, you know, being gay and being in the closet if you were, and the fact that she took such a stance in the establishment for protection for gay, lesbian, queer people, showed that she could expand her mind as to civil and human rights for all. And the gay community knows that she and Edward [Irving] Koch, [former] mayor [of New York City and] former Congressman—signed on. They know this, and they've always been very thankful and very respectful that she did that.

MURPHY:

What was the response around that time here in the city? She was campaigning in—

ABZUG:

Yes, she was campaigning for it. And actually, when Anita Bryant in Florida—spokesperson for the Florida orange industry—was trying to fight the gay rights referendum, and they won to defeat this gay rights referendum. In the middle of the night, [about] 200 gay men that night came to their brownstone on Bank Street with candlelight and calling her name. My father thought she was dreaming. It was like 2:00 in the morning. And he said, “You’re dreaming.” And she said, “No, I’m not. I’m not.” And she opened up the shutters and there they were. And she went out in her nightgown to

speak to them in the street. She said, “I’m going to help you. We’re going to fight this. We’re going to push back on this.”

MURPHY: So it was both a principled rejection but also constituent representation.

ABZUG: Exactly.

MURPHY: And like you said, that was very unusual for the time. Also, she introduced in 1973 an abortion rights act—

ABZUG: Right.

MURPHY: —which was designed to counteract some of these state laws that were restricting—

ABZUG: Right. That banned it.¹² Yes, you did your homework, boy. {laughter}

MURPHY: Well, thank you.

ABZUG: Good for you, Michael. That’s good.

MURPHY: That’s the job. So those two bills right there, I had to spend a lot of time just reading about them because I was thinking about the way they would be received by some of these older—especially southern Members, conservative Members of the House.

ABZUG: Yes.

MURPHY: I’m trying to imagine the response to that.

ABZUG: Well, they were fighting. I mean, they were just trying to shout her down.

MURPHY: Did this offer a way to build a coalition with other women?

ABZUG: Yes. To try [to] build the abortion rights movement, that would hopefully spill over to trying to get the ERA passed and to protect women's lives most of all.

MURPHY: At some point in 1976, she decides that she's going to not be a candidate for the House and to run for the Senate. Why did she make that decision?

ABZUG: Some of her friends were worried about it because she had a safe seat—they believed she could have had it for the rest of her life. That's [Jerrold Lewis] Nadler's seat today. She felt, why not run for Senate, which is the more powerful arm of the Congress? She'd rather be 1 of 100 than 1 of 435 [in the House] in terms of being able to legislate [and] in terms of, at that time, being able to veto, in terms of having access to the White House. And so she said, "I'm going to take a risk." She was a risk taker. And she was a poker player—both my parents loved playing poker. But the risk was great.

That race with [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan in 1976—she lost by a quarter of a percentage point and 20,000 votes statewide.¹³ Her calculation in my view was correct—to run for Senate. The thing that got her was that—you might have known and read. The *New York Times*, which was going to be an endorsement—at that time, newspaper endorsement was very important to political candidates. The editorial board had voted to endorse her, and the publisher overturned it. So she did not get endorsed by the *New York Times*, and, in fact, she won in all the upstate counties. It was down here that she lost—in Queens, if you believe it. And largely because that endorsement had a really bad impact a couple of days before the election.

MURPHY: That's an interesting—

ABZUG: We weren't worried so much about voter suppression like we are today. We were worried about endorsements of newspapers and getting people out to the polls. Not so much suppressing the vote—getting them out to the polls.

MURPHY: That's an interesting calculation, though, seeing the Senate as the way to be—

ABZUG: A more powerful, more vocal—I mean, she had a lot of visibility already from the House, so probably she thought, “Get into the Senate. I'll have that visibility. I'll have more power in terms of legislating, and why not? There's no woman in the Senate. This has got to end. There should be some women in the Senate.”

MURPHY: It seems like consistently she saw herself as a pioneer in politics—

ABZUG: She did. She did.

MURPHY: —and this would be just another hurdle.

ABZUG: When I interviewed Hillary Clinton for the Bella documentary that we're just doing now and finishing, Hillary knew. One of the things Hillary says—and you should be interested to see this documentary after all your research by the way. She said, “I stand on the shoulders of Bella. There's no question.” Don't forget, she had a similar path even though she was First Lady. She ran for Senate. And then she ran for a higher office—for President. So in that sense, it was a very similar path, and she sustained the same kind of attacks—to her intelligence, to her physicality, and her voice. She's too soft, she's too hard. She's not emotional enough. Same things 45 years later my mother had to deal with. So there was a common thread, and they related to each other. You know, progress has been slow for us women. {laughter} We are 51 percent of

the population and we're about 52 percent of the voting public, so why should it be that we only have 20 percent of representation still?

MURPHY: That's what made me think about the Senate because since she was going to be the only woman in the Senate. There was a small increase in the number of women in the House at that time—

ABZUG: Right. Gradual increase.

MURPHY: —and she saw her path going that direction. That's interesting.

ABZUG: Right. Barrier breaking. Trying to be a barrier breaker.

MURPHY: And then she wanted to run for mayor of New York City.

ABZUG: Right. She ran for mayor the next year. She ran for Senate in 1976, a year later for mayor. In a multicandidate race—one woman and all the men. The seven dwarves, they used to call them.

END OF PART TWO — BEGINNING OF PART THREE

MURPHY: Did she see herself as a mentor for other women in politics?

ABZUG: Yes, absolutely. Women and men. She was a mentor to women and men—progressive men. In fact, several of the people who stayed close to her until the end of her life when she died at 77 was her press secretary all through Congress—who was Harold Holzer—and some of the original campaign people. [They] really stayed true to her, stayed loyal to her, were in her life until the very end of her life. As much as she yelled at her campaign people and her staff, they stayed—there are half of them in the documentary we just did because they really respected her and her work ethic and her intelligence and her ability to break barriers. And her legacy is the Bella Abzug Leadership

Institute which I formed in '05—a few years after her death—which is inspiring young women and girls to lead presently and in the future. To take the tactics of her strategic mind and the activities and the advocacy, and to fight for feminism, to see the job done—complete equality, gender equality. And that's a living legacy to her life.

MURPHY: In terms of congressional Members, you mentioned Geraldine Ferraro—

ABZUG: Yes. Geraldine Ferraro.

MURPHY: What was her relationship with—

ABZUG: They had a great relationship. Very close. And Geraldine loved my mother and vice versa. Gerry came in about—in the '80s, probably about 10 years later or so. And she was similar—a lawyer—different background, though, of course. Italian—lived in Queens. Working-class people, mother. They related on many levels, and they were very fond of each other.

MURPHY: Did she talk to her during her vice presidential campaign?

ABZUG: Oh yes. She was thrilled. Talked to her strategically—she was on the stage when she accepted her nomination for Vice President. My mother believed that you help—she really did believe that sisterhood is sisterhood. It's important to work in coalition with other women and with like-minded men. She believed in that very deeply to get things done.

She mentored a lot of young people. It's funny, I do the same in my work. Obviously, I was mentored by one of the greatest. I think it translates a lot, you know? She wasn't threatened by powerful people. She wasn't threatened by sadness. She wasn't threatened by sharing her emotions and being honest because she believed that when you connect with an individual or a people,

that's how they're going to vote for you. That's how they're going to understand you as a leader, if they know where you're at. And it was not a problem for her to share her emotional feelings in addition to her intellect and her strategies for advocacy and change. And that's what makes a true leader, in my view. The passion, the tears, the exuberance, the frustration—expressing that openly, in addition to getting things done.

MURPHY: Did she have a sense of disdain for those who offered canned responses?

ABZUG: You could call it disdain—I would call it impatience. Impatience for ridiculousness and for people who didn't try, or weren't smart, or weren't genuine. Integrity and loyalty are very important in our family. Not to say it's not in other families. We used to say, and I have said, "She died with her boots on, fighting to the end." She never compromised on her principles, even if it meant it wasn't going to be good for her. She stayed true to that. She could sleep at night. And she stayed with integrity and principle.

When American Express came to her later on and wanted to do an American Express commercial, "Hi, my name is Bella. Do you see my card?" After the Equal Credit Act. They were going to pay her a lot of money to do it. She turned it down—and she needed the money, she was in debt from her campaigns—\$100,000—she turned it down, because they're going to think it's commercial and selling out. And why don't they support our documentary now? That's what I want to know. {laughter} We went to them to try and get support from them.

MURPHY: Did it—they'd have a lot less credit card users if not for Bella Abzug.

ABZUG: That's right. That's right. That's the argument.

MURPHY: What accomplishment did you think your mother was most proud of from her time in the House?

ABZUG: The Equal Credit Act. The Freedom of Information Act—Sunshine Law. The trading in dollars for Westway for mass transit and the gay rights bill. Just to name a few. She would name a lot more. But those, I think, are some major ones.

MURPHY: But do you think she would point immediately to those individual pieces of legislation before she would point to her legacy as a trailblazing woman politician?

ABZUG: I think she would point to both of those. I think she would point to both of those, but of course, trailblazer—no question, first. But in order to get that legislation, she had to speak out and up and create legislation and get consensus. So yes, she was a trailblazer. She broke down the doors. She broke in and integrated the male bastions and integrated—in civil rights context—working with the Black delegation, the [Congressional Black] Caucus. But on the other hand, she got it done. So you can criticize her style, if some of them did, but in the end she got it done. And she produced. And that's what being a legislator is all about. Produced for her constituents and for the people—not just her own constituents.

MURPHY: I think that's a great way to bring it all together. One other thing—and I think I might have missed this earlier—but when we were talking about the second-wave feminist movement—what was her relationship with this movement? It became kind of caricatured movement in a sense—the pejorative “women's lib.” Did she embrace that? Did she see herself as a leader in that movement?

ABZUG:

I think she was proud of fighting for equal rights, and she saw the movement as being the way in which to express it culturally, socially, economically, and to make a mass movement to try to work for gender equality. And she saw it as a vehicle, and she didn't care—women's lib, bra burning, lesbian. She believed in gender equality. And how can we get there? The best way—Title VII, Title IX. The Equal Credit Act, ERA—so that we could have full gender equality. She was strategic about it, and she also believed it deeply in her heart.

As she said, "I was a feminist from the day I was born." The other thing is she said, "Women were trained to speak softly and carry a lipstick. Well, now we're going to carry a bigger stick." She also said, "Men and women have been doing things in pairs since Noah's Ark. So what's the rub?" You know? Why can't we get equality here? Those one liners or two liners—that was the depth of her politics, her soul, and her intellect. Like she said, she knew no one who was a lawyer. She didn't know anything about it, but she knew as a young kid she wanted to be one because she really believed in fighting for fair, equal rights and social justice for all people.

MURPHY:

I think that's another one of these lasting legacies that we can end—

ABZUG:

Yes, the lasting legacy is that women can be strong, can be funny, can be softer, can dress like they want to, and have great humor and still have great intellect, and still work in consensus and get things done. Even with men or other women who may be very conservative opposing her. And you find a way to try to reach a consensus for a new, more sane society and world.

MURPHY:

Great. Thanks for talking to us. I really appreciate it.

NOTES

¹ For more on Abzug's role in the McGee case, see Leandra Zarnow, "Braving Jim Crow to Save Willie McGee: Bella Abzug, the Legal Left, and Civil Rights Innovation, 1948–1951," *Law & Social Inquiry* 33:4 (Fall 2008): 1003–1041.

² Margaret Crimmins, "Lower Manhattan's Bella Abzug Rasps It Like It Is," 5 July 1970, *Washington Post*: G1; Carol H. Falk, "Women's Lib Advocate Promotes the Cause In Race for Congress," 8 October 1970, *Wall Street Journal*: 1.

³ At the start of the 116th Congress on January 3, 2019, there were 106 women in the House of Representatives, including 102 Members (23.4 percent) and four non-voting Delegates. There were also 25 women in the Senate.

⁴ The Congressional Black Caucus was founded by the 13 African-American Members of the House of Representatives in 1971.

⁵ Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, creed, and sex. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 outlawed discrimination in federally-funded education programs based on sex.

⁶ Abzug sponsored an amendment in the 1976 extension of the Federal Highway Assistance Act to allow New York City to trade in money for the interstate highway construction plan for the West Side of Manhattan.

⁷ In the House, Representative Abzug sponsored the Government in the Sunshine Act, H.R. 11656, 94th Cong. (1976)—one of several Freedom of Information Acts. It was signed into law as Public Law 94-409, 90 Stat. 1241 (1976).

⁸ Representative Abzug introduced the Equal Credit Opportunity Act as H.R. 15116, 92nd Cong. (1972). It became law in the 93rd Congress, as part of Public Law 93-495, 88 Stat. 1500 (1974).

⁹ "The Honorable Ronald V. Dellums Oral History Interview," Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, (12 April 2012): 9–10.

¹⁰ In February 1976, Representative Abzug introduced the Government in the Sunshine Act as H.R. 12016, 94th Cong. (1976). She reintroduced it as H.R. 11656 in July 1976, but the Senate version of the bill, S. 5, 94th Cong. (1976), was ultimately signed into law. Government in the Sunshine Act, Public Law 94-409, 90 Stat. 1241 (1976).

¹¹ Equality Act of 1974, H.R. 14752, 93rd Cong. (1974).

¹² To enforce the constitutional right of females to terminate pregnancies that they do not wish to continue, H.R. 254, 93rd Cong. (1973).

¹³ In the 1976 Democratic primary, Abzug lost by one percentage point of the total vote—a little less than 10,000 votes. Maurice Carroll, "Mrs. Abzug Offers to Aid Winner," 16 September 1976, *New York Times*: 81.