

Melba Dunlap

Judith: Today is Thursday, November 17th, 2011. My name is Judith Auth and I am interviewing Melba Dunlap, and also in the room is Cherstin Lyon.

Melba: Good morning.

Judith: Good morning.

Cherstin: Good morning.

Judith: We're here today, Melba to talk about your career as a woman working with environmental issues, and I have a series of questions, but we are mostly interested in your stories. Feel free to adjust the questions.

Melba: It might be a long day.

Judith: (Laughing) We want to start with your childhood. Can you share any childhood or family experiences that may have shaped your environmental involvement?

Melba: Well, as a very young person we left Texas in 1934 to go to Washington State to get out of the dust bowl. Now I'm sure that I don't remember ... I remember part of the trip, but that probably was my first introduction to what has now been known, has become a very, very serious environmental problem in those days.

Judith: Is there anything in your family history, or family traditions that shaped your involvement?

Melba: No, I cannot think ... recall any.

Judith: Do you see a relationship between your political values and your views on the environment?

Melba: I'm not sure. Politically my dad always had us listen with him on Sundays to Franklin Roosevelt's *Message by the Fireplace*. And I remember sitting on his lap and listening to those. And very interested in that, I remember. But environmentally ... no. My dad was a farmer. I don't know what the term would be, but he had the equipment to service people who had large gardens up in Washington State in the backyard. You couldn't get tractors in 'em, but he could get his horse in 'em. And that's what he did. He went around cultivating people's small berry patches, and their gardens. And we raised practically everything we ever ate.

I was telling my granddaughter one time and when I got done she said, "What did you buy?" (Laughing) I had to stop and think ... well, flour, and salt and pepper, you know. (Laughing) Coffee. Basics. We had everything.

Judith: Do you see any relationship between your spiritual values and your views on the environment?

Melba: I don't mentally connect them. I believe in the Creation, and I've always enjoyed beautiful scenery, and I hate to see a tree cut down. So ... I'm not sure. I'm not sure I can answer that.

Judith: Well, do you have any favorite stories or works of literature that you think shaped your views on the environment?

Melba: No. I can't think of any. I might think of one tomorrow, but I can't think of one today.

Judith: With your busy public life, have you had any time for hobbies or leisure activities that you specially enjoy?

Melba: Well, I was always curious about things going on in the community. I always wanted to know everything. And so I always enjoyed being a part of something that was being productive. In later years, after the children are grown, I went back to playing tennis. I had played on the boy's varsity tennis team in 1948. First girl to ever receive a varsity letter. And then I didn't play anymore until the late '70s. And then I started back playing tennis.

Judith: And you said you were playing tennis once a week until this year?

Melba: Uh-hmm. Until July of this year.

Judith: My goodness.

Melba: Even when I was in office. Wednesday morning was saved until 9 o'clock. No appointments before 9:30 or 10 on Wednesdays, 'cause we played tennis at 7 at UCR. And one day I was really ticked off at one of the Administrative people, and so I said, "I want to put some initials on the balls today." So we put these initials, and we knocked those balls all over the court! And I felt much better when I came home to take my shower. (Laughing)

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: I like sports. I like sports. When I was in office on Tuesdays at noontime we had a bocce ball. You know what bocce ball is down in the grass that used to be there? And so they let me play, and I ended up being the bocce ball champion! (Laughing) Beat all the Road Department guys.

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: No. I like my sports. I like sports. That's always been a ... We always had sports here at the house. Ping-Pong, badmitton, croquet. We always had a sport to play.

Judith: Talking about your involvement with the community, who were your models?

Melba: Judy, I didn't look for any. I'd get an idea in my head and I've always been the kind ... I used to tell my husband. He'd say, "Well, how do you know it's going to work?"

And I said, "Well, I'll do what I call my sidewalk survey. I'll tell them what I'm thinking. If I have to ask a hundred, I'll ask a hundred."

He said, "What if they'll all say 'no'?"

And I said, "Then I'll find one person that says 'yes' and then I'll know I'm right." I've been a very free flowing person. I've never ever followed a designated pathway. I always look for a different way to go.

Ethel Silver. Remember Ethel Silver?

Judith: Yes.

Melba: A Republican. A wonderful lady. We were good friends. She always tried to get me to join the Republican Party. And I said, "No." I had to join the Democratic Party 'cause when we came here we had to do something. We weren't used to that. So we flipped a quarter and I lost. Republican or Democrat. I got the Democrat. We thought, well if he registers one and I register one, we should get *all* the information. But I'm not a party follower.

And she said, "You'd do really well!"

And I said, "Ethel, you would want me to vote for Joe Blow who I think is really stupid, and I won't support him. I'll probably support the other one, and then you'd either have to kick me out, or I'd have to resign. So let's just save our friendship and (laughing) work with one another." So we did, for years. She was on the Wednesday morning group that met on Monday. Did you ever hear about that group?

Judith: I did.

Melba: I started that.

Judith: Oh, really? When was that?

Melba: That was in about 1980.

Judith: Okay.

Melba: Ethel Silver, Rosanna Scott, myself, Martha McLean, Jane Block. And there was one other person. Was that five? Myself, Rosanna, Ethel, Jane Block and Martha McLean. Five of us. And that was just before Martha got really, really ill, so she could only come a couple of times. We'd meet here at the house, at the round table on Mondays, because the Monday Morning Group was nothing but men. And up to that time they had been almost a secret group. And they met on Wednesdays.

Cherstin: And who were they? The Monday Morning Group.

Melba: Oh, I don't remember all their names.

Cherstin: Do you remember if you could describe, let's say if somebody doesn't know anything about it? Was it a group of insiders

Melba: No. They were a group of men ... very prominent in Riverside ... unknown to most people

who live on my street. You had to be the circle. And they did good things. They worked very hard to get the National Cemetery, and there are other things. But they also were controlling the City Council, in my opinion. And you couldn't figure out who they were. J.D. Diffenbaugh was one. They were good people. I'm not putting them down at all. But I didn't think it was right for these people ... this little group ... to be going to Washington, D.C., representing the City of Riverside. They weren't speaking for me. They were speaking for their own point and not, not for the citizens necessarily of Riverside.

And so we had this group, and we decided that we would do those things that should be done because it was the right thing to do. And we would win! We would win because we were persistent. We persevered and we were pretty.

Judith: (Laughing) What were the obstacles that you encountered?

Melba: Doing that? Or everything?

Judith: Everything. Anything.

Melba: If there were obstacles I either didn't see them, or I would put somebody else up front and push, and then we would go under the wall. We would find a way to get most of the things ... sooner or later most of the things that I worked for in Riverside have gotten accomplished.

Judith: Tell us about some of those triumphant accomplishments..

Melba: Well, one of 'em is the after school programs that I worked very hard in the '70s. Isabelle Nelson and I ... At that time they called 'em 'latch key kids' because they had a string with a key around their neck. And Isabelle and I were involved in mental health issues. And I was President of Ramona PTA in the '70s, and you could see a decline ... beginning to see a decline of mothers volunteering. And more kids out on the street after school. And just in common sense, we felt that the schools were the ideal place ... the middle school ... 'cause all the elementaries feed into that middle school ... would be the ideal place to have after school programs in the gym. You know, anything. They could study ... whatever. Play, but with supervision.

Well, the schools wouldn't allow it. Not possible. They might mess up something, and all kinds of excuses. But Isabelle and I did one time ... and this was kind of fun ... we convinced the School District ... the School Board, to let us have a two week seminar at Nichols Park over here ...

Uh, just by the railroad tracks (laughing) on Dewey, where the girls in the 5th and 6th grade were getting ready to go into junior high. And we had people from the cosmetology department at RCC came and talked to them about nails and hair and styles. Cut some of their hair. Sears did a fashion show for us. We had somebody come in and talk to them about how important appearance was. The kids loved it! They ate it up! They ate it up. They came three times a week for two weeks. And that was the kind of thing that they could have had going on once or twice a week in any school in town, if they just put their minds to it, and got the volunteers.

Judith: Well, that program is certainly well-established now, and the school house is open ...

Melba: Well, one of the things that I did when I was on the Board. If you recall it was in 19 ... I think it was in '86 ... we passed another half-cent override and it was to go to the Sheriff, the District Attorney, the Coroner, and the Fire Department for extra money. And I publicly said one day at the Board Meeting ... I said, "I'm not supporting it unless it has something in that Ordinance for kids."

I said, "Nobody else will do it. The County needs to do it. We need to set programs up with non-profit organizations, to get these kids between 11 and 15. That's why I didn't support First Five. First Five isn't ... they're wrong. It's between the ages of 10 and 11 and 16 is where you lose 'em, because there's nobody home. Mommas aren't there. Dads aren't there. They're bored. What do they do? Well now, they won't play games. But most days they roamed the street. They'd get into mischief! They're kids! And I saw this coming, all these gangs and stuff. I saw it coming.

And it passed! Overwhelmingly. Well, of course, the Sheriff and the D.A didn't play too honest on that. But they did not quite write that into the Bill. And we couldn't lobby because we had put it on. But, anyway, for the two years that was left and I was left on the Board, we appropriated well over a million dollars to non-profit organizations from here to the river. And it had to be non-profit organizations that had been set up for at least two or three years working with children; they couldn't form a non-profit and say: Here I am. You know, uh-uh. They had to be ... church is good. YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, if there was a well-established one. All of those would be eligible. We had a committee. We screened them, and we passed out the money.

Judith: What were some of the other triumphs? Your Measure A triumph?

Melba: Oh, Measure A was great. I was Chairman of RCTC. Riverside County Transportation Commission. And it was interesting because we used to need a quorum and we just had to fight to get a quorum there to vote on anything. And I think we barely had a quorum that day that I pushed the sales tax over-ride. And Jack Reagan had just come to work for us, and I had him put together a committee. I told him who to get on it, and we had Jack Yeager, and some of the big guys that do a lot of road building, because we knew we'd need their support. And I made 'em write into that that there would be money for light rail service. And we debated that for a while. I said, "I'm telling you, there are two things that are going to pass this: the light rail and the support of senior transportation services. That will pass this bill."

Well, we won with 75 plus. . .I think it was in '86 ... for 20 years. One billion dollars. And we got the train. I got the train. Do you want me to tell the story of the train?

Judith: Sure.

Melba: The Ford Motor Company wanted a Dispatch Center where they unload all the cars. A Prep Center, they call it. To finish ... to put in the radios and all that stuff over off of Van Buren. And they had to build an overpass for the railroad cars, and they wanted me to fast track it. And that means that if your supervisor fast tracks a project, it goes to the top of the list. It doesn't have to wait.

And I said, "On one condition I will."

And they said, "What's that?"

Well, there was a spur line on Etiwanda up there by Mira Loma Village, that when there was train cars on it, it stuck about two or three feet over into the roadbed. And the County had been trying to get Union Pacific to move that for about 40 years. I said, "Within a year if you're building that, you will move the track of Etiwanda."

Sure, they'll do that. They'll do that. Well, it didn't happen. It didn't happen. I called 'em up, they send somebody ... well, you know. So one day I got mad ... I didn't get mad, I just got ... I was through! I was through being nice. So I had Rosanna come in and I had my secretary get the Union Pacific Chairman of the Board on the phone, and I explained to him who I was. I said, "I think back there you call them Commissioners and here we are called Supervisors." And I told him what was happening, and he said, "Well, that isn't our problem."

And I said, "It's the UP Land Company."

"Oh, well, we don't have anything to do with them."

I said, "How come they use your logo?" I said, "It's your logo. This is *Union Pacific* Land." I said, "I didn't fall off the turnip truck." 'cause they're back in Nebraska." (Laughing) I knew they'd understand. That was a saying of my dad's. **I didn't fall off no turnip truck!**

So they hem-hawed around and I said, "You own" And I knew how many sections along the railroad ... "You have 16 crossings in my District, and in this State and this County, whose ever District is boss ... the head of it ... they make the decision." Which was ... he wouldn't know the difference.

So I said, "I'm telling you right now ... not one spade full of earth ... nothing will be done on one single piece of your property until that track is off Etiwanda." And I said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going invite you to tea (laughing) ... I said tea. I'm going to invite you to tea, and I want you to send people with the authority to sit down with me and my staff and make a decision ... a binding decision right now."

They did. I said, "You give me a date right now."

Judith: And this was 1980??

Melba: Probably about '90, '91 maybe? And they came and it was during Daffodil Days ... I had a big, huge bowl of daffodils on the table. I had them down at that end. I said, I wanted the names so everybody had a nameplate, and I went in last. (Laughing) I had this one dress that Rosanna says, "Makes you look 11 feet tall! 'Cause I am tall. And it just makes me look: "Here she comes. " So I waited and I walked in with, my head up and my shoulders back. Slapped the table and I said, "Let's get started." (Laughing) It was really fun. I had everybody there and I said, "I'm not going to tell the history of this, 'cause if you don't know by now, you should have read your material." And I said "I'm going to show good faith. That's in Re-development." So it was '88. We had just put it in a Re-development ... that one strip.

I said, "The County is willing to give a hundred thousand in for Re-development ... of money "

And in the meantime they had sold 360 acres, just north of Mira Loma Village, to build. And I had written to the commercial realtor ... hated to do that to her ... and I told her that unless that track was gone, not one spade full of earth was going to be turned. And she came to see me. She said, "You don't mean that, do you?"

I said, "Yes, I do mean that."

So it was a big company. I forgot the name of the company. You see their signs everywhere on big pieces of property. And they put in the money. Railroad people put in the money. We had a done deal. And about three weeks later ... that was in March ... a month later we were signing papers. So all the lawyers were there ... There were probably 10, 12, 15 of us. We must have signed papers for 2 hours.

And so in the meantime we signed a while, then they signed a while, and then we'd talk _____ and, you know. So I asked one of the Union Pacific guys ... I said, "Union Pacific doesn't run passenger service, does it?"

And he said, "No, we don't. But we're thinking about it."

I said, "Good. Stop thinking. I want a train from here to L.A." I said, "Santa Ana wants a billion dollars, and I want to give them the finger 'cause we're not going to give 'em a billion dollars. And you're not going to get a billion either." They know we'd passed this transportation over-ride.

So within three weeks I sent them over to see Jack Reagan after that meeting. I called Jack and I said, "These guys are coming over. Deal with them. They want to do a train."

There was a train. Just like that.

Cherstin: And which train is it?

Melba: Right place, at the right time. Just put the last puzzle piece in place. And we got the train. Within three weeks they were laying tracks. Double track.

Judith: And this was the beginning of the Metro Link?

Melba: Yes! Absolutely.

Judith: Amazing.

Melba: It started in L.A. And then Santa Ana finally got on board...

Judith: Uh-hmm.

Melba: And now we're going out to Perris and Hemet.

Judith: Yeah.

Melba: It takes about ... When I left office it was carrying 8 to 12 ... 8, 10, 12 thousand a day. And that was in '95 I left office. So, yeah, it was a great experience. The President sent his car out for the initial ride. He was there. I was dressed down 'cause it was Saturday. I wasn't dressed up. We're going on a train ride. (Laughing) All these Dignitaries kept coming by to meet me, and I didn't know what was going on. (Laughing) I'm oblivious. I just think there's somebody ... you know, nobody important ... (laughing) And Jack Reagan said, "Do you know who those people were?"

I said, "Well, I guess they were out of L.A."

He said, "That was the President of the Union Pacific Railroad Company!"

I said, "Oh."

When I retired they offered me a locomotive free. To pull a train to L.A and have a party on it.

Judith: Oh, my.

Melba: I said, "No, 'cause you have to have everybody together." So that was a much too long a story. Sorry about that.

Judith: What were your reasons for wanting the train? Was it traffic congestion?

Melba: Yes. Traffic and smog! Traffic and the reduction of smog. And I think I have an amazing instinct. Maybe intuition. I just know things are going to happen. And I think it's because all my life I've read, and I observe, and I tuck it away somewhere. 'Cause you never know when that information is going to come in handy.

And I saw the shift coming. I saw the shift coming. Both in housing and industrial.

Judith: Well, I want to top that right now with the next question. What do you see as the pressing issues right now in our community?

Melba: I really see it ... that's a better monitoring of the growth, and what comes in to our County. When we did the Jurupa General Plan, which was the only unincorporated area in the County that had a general plan that I put together. And with the industrial ... It was not all supposed to be warehouses. But that was in the late mid-80s? Yes. That was in the mid-80's. About '84? '85? I would say '85, that we did that general plan. And it was intended to be light manufacturing, job producing, not just wall-to-wall warehouses. And I think they're going to have to do more with the diesel trucks. I think the transportation state-wide is going to have to stop building more Freeway lanes, and spreading 'em out, but over-passing 'em where trucks and heavy vehicles go on one level, and cars go on the other level.

Judith: They sure beat up the roads.

Melba: And they cause a lot of the slowness congestion. It's not their fault. They've got to go do their job. And it is job producing and it pays well. But I think there's a lot of work that has to be done on the diesel, which is nationwide, not just Riverside County.

I think the County has done an exceptional job on their open space. I was involved. I was the one that got the Santa Rosa Plateau saved. And so ...

Judith: You carried the Legislation?

Melba: No. What happened there was (laughing) ... and this is what really angered Walt Abraham so terribly. I just couldn't see that. I went up there and saw it, and I was just so impressed and I thought, "This can't be stripped down for door-to-door houses, 20 feet apart. These mansions on the hill. And I think Jane was involved with that.

So when it came time to vote, I saw the developer, Won Yu, sitting right there in the front row, and I said to him, "The developer, Mr. Won Yu knew that this was supposed to be open space when he bought the land. And now he wants us to rezone it just so he can make multi-million dollars." I said, "No!" And I voted 'No'.

Walt was furious. He kicked my chair ...

Judith: Walt Abraham was the Supervisor for that District.

Melba: Yeah. Walt Abraham was District 1. He kicked my chair and he said something ... he didn't say 'damn'. Yeah, he did. He said, "Damn you!"

I said, "What are you complaining about Walt? You got what you wanted!"

And you know what the answer was? "Yes. But it'll be harder for them to get a loan."

With that one 'no' vote, the banks look at that, and as I figured out later .. I couldn't figure it out at the time why???? You know, I said, "I don't understand."

Because if one vote is against it, that means there's probably others somewhere, and a lawsuit is going to crop up. And they told me later that that one 'no' vote was like the light at the end of the tunnel. And they called me and asked me if I knew how to get to Walt. And I said, "Yeah. Walt likes everybody to love him." I said, "Let him be Uncle Walt to you, and, you know ... Won Yu wants to be honored. He wants to be admired and honored and praised." And I said, "You cater to those two factors, you'll get what you want."

And it worked! It worked. I didn't do any work. I didn't even get involved it after that.

Judith: But you put a roadblock in a significant way.

Melba: And you don't really know those things. When you make that very conscientious decision of what's right and what's wrong, you can't predict. It's like the rock when you throw it in the water, you can't really predict how many ripples you're going to get. But I was told later that it was like the light at the end of the tunnel for that ... they had a chance.

Judith: You mentioned the development of the warehouse in the truck traffic. Is there anything else

that concerns you about the environmental movement today?

Melba: Well, compared to what it was in the '70s, the air is wonderful. (Laughing) In 1971, '72 I was President of Riverside Council PTA. That's all of the schools in town. And we were fighting smog. They were having the kids out there playing football practice when the smog you couldn't see across the street. It was terrible! So we got together and we made smog alert flags for the school. Every school in town had a big flag and when, by law, the schools were supposed to call all the schools and tell 'em that there was a smog alert.

They didn't do it. So we would have somebody ... a representative from each school ... from PTA, would make the call and say: There's a smog alert. Put up the flag. So they all had these big flags to put on the flagpole out in front, and then little ones ... a couple of little ones for the backyard ... for the playground.

And the kids were all told, you know ... all the parents told their kids, "You don't have to go out and play in the smog, if the yellow flag is out."

So we made (laughing) ... there were like 36 schools (laughing) and one day we got together by the sewing machines, and made all of these flags! Sears gave us the material. Riverside Tent and Awnings gave me ... No, Sears gave me the red material to make the red binding, and Riverside Tent and Awning gave me enough material for the flags. **Bright, bright yellow!**

So one group of sewers cut the material and made the bias, and others cut the flags. We had about 12 or 15 sewing machines going on one day, at one house. It was a party! We got 'em all done! One day! (Laughing)

Judith: It was a very effective public relations move.

Melba: They flew 'em at the fire station. They flew 'em at the dump. You probably wouldn't be able to find one today. I even got a little piece of wood, and I varnished it, and I bought a penholder, you know ... that's on a desk and tips for just one pen. And I mounted it on this plaque ... this little piece of wood ... and so it would fold down. Made a little bitty flag and gave it to Walt Ingles. . He was in Sacramento then

And when he went into the Assembly to vote, he was to take that with him. If there was a smog alert he was to put it on his desk and put the flag up! (Laughing) And he did.

Judith: (Laughing) Well, that situation really has been tackled. And it is much improved.

Melba: Much, much better.

Judith: What would you see as an issue that young people, especially young women, might tackle today?

Melba: Well, I think the pollution from the trucks is a problem. We never foresaw that in the '80s. When we voted for the General Plan, which the people out there put together. I didn't even sit in on the meetings. I stayed out of it. Everybody had representation. And it never occurred to anybody. We

didn't know about the diesel smoke. The smell ... we used to have objections for the smell when they would park their rigs behind a mobile home park over there, and let it run all night. The reefers . That's what they call the refrigerator trucks. A reefer. It would run all night ... and you know, the fumes from a truck are bad.

But none of us thought ... we'd never would have allowed ... if there had been some way we could have made in the General Plan ...no more than X number of warehouses Nobody even *said* the word 'warehouse'. It never came up, that I recall. Ever! It was, yeah, on the list of things that could go in here. Yes, was the warehouse.

Judith: And it was in the General Plan too that you put the Library.

Melba: Yeah. Yes. We didn't plan it to be on that spot. But it was on the to-do list. And that was an industrial zoned ... that area. But it looks nice there.

Judith: It does.

Melba: It was the only place we could find a big enough piece of property that we could afford. And I thought, you know ... this just might be a nice distraction. We knew there were a lot of houses ... it is surrounded by houses, all on the front side.

Judith: The Glen Avon Library near Orco Block

Melba: It's on the corner of Feldspar and Galina. Orco Block had been a wonderful company. They lost one of their workers one time to a heart attack, and he had been involved in Little League, so Mr. Orco called me and said that he would like to have some sort of a memorial for the gentleman. And he was going to give me \$50,000 to see that something in his honor was built.

So there had been a ball field over there that was in terrible sad repair that his team used to play. So we redid that and built restrooms and built a little ... not a cafeteria, but a little snack shop ... and an announcer's area. And we named the park for him. So that was nice. Yeah, he was very good.

Judith: The next question ... talk about the awards and achievements that you received. Were there anyone that was particularly meaningful for your community and your political work?

Melba: Senator Bob Presley used to say when he'd get an award ... "I don't really deserve this, but I'll accept it anyway." (Laughing) I was named an Outstanding Distinguished Citizen of the Year by the Riverside County Regional Medical Center Foundation. And I think probably *that*, because it was so unexpected, and it was like I said that night, "It's hard to accept a recognition and an award for something that you enjoy doing so much."

You know ... I mean you love a child. That's your recognition. So that was hard. That was hard for me to accept that. I don't know why, but it just was. But it was a nice honor.

Judith: How do you see that you have made a difference in this community, and the County, and the State?

Melba: Well, every time I hear the train go by over there (laughing) I think: Ah-hah! You know, the train. I think the train has made a tremendous ... and it will continue in years and years and years to come. The Martha McLean Park. I brought it back. It was nothing. And John Merserau who worked at Toro, he came to me one day and asked if we would consider letting him test the sprinklers at the it was then the DeAnza Narrows Park.

I said, "I think that's a great idea 'cause I want to bring it back to life anyway." And I said, "Let's just get the whole park redone."

So I called Ron Loveridge who was on the City Council, and I asked him to put in \$10,000 and I put in \$10,000, and Toro put in the pipes. And I think we bought the pump. No ... they put in the pipes and the pump, and we had water. And so then there was no reason

Then we got Pepsi Cola to put in the play park. That's still there. Been redone. And then the County has done a magnificent job. Have you been down there?

Judith: I have. I go often with my grandsons.

Melba: Isn't it beautiful? It's a hill I used to go and sit on when it was just nothing. And it's like, you know there's millions of people around you, but it's like you're out there all by yourself.

Judith: And you said you had a role in the Trail Ways. That Trail ... the side trail is very appreciated ...

Melba: Yes. I put in a trail from Fairmont to Van Buren. And now it goes on up past Redlands. A doctor that I had one time ... he was in Redlands ... he and his daughter ride to Fairmont almost every Saturday. They ride. And it goes all the way to Oh! Have you gone all the way down?

Judith: No. I've only gone from Fairmont Park to the Martha McLean Park.

Melba: Go down Arlington to Hidden Valley. Have you been into Hidden Valley?

That is wonderful. That trail is just wonderful. I wish I ... I should go ask Mike Gardner to let me borrow his Segway so I could I'd give anything to have a golf cart and do that trail.

We have some rough spots, I noticed here in Riverside. I was down Rubidoux Avenue. It goes all the way to what used to be the dump. Across Grand Street. And there's no trail there. It's just really bad. I don't know ... I think it probably got washed out, but they said they have to get off there, and then go around through Jurupa Avenue, and get back on it at Martha McLean. I think that's been washed out. I got to check on that.

Judith: What other stories can you tell us?

Melba: Oh, let's see. Let me see what I wrote down here. Oh, the buses for Riverside. I was on a Citizen's Transportation Committee. That's when we got the trails. But I also pushed for buses.

Judith: And that was before RCTC?

Melba: Oh, yes. This was '70 ... '74. I did President of Riverside PTA Council twice. '71 to '72, and '74 to '75. And I always encouraged the Presidents of the schools to get volunteers for each of the Chairmanships. Because anything that you can't get a volunteer to chair, you've got to take care of yourself. I couldn't get anybody to do the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee. So I had to follow through on my word (laughing) and so I did. I enjoyed it very much ... working with Bill Gardner. And we were trying to get buses for Riverside.

And I remember going to the Council one time and saying: "I don't understand the Council perfectly willing to spend a million dollars a year for two buses to run through Riverside, once a day, when we could have our own bus transportation." They started working on it, and we got our bus transportation.

For a while there were two buses. Norton Younglove got involved with it then on the County level. And Senator Presley got involved with it on the State level, and so it all came together. Then they had the Riverside RTA. Riverside Transit Agency. Eric Haley ran it for a while. Riverside Transit Agency. And that's how that all happened.

We used to have one RTA bus running, and a Los Angeles bus running. It wasn't RTA. It was Riverside City. One behind the other ... down Magnolia Avenue. (Laughing) Crazy. Crazy. So that's how we got the buses. I was involved with that, and the trails. Horse trails too.

Jurupa was just full of horses. In the General Plan it's completely covered with horse trails. And down in Menifee, Murrieta, Temecula ... a lot of horse people. And so they got involved and they started harping at Norton and Walt. And so, all of a sudden, Norton and Walt put it on the agenda ... a countywide trail ... Horse Trails Committee. Which was wonderful! You know, I didn't smile. Didn't smile. (Laughing)

People in Temecula came up one time, it really burned Walt, and awarded me a special award because Gene and I had gone down there horseback riding, up in the Santa Rosa Plateau. That was a beautiful experience. And so they came up and they gave me a tee shirt and said it was the award because I had the best seat on the Board. (Laughing) When horseback riding ... how you ride is ... how you're seated, you know. (Laughing)

Judith: What got you on the Board of Supervisors to begin with?

Melba: On the Board? Well, I ran for County Board of Education in '72. We were sitting in chairs, just in that same position, and an old guy, Dr. Gardner, was running. He was like 88 or something, and a kid 18, and just being smart-mouthed, I said, "Somebody middle-aged ought to run," and Gene says "Well, why don't you run?" And so I did. And didn't win. Gardner won. (Laughing) But he called Gene after the election. He called after the election and asked Gene if he could take me to dinner. And he was very biased. Very prejudiced. But he won. And I went to dinner with him, and he said, "You know, Melba ... " He said, "If you had beat me it'd been okay 'cause you' would have been really good."

And I thought that was really nice. And then I ran for City Council once, in 1975. There again one of them ... Arden Anderson, the group was it was dangerous. It was a clique. And they would meet over at the bowling alley and make their decisions Monday night, before the Council meetings on

Tuesday.

Judith: Did you call them the Palm Quartet?

Melba: Yes. I named 'em. There was Pintor, Anderson, Lorenzi, and Manning.

Cherstin: And where their full names?

Melba: Uh, Ernie Pintor, Arden Anderson, Don Lorenzi, Jim Manning. Who did I leave out? I think the Second Ward was okay. We left him alone. I can't remember who it was though. And we beat 'em. Wiped them all out.

Three out in the first election.

Judith: How did you become aware of their meeting?

Melba: Just watching, listening, paying attention. Howard Fischer had ... was it KPRO? He had the local radio station. It was right there where Staples is now. And the year before I decided to run, in '74. I went to him and I said, "Can I have 15 minutes every Wednesday morning, just as a public service?"

He said, "What do you want to do?"

I said, "Well, actually I want a spot Monday morning and then Wednesday morning." I said, "I want to tell you ... I want to get on the air and alert people to what's going to happen on Tuesday. And then I want to get on the air again Wednesday morning and tell 'em I told you so!" (Laughing)

Judith: Tuesday was the Council meeting.

Melba: Tuesday was the Council meeting. (Laughing) If that group had gotten re-elected you would **never, never** have had the protection of Victoria Avenue. You would never have had the protection of **anything** that a house and a developer's money couldn't buy. It would have been horrible! Just horrible.

And we ran an unknown, Jean Mansfield. Did you know Jean Mansfield?

Judith: Yes, I did.

Melba: And she beat him by ... oh, fifteen thousand ...

Judith: She beat Arden. . .

Melba: Beat Arden Anderson. That was in 1979.

Cherstin: How did your group get the rest of the people to run against these incumbents?

Melba: Well, they were just going to run. Ron Loveridge ran against Ernie Pintor, and Jean Mansfield

ran against Arden Anderson. And Bob Buster ran against Don Lorenzi. And I can't remember who ran against Manning.

Judith: This was a watershed in Riverside politics.

Melba: Yes.

Judith: It was after Prop 13 ...

Melba: Yes. Oh, Terry Frizzel was elected. It was Proposition R, the first measure to protect by 5 acre lots on Victoria. Jessie Meyers was involved in that, with Rosanna Scott.

Judith: Jessie Meyers was a long-term assistant to you?

Melba: She had worked for Kay. And I told Jean Mansfield, I said, "You have to support Prop R" She didn't know what it was so I explained it to her. I said, "If you don't know anymore than what I'm telling you, you support it anyway."

Judith: This is to protect the Green Belt in Riverside.

Melba: To protect the Green Belt. Absolutely. Absolutely. You wouldn't know Riverside if that hadn't have passed, and those people had been kicked out. Yeah. It was Terry Frizzel that took Jim Manning's place. And Bob Buster had a run-off with Don Lorenzi. But he beat him.

We kicked three out that night.

Cherstin: Was that a coordinated campaign? Did everyone run together on some kind of platform?

Melba: No. I never, ever worked or ran on a campaign with anybody else.

Judith: By alerting the community to the situation. ...

Melba: Well, see what I did ...

Judith: ... raised the awareness.

Melba: ... in '75 I lost. Okay. And I was well aware of what was going to happen. So come '78 ... late '77 ... early '78, I had letters to the Editor consistently. And I remember one was ... ohhh, short and sweet. They were rude to people. They were discourteous. And there was something at City Hall that they did that was just really ... well, I-can-do-anything-I-want-attitude ... you know what I mean?

And so I wrote about something that Arden Anderson said, and I said, "Everything is tied into Dominic Tavaglione." It got so bad that by the time you ran in '79 if Dominic Tavaglione's name was on your sign-up sheet, or your contributions, EHHHH, you were dead. You were dead before you ever got to the poll. It was just about four sentences, and it was **dynamite!**

And from that day forward Dominic Tavaglione was not in a political circle at all.

Judith: But he was a major player ...

Melba: Absolutely.

Judith: And then when you ran for County Supervisor ...

Melba: Same thing. I started watching ... By this time I'm involved with countywide District PTA. And so I'm getting familiar with Jurupa School District, Rubidoux School District, which was considered in the pits ... in the late '60s, '70s, early '80s. And I got to watching ... I knew Ruth Wilson. She and I got really close when she ran for Paul Anderson's place when he died. She ran, but she lost. But even before that I was watching ... when Schroeder ran in '78.... he'd left town for the day. He was out fishing. He wasn't even at the Board meeting. And I had been going from about '74, '73 to the Board Meetings. I'd been going to the Board meetings often on mental health issues, trying to get mental health. Mental health was in the Public Health Department ... locked in. And we got the measure passed in Sacramento called Lanterman, Petris Doyle Act. Anyway, there were special mental health bills giving counties a guaranteed set amount of money for having really good mental health programs.

Well, L.A got like 2 bucks a person. We were getting like 28 cents because we didn't even have a plan. So I helped write the countywide program ... That's another story ... And Isabelle Nelson and I worked on that. We used to go to the Board of Supervisors and tell them about the need, and that this Board needed to step up and provide an independent department, run by an independent person, not from the Public Health office perspective, but from a Mental Health office perspective. And they were rude. They were rude. 'Cause Robert T. Anderson was a CEO. He made a comment one day that mental health is just a state of the mind.

I thought Duh! Yes, it is.

He made a speech one time about mental health programs and when he got done I stood up and I said, "That's the best fiction I've ever heard." (Laughing)]

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: And everybody went UGHhhhhh 'cause you never talked to Robert T. Anderson like that. He was a Southern Baptist, and he was not a very nice man.

Judith: He was Chief County Executive Officer. And Dan Schroeder was the ...

Melba: Second District Supervisor.

Judith: ... Supervisor.

Melba: And so when he went fishing, that was like (slapping hands) ... that's it! He's gotta go. And a gal by the name of Pat Merrit, we called her the 'Doggie Lady' 'cause she's really in to saving pets and stuff, ran against him and didn't lose by that much! And she only had the one issue. And I started watching. And like I said, I got to know the people ... some of the people over there through PTA,

and it was just a poor area, and nobody loved it. Nobody cared about it.

And so I ran Byron Morton's last campaign in '78, and we were going out to Palm Springs one evening, and he said, "Melba, why don't you run for office?"

I said, "I thought about that. I think I'd like to be a Supervisor."

He said, "Ohh, Melba, that's the worst job in the world!"

So I thought about that. And then our youngest son was gone, and I'm sitting out in the backyard, and I'm floating around in pool ... in my rubber raft ... and I thought: Here I am. What am I going to do for the rest of my life?"

I was a nurse. I didn't want to go back. I didn't have to go to school. I didn't want to go to school. Dickie DeLoss. . . remember Dickie DeLoss? She wanted me to come in to real estate with her. I didn't want to do any book learning. (Laughing) I wanted to go do something. I thought: I think I'll run for Supervisor. And I did my sidewalk survey. Everybody said, "Yeah, yeah! Go do it! I'll help!"

So Gene and I were down at what used to be Reubens ... underneath Coco's ... and one evening in February of '81 ... and I was sort of thinking my own thoughts. He said, "What are you thinking about?"

I said, "You don't want to hear."

So he took out an envelope out of his pocket and handed it to me. He said "Write it on this envelope."

And I said, "I'm thinking about running." 'Cause I was going to run for City Council in '78. And he was just really dead-set against that. No way.

And so I acquiesced, but then I started playing tennis. So I got even with him. (Laughing)

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: I went back to playing tennis. All the time. But, anyway, I wrote: I'm thinking about running for Supervisor. And he still has that envelope. He put it in the scrapbook. And just started putting it together.

Judith: Who ran your campaign?

Melba: Rosanna and I ran the campaign. But we had a little committee. We had Les Hustis. He was well-known. He'd been on the Public Utilities Board for years. He was well-known and well-respected. Had retired from Bournes.

A man by the name of Guy Gillians from Rubidoux. I only knew two people in Jurupa when I ran. I went and met Penny Newman.. The only two people I knew in all of Jurupa.

Judith: When you were elected, did you get involved with the Stringfellow acid pits?

Melba: Yes. I met Penny Newman. We talked about it. And I went up there and looked around at it, and she briefed me on it. And the first thing I did with Stringfellow was in the first few months ... maybe two or three months I was in office ... I called Penny and said, "Penny, I'd like to name you as the Second District's Representative to help clean up Stringfellow acid pits.

To that point she was getting nowhere. They were ignoring her like she didn't exist.

Judith: And the situation was that there were hazardous materials in the quarry ...

Melba: Horrible!

Judith: ... the holes left from the quarry ... of the stone.

Melba: Anybody with any brains ... I'm not a scientist but why in the world would you put liquid up here and not figure out that sooner or later it's going to drain down there. I have a map on my wall, all of Jurupa. Huge. Probably ten, twelve feet by eight, six. All you have to do is look at it. Here's the granite hillside. Just follow the line of trees to the riverbed. What does that tell you? There's water there.

Well, I was up there when they were digging it out, and it was like pock marks, you know, just like shotgun, and every one of those little nooks and crannies had been filled over the years. You could take a litmus paper and dip it in the water coming out and it would turn blue. It was terrible! Terrible!

But Penny was getting nowhere. Nobody was giving her any attention, brushing her off as the nag. You know how that goes. And almost overnight she suddenly came respected. I didn't realize the significance of that.

The Public Health man came ... the Environmental Health guy ... Herb Hale came to me and begged me ... **begged me** not to appoint her. She's a troublemaker. 'Cause see, Riverside County pretended that they had nothing whatsoever to do with that. That the State had done it. Well, the State **had**, but the Board did not have to accept it. But they did. And I said one day publicly at the Board meeting, I said, "I don't care whether the County has responsibility in it or not. As a Board of Supervisors I'm sitting here representing that District. I feel it **is our** personal responsibility to do all we can to clean that up." And that's the way it started. Penny just took it and ran with it. And it was just amazing how that came together.

And then they got the brine line in, so they channeled that water then into the brine line, which goes down to Orange County, and just filtered out, and solved that problem nicely.

We had a problem with about five independent wells over there that had high levels of concentrated chemicals in them. And so the State put them on bottled water. Well, then they found out the State didn't want to put 'em on bottled water. Penny was asking for bottled water for them. She called me and she said, "Melba, they won't give 'em bottled water."

And I said, "Well, I think they should."

So I called Joel Markowitz and we talked about it. He said, "Melba, I can't do that."

I said, "You don't have any choice."

And I had a little basal cell ... carcinoma ... right here on my upper lip at that time, and I said, "I hate to do this to you, but if you don't. I'm going to go to the *Press* and show them I drank some water from Stringfellow about six months or a year ago, and now I have this cancer on my lip."

They got the water. (Laughing)

Not only that, but then the Glen Avon Water Company was contaminated, so they had to supply them. And I signed a request for something like over \$10,000 a month for the State to provide that bottled water.

Judith: That was a major issue during the ...

Melba: Wasn't that amazing?

Judith: ... time that Penny was active ...

Melba: All the time you're doing it you don't think ... It's only been in the last ... like talking with you that I think about it, and realize that was really a good job. Penny became known worldwide

Judith: Now as we're coming to the close of our interview, is there anything you'd like to share that ...

Melba: Well, let's see ... what I missed on my list Oh, yes! We have some more, if you have time. I stopped a tire burning facility from going in across the County line in Rialto.

Judith: Tire burning

Melba: Tire burning facility, and threatened them with a lawsuit. Grand Terrace and San Bernardino City and County went in with us. That we would have sued them. That we would have taken them to court, so they just dropped it.

The other one was the Granite ... there's a big hole over there off the Sierra that goes over the hill to Fontana, and they wanted to dump tires in there. Just dump 'em. And I didn't allow that. It's now a beautiful golf course. Just a really, really nice golf course.

Another major thing for the environment was the .. I almost forgot this ... You never see a junk car in the County of Riverside. Anywhere. What was the last time you saw a junk car sitting in the street?

Well, in 1986 I took over as the Board Chairman for the Waste Management, and Jurupa was just full. We had one place where they had 110 junk cars sitting on it. So how do we get rid of them?

Well, at that time you couldn't because the inside of the car had been declared ... it was called 'fluff', it was declared hazardous material. So one day I read a little piece in the paper about how that material could be used to seal garbage dumps. Land fills. Because it was so impermeable. And that's a problem with the closed landfill ... the water leaking through.

So I called up Bob Nelson and I said, "We have our answer." I said, "There's going to be a big market for this fluff, and the first ones in are going to make a fortune." I said, "Now we can get the junkyard people to take our cars 'cause they could take off the fluff and sell it. And we won't even have to pay to have the cars picked up!"

So, fine. We agreed. Okay, so how do we get the money to pick up the cars? We put 25 cents a month on everybody's garbage dump. The waste dump going to the waste. I said, "You have to get the cities involved 'cause they're going to want their share. They can tell you at the dump exactly how many tons Riverside dumps a day, individually. Keep records. "

So I said, "That only costs people what? I think it was 25 cents. It added up to about \$25.00 a year, so maybe it was \$2.50 a month. And they started picking up cars. Free for nothing. And we kept a Rolodex. Everybody wanted it. Dealers who wanted to pick up a car, and you were next. And you'd call and those junk cars were gone in two hours! You never see a junked abandoned car ever.

There was a place in Walt's district ... we call it Cadillac Hill ...and Bob Buster finally just got the last Cadillacs out of this two or three hundred foot ravine. You drive and you'll never see a junk car. I really ... I really liked that. Not one call objecting. See, if you have a good reason for charging people something, something that they can see, that's how you do it. And I got on Grover Trask over that because we didn't have a District Attorney working with the public ... you know on compliance, and the Public Safety, and law enforcement. And I said, "You need to assign us a permanent District Attorney. A Deputy Attorney over here."

And he said, "I don't have one."

I said, "Grover, how are you going to like it when I go out there and tell my people that the reason we can't get these cars picked up is because you won't give us a Deputy Attorney to do something about it."

We got him. (Laughing)

Judith: Was Byron Morton Deputy ... District Attorney?

Melba: He was a D.A. He died. Byron was eager for me to run. He could hardly wait. He was so excited. He was going to be my campaign chair. And he died in January before I ... He retired in November and he died in February. February or March. I was heartbroken 'cause I ran his campaign. But all of these years of doing this, when I ran and we were doing the final December ... November run-off election ... Well, also in the June election. September we were sitting in the backyard, Rosanna and I, and said, "How much money do we have in the bank?"

"\$25.00." (Laughing)

That's in August. August! (Laughing) So, how are we going to raise the money?

So I called a bunch of people and I said, "Get all the junk you've been wanting to get rid of and bring it to my house 'cause I want to have a yard sale." And I said, "With the understanding that what doesn't sell is going to the Goodwill. But if you want it back, let me know, and I'll give it back."

We raised \$2,200. George Brown came and bought a piece of driftwood for 25 bucks cash ... no records.

Judith: (Laughing) George Brown was the Congressman.

Melba: George Brown was the Congressman. Bless his heart. But we only had at the end enough money to buy labels, or enough money to pay the postage. Okay. So I had the precincts, so I went thorough all the precincts and if I knew you, you didn't get one. 'Cause I knew you'd either vote for me, or you wouldn't vote for me. So I didn't send you one. (Laughing) You didn't get one. Every other house got one if there were two voters in each house, every other one. I said, "Share this with your neighbor." (Laughing)

And I called people up and asked them if they could write mailing labels, three or four hundred a precinct. I had an in-and-out box on the front porch. They would come by, look through there, pick up their name, and it had all the labels, directions, and I told them when I needed it back. And 32,000 names and addresses in less than two weeks. Lost one. Somebody took one, gave it to her daughter to do in typing class, and her locker got ripped off and lost it. But it was just a little one.

I had a lady in Jurupa ... to this day I don't know who she is. I've never seen her. And there's a liquor store on Mission Boulevard ... not too far down the street over the bridge ... and she called and she said, "I'd really like to help you."

I said, "Do I know you?"

She said, "No. What can I do?"

This was like two, three weeks before the mailing of these labels. We were just starting that. And I said, "Well, can you write well?"

"Oh," she said, "I write beautifully."

I said, "Okay. Would you like to write some mailing labels?"

"I would be *happy* to."

"Okay. Where do you live? I'll bring them ..."

"No, no, no!" She said, "Drop them off at the liquor store, Black's Liquor Store, and I'll pick them up."

So I took her just a little one ... not very many ... and next morning she called. "It's like 150.

They're all finished. Bring me some more.”

She must have written over a thousand .. twelve, fifteen hundred ... Never saw her. To this day I don't know who she is.

But one of the newspaper reporters ... in those days they would go and spend a day with the person that's running ... so this guy wanted to run with me ... sit with me ... So I had my little manila envelope with my labels in 'em, and the precinct list. I said, “Well, I've have to make a stop here at the liquor store.” Pulled in. He looked at me and I said, “I have to turn in this envelope. You can come in if you want.”

No! I didn't ask him to come in. I said, “I'll be right back.” Ran in, traded all of them. He's looking at me. I said, “Do you want to see what's in there? Help yourself.”

And I told him the story. He didn't believe it. I said, “Look!” And then it gets better. We went up to Stringfellow. Well, it had a gate, and he got out and opened the gate. So I drove around Stringfellow and showed him this and that, then we were coming down, and the gate was shut again. The wind was blowing. I said, “Don't worry Carl. It'll open.” Just as we got there the gate just opened up.

He said, “My God! I'm a believer!!!” (Laughing)

I just had this feeling that gate's going to open and it did! (Laughing) Sesame!

Judith: Did the women elected to office in the City Council pre-figure the women elected to the Board of Supervisors, and did having the majority of women on the Board of Supervisors alter the direction ...

Melba: Yes and no. Kay would never stand with her toe up to the line. I asked her one time ... I drew a fake line in the carpet, and I said, “Kay, when are you going to step up to the line and take on the good old boys?”

She said, “I don't want to hurt their feelings.”

: And Corky went to Kay. Corky and I talked when we went out to the desert.

Judith: Patricia Larson?

Melba: Corky Larson, from the desert. The 4th District. She said she called... I didn't even get a telephone call from Kay when I was elected. The only Supervisor that called me was the one ... Clayton Record. Nice man. He'd been Supervisor before Kay Cenicerros, and we had breakfast up at Coco's, and he gave me some good advice. And didn't ask for anything. Didn't make any suggestions. Just some advice. You know, I might want to change my phone number, or get a personal phone ... which I didn't. And Corky said she called Kay, and she said it was the most disappointing meeting she'd ever attended in her life.

She asked Kay to get together the up and coming young people from the Administrative Office so they could talk about the direction of the County, and where to go, and what she saw. And she said

all they would say that there's nothing wrong with the County. It's just fine.

And she said, "I went home crying. I went home crying. I was so disappointed." No, Kay never called me. Never called me one time."

If that had been me, if I'd been Chairman on the Board, you'd bet I'd been on the phone." Not to organize anything. The joke in the Road Department was on any given Tuesday, 3 Queens beat 2 Jacks. (Laughing)

Oh, we had a lot of fun up there. It wasn't work. I had people come and say, "Melba, if you ever have an opening I'd sure like to work over here. You guys" I had Department Heads tell us that we put out more work and information than the others put together

And he said, "You're always laughing! Somebody's always laughing!"

I said, "That's how we get the work done. You make it fun." No, it was ... I think it's rare. I think you are a very fortunate individual when you find yourself in exactly the right position that you're supposed to be in in that time of your life. And it was like everything I had ever done, you know ... everything I ever wanted to know and learn brought me to right there.

Judith: You were marvelously effective.

Melba: I just loved it.

Judith: You have been a role model ...

Melba: Somebody said something ... "How are you going to get your information Melba?"

I said, "Look, I'm not going to get it from Department heads. I'll call Mary and ask her what her husband's name is because he's the janitor, and he knows. He's the one that knows what's going on. He knows who's goofing off, and who's ... (Laughing) I'd be in the elevator and they'd whip out pictures of their kids to show me. (Laughing)

Judith: And you were in office for how many years?

Melba: Twelve years. Twelve years.

Judith: And did you run unopposed?

Melba: (Laughing) Ohhh, no. In '86 it was the fourth largest money laundering scandal in the history of California at that time. With Walt Abraham chairing it against Sam Digati, and three other guys. Four other guys. There were 11 felonies and 23 misdemeanors. Some went to jail. They paid over \$600,000 in fines and forfeitures. The CPA firm Carlin and Arzoo was penalized. The opposition spent \$350,000 just against me. And I spent \$65,000.

And then in the last election in '90 ... and this is ironic because when I beat Schroeder, he spent \$65,000. I spent under \$12,000 in '82. And I got I think it was 51, 52% of the vote. In '86 with all of

that the percentage of vote was almost identical. Which meant, in my mind, everybody who voted me the first time was very satisfied. And they were going to stay with me no matter what the *Press* said.

That was interesting. When I went to the *Press* the first time I ran, I met with Tim Hays and he asked me ... he said, "Melba, who asked you to run?"

Now see, this takes you back to the Monday Morning Group. Okay? Keep that in mind. And the *Press Enterprise*. He asked me: "Melba, who asked you to run?"

I didn't get it. I didn't know what he meant. And you could tell 'cause I don't hide ... my feelings are right there.

And he said it again. (Laughing) My mind was trying to find something out of that computer to answer the editor of the *Press*. For heaven's sakes. Got me speechless.

And then he said, "Did the League of Women Voters?"

I said, "Oh!"

Then I got it. I said, "Oh, no! I asked myself to run." (Laughing) Can you believe that? I think he kind of knew I was a little ticked. I asked myself to run. Why should I have to go out and ask somebody ... can I run for an office? That's what's wrong with our politics. How do you think George Bush got elected? No offense if you're a Republican, but because all those people ... money people ... knew that they could control everything he did.

Obama got elected the same way I did. He went out to the little people on the street where I live, and gathered them in together and mobilized them. That's the difference.

Judith: Did you use that same technique with Jean Mansfield and with Rosanna Scott?

Melba: Yes.

Judith: And both of them were elected to the Riverside City Council.

Melba: Rosanna got elected in the '70s all on her own. Walking. We were clever though. I have to say this. We were clever. We would send out for the '90 election ... we'd pick a precinct and I had pre-made post cards, and on it was a blank spot, and it said, I'll be walking in your neighborhood on such and such a date, from such and such a time ... and I didn't put a time ... on a date ... I hope I have the privilege of meeting you in person. And if I miss you and you have any questions, you know, telephone number.

We mailed it out. Go walk in that precinct. Now, we didn't cover the precinct, but I would walk in that precinct, so it wasn't a lie. Then we mailed another postcard that said, "I'm sorry I missed you when I was walking in your neighborhood."

I get a contribution. There was a postcard ... my handwriting. Signed by me. Pre-printed with a stamp already on it, and I would write them ... Thank you for your contribution to my campaign, and

having the confidence in my ability to serve you well. PLUNK! In the mailbox. It took two seconds.

I had a big money-giver come to me one time and say, “You're the only person ever that's ever given me a personal thank you for making a contribution to a campaign.” And he was really impressed.

The other thing we did ... we started the campaign on November the 13th. We had our first fund raiser in '81. And raised \$1,800. We thought we'd died and gone to heaven!

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: Everybody was there. Patsy Martin held it at her house. Her husband had been a Congressman, and she was a Republican too, come to think of it. And so everybody got a little thank you note. And we did everything ourselves. Never had a campaign manager. Everything that ever went out, I wrote. Showed it to Rosanna. We'd go over it, and she's artistic so she would do some clever things with the artwork. Take it to the printer, and that's the way it was. That's what we wanted. And they were very good. They were very good.

But we had a lot of fun. We had balloons. My husband, when he retired ... for the '86th election ... he'd retired. He ordered fingernail files. I'm still using fingernail files. I mean, I didn't have any left, but they last. I meet people on the street that I haven't seen and they say: “I used your fingernail file the other day.” (Laughing) Little ticky- tacky things.

Oh, I used to ride in the Norco Parade and if I wasn't on a horse, be in a convertible, and Gene got ... and you'd throw candy at that parade. Eight, ten, twelve pounds of candy you have got to throw out. And so Gene bought tongue blades or popsicle sticks. Well, no, I think it was tongue blades, anyway ... whichever ... and then he took a caramel and he taped it around the end of the ... so you kind of threw it, you know. Man! The first parade we did down there we had balloons. Five hundred balloons. Two-hundred-and-fifty balloons we handed out.

And about a week later I was in Norco and here's a young person riding their horse, with a balloon tied to a saddle horn. There was a little kid over here in Jurupa about twelve years old, had made yard signs and put 'em up on the telephone pole in front of his house. It was people ... people friendly. They don't do that anymore. Campaign managers don't have that touch. They'll never be ...

Judith: You were the people's candidate then. You were the people's supervisor.

Melba: Yup. And it was fun. It was just amazingly a lot of fun. I had a great time.

Judith: Well, this has been very much fun on my part. I really enjoyed talking with you. Cherstin. do you have any final comments or questions to ask?

Cherstin: I'll leave that to you if you have a final experience.

Melba: There are a couple of other things if you're interested. I put together the Water Official Landscaping Plan that was passed in '94, by getting UCR and the grass growers, and allowing the landscaping people to come together for water efficiency. I saw that coming. And every new house

that was built was supposed to have a booklet left in the house ... suggestions as to water efficient plans. I don't think that had ever got kept up.

Oh, and the Jurupa General Plan required all industrial business parks to be plumbed with purple pipes. And they're now beginning to use the recycled water. So all of that over there that you see, that's been built, is all purple piped ... for landscaping.

Judith: And that is recycles water, is it not?

Melba: Yes, recycled. And I was in an office six weeks and I went to Sacramento to tell 'em how to run their Waste Department. (Laughing) Had a little diagram but they couldn't put it up. I told them "You have got to divide it in half. You've got all your garbage ... all your waste in one department. You need to have a Hazardous Waste Department and a Waste Management Department."

They do. They did later on.

But I was the leader in getting ... when I got on the Waste Management here ... _Co-Swmp Board as chairman, we also put the recycle through. And we were one of the earlier ones in the state to have a recycle program. I was pleased about that.

The Coast-to- Crest Trail, Barton Flats to Huntington Beach. And I was ... like I said, the leader on the mainstem project ... the Seven Oaks Dam and one of those with the Corps of Engineers.

Cherstin: Oh, can you tell us a little bit more about the dam project

Melba: Yes. Well, the Board of Supervisors, prior to my term, had voted to go with it.

Cherstin: And which dam was this again?

Melba: It's open. It's built. It's complete.

Cherstin: The Seven Oaks Dam

Melba: Up above Yucaipa, Mentone, up in there. I verbally said one day if I'd been on the Board it wouldn't have happened the way that it had. But it was built strictly for the privilege of Orange County. The Corps of Engineers looked the other way and they had built hundreds and hundreds of thousands of houses in the floodplain. And so then the Corps redesigned where the floodplain was. They changed it. And ohhhh, now we got all these houses that are going to flood!

Riverside County lost about, oh, I think about 50 or 60 large dairies, and quite a few houses. And we were not compensated whatsoever for the property tax from that forever. And if I'd been on the Board, Orange County ... somebody would have been paying property tax for a lot of years to compensate Riverside County. But that's water under the bridge.

So I was on the Committee and there were three of us. There was Harriet Wieder, Supervisor of Orange County. Barbara Riordan from San Bernardino, and myself. And we started meeting with the Corps of Engineers on the mainstem project. And things were going well, but the Corps was ... they

say one thing, then you go back to Washington to meet and sign the papers, and they would have them changed ... anything that you had decided on here was totally ignored back there.

So we were going back to the final meeting. The last minute they decided to slip in that there would be a five-member panel from Orange County that in case there was a dispute over something, that those people would be appointed from the citizenry to make the final decision.

Now, Orange County also had a group of men much like our Wednesday Morning Group, and I knew this from Harriet.

And even if that hadn't been the case, no way. And I said, "No. We're not going to do that because I'm elected to represent these people, not somebody in Orange County." And I said, "We're not going to do that."

Well, I remembered the Tennessee Valley Authority ... that took years, because there were so many disputes. And I remembered that. So we were down to the last stages and we were still fighting over this. We had been back to Washington, D.C and we had agreed that the three Boards of Supervisors would sign the agreement.

We get back to Washington, D.C and we're meeting with the General at this long table ... he's at the end and I'm over here on the right, and he says: "Oh, this is the way it's gonna be." ... Right back where we started.

And I said, "Time out. Wait a minute! You send people out to Los Angeles. We go into Los Angeles. We take our time. We sit down for hours. We make an agreement. We come back and every time we come back here you've changed it." I said, "No! We're not signing that agreement." So we left. We all just got up and walked out.

So, the next thing I knew somebody ... this mediator ... is coming from Washington, D.C to sit with us at the Flood Control Office. A big long table. The three ladies are all right here, arm-in-arm, and the mediator is sitting way down there, and he just starts off by telling us that this is the way it's going to be. And I'm sitting there and I'm listening and I'm thinking ... First of all I didn't like him sitting down there. ... He should have been right here.

And I didn't know this until about three years ago. And nicely, I say, "Mr. So and So, I don't think you understand what's going on here. I'm Supervisor Melba Dunlap and I represent X number of people and I'm responsible for making decisions for these people. I said, "This is Supervisor Harriet Wieder" and I said she represents da, dah, dah ... and told her, "This is Supervisor Barbara Riordan, and we make the decisions."

And he said, "Well, it's in the book that says ta, ta, da, dah, dah, dah,..." And I said, "Yes, I know what's in the book. That book was written because of the Tennessee Valley Authority. You guys couldn't get your act together with the people in the communities, and it took years to settle the lawsuits. We have all agreed, at more than one time, that we'll be willing to have mediation if there's a disagreement. We will be willing to have binding arbitration.

He said, Well, if it's in the book," I say, "You're just going to have to tear that page out of the

book and write a new page because we're not signing it." So they threw out the page. When I left office he wrote me a nice letter and said he was retiring, and he wanted to tell me how much he appreciated that day

And he said, "You're a great mediator. (Laughing) So two years ago at the Supervisor's Christmas breakfast I usually go to, Pete Lyons was our County Counsel (attorney) at the time, and he was sitting by my right. And he turned to me, and Ken Edwards, who was our Flood Control Manager at the time was sitting on my left. And he said to me, "Melba, I'll never forget that last meeting that we had with the Corps of Engineers. I've never been so proud of anybody in my life as I was you."

And I looked and I said, "Really?"

He said, "You were absolutely magnificent."

And I said, "What did I do?"

He said, "He had control. He knew he had control of that and he was gonna ram this You took that meeting away from him and he didn't even know what was happening."

I said, "Well, I wasn't rude, was I?"

And he said, Oh, no! It was pure joy (laughing) to watch you."

And that really surprised me 'cause I was never known for being really very patient, I think ... or maybe thoughtful, or politically mannered, you know. But no, no, I didn't want to be rude to him, I just wanted him to understand. I really didn't believe that he realized who we were.

The first time I went to Washington, D.C with Ken Edwards, 'cause I was Chairman of the Flood Control , he introduced me to one of the Corps of Engineers. He was chit-chatting. He said, "Oh! This is one of the other Supervisors I brought along with me."

And I said, "Yes. I'm Supervisor Melba Dunlap. Ken works for me."

I got respect after that. They looked at each other and kind of smiled. I said it nice, with a sweet face.

I said, "Yes, Ken is one of our employees. He works for me."

There was a lot of that. Corky and I wanted to interview the. . . they had Department heads up there for 38 years who never been given a review. Ever. Ever!

Judith: County of Riverside?

Melba: Yes! They didn't have Department Head reviews. So Corky and I set it up, and the day we were supposed to review the Road Department guy, Jack something ... I can't remember his last name. He retired. He didn't come to his appointment. He retired. And I heard later that they all wore black armbands that day. (Laughing)

Yeah ... I think we scared 'em, but I think we really changed the County behavior. These guys were at least polite. I don't agree with all they're doing. I think there's a lot of favoritism. There's a lot of bickering. We had no bickering on the Board. We had none of that sniping that these guys do. None of it. No matter what went on back here ... I knew Walt Abraham was involved with laundering money in March of 1986. All I had to do was look at Sam Digati's financial ... right there in front of you. You'll see money was laundered against me in '82 to Don Schroeder. It was in my head. I could read those things and tell you. And Rosanna and I got it, we just looked at each other and didn't say a word. Just let it ride. Let's see how far it's going to go.

Then in October we wrote a letter to the Fair Political Practices, the *Press-Enterprise*, and the District Attorney's Office. And it took 'em three years to put it all together.

I later found out ... couldn't understand why Walt didn't get more of a punishment. He wasn't even fined. And the meeting to launder the money was held at his house. And a person that was there told me about it. Two people that were there told me about it. And I kept it in my head. Didn't say a word. Didn't say a word. Wouldn't do any good at that time. My turn will come. You know, I can wait. I'm patient.

And in 1989 they piled a search warrant on Carlin and Arzoo, the accounting firm and found this IBM box, about this big, full of consecutively numbered money orders. Had that been me ... I would have burned them the next day in the fireplace. So arrogant. And so conceited that they thought I'm too stupid to know anything, and they could get away with it. But they didn't. They didn't. We got 'em.

But if more had been done I really think it might have avoided the San Jacinto horrible Council scandal. I think it would have stopped that.

Judith: How is that related to this?

Melba: If it the penalties had been penalties like they should have been. Sam Digati wrote a letter saying he wouldn't run for election anymore. Walt Abraham got off with nothing. Nothing! Nothing! Because it said that he ... even though he held it at his house ... he'd gone into the kitchen to get some coffee when they talked about how they laundered the money.

I had a list of all the guys who gave the money. I even had the list of the Chairman of the money laundering . One year at Christmas about four years ago I thought: You know what it'll be fun to get a nice Christmas card, and mail it to those guys, and enclose that list.

Judith: She never forgets! (Laughing)

Melba: I think if there had been punishment ... big, bold punishment ... it would have given San Jacinto something to think about. Maybe they would have read that. Maybe they would have remembered. Maybe other people in the community would have been more aware. Same people still launder the money. I see it in the paper. The publisher who gave what??? It's still the same people. Lou Laramore is still giving money.

And he had the audacity to send me \$1,000 at my next fundraiser. And I made an appointment and I took it back to him. And I went in. . . I was being nice. When we went out, I took Rosanna with me, when we came back to the car . . . she said: “You were **absolutely** brilliant! “

And I said, “What? What? I just told him it was okay.”

She said, “No you didn't.”

I said, “Well, what did I say?”

She said, “You told him that there was not a shovelful of dirt turned over in Jurupa that I didn't know about, and that if he wanted something, he should make an appointment and come to my office. Not do it behind my back.”

And I thought that was a nice way. I don't regret saying that. It was nice. I wanted him to know that I know what's going on. And he learned it quickly. He sent me a check, and I took that back. The next year he sent Kay a check, and Kay came and asked me if she should keep the check. And I said, “I took mine back.”

She said, “What?”

I said, “He sent me one Kay, and I returned it. I refused to accept it.”

She kept it. She kept it.

Judith: You had a forthrightness that was very admirable.

Melba: Kay was afraid to do anything that she thought would go against her politically. She always evaluated. She had some people in her office one day, and she came over and got me and said, “I want you to meet these guys. They're involved with hazardous waste haulers.” And she said, “They're really good people to know if you want to know 'em, because if you ever run for another office, they'll give you a lot of money.”

So I thought: Oh, I don't care about that. But I went over, out of courtesy, 'cause I was new on the Board, and when they left I was still there. She said, “What'd you think?”

I said, “Kay, they're a bunch of crooks!” (Laughing) First time I met Jerry Eaves. I told my assistant, “Don't have anything to do with him. He's a crook.”

I just have that knack. I'm either right on, or so far off it's unbelievable. There's no half-way in between.

Melba: I told you not to ask . . . (Laughing)

Judith: Thank you. Thank you. Tell us about the women at the Wednesday Morning Group, sitting around this table, and how you strategized.

Melba: Well, what we did was we really didn't ... the most effective thing we did was ... Ethel got the idea We were talking one day about campaigns, and I said, "Ethel, what's your biggest problem when you're planning a campaign?"

And she said, "Trying to teach 'em how to do it."

I said, "Well, why don't we have a seminar and teach 'em ... teach 'em before we get 'em ... you get 'em."

Well, Frances Nelson was on the Board of Trustees at RCC, so we did a campaign class.... are you ready for this?"Rare, Medium or Well Done."

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: That was the pun on our kitchen table ... the round table. 'Cause Ethel had a round table in the kitchen too. (Laughing) "Rare, Medium or Well Done." The guy that was supposed to help us run it didn't want us to call it that.

I said, "We have our reasons."

This is interesting. We mailed it out only to women. All the women's groups. All the women's groups. We didn't mail it to any men's groups. 80% were men. 80% of the attendees were men .

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: Every person that was running for office in '82 ... Grover Trask, Cois Byrd who were running for office were at that campaign. Byron Morton. And it was the first time our names were ever public.

Judith: Ethel Silver was an adviser to me in the planning for the Library Measure C. She was gracious and her advice was very good and I think we can credit her with our success .

Melba: Yeah, she was good.

Judith: ... the things she said. "You never send out any information without a contribution envelope."

Melba: That's correct. And Blaine Rawdon, in 1975 did my first brochure. And I saw him the other day and I said: "I still remember what you taught me on campaigning brochures."

And he said, "What's that?"

"Your name has to be on at least five times." And we always made sure that the name was there. But *Melba* got a lot of attention. Just that name. *Melba*. It was different, and it got a lot of attention. And so we would put *Melba*, and we'd put Dunlap down here.

Well, I can't think of anything else. The Metro Link, and the Santa Ana River ... that was fun. I used to talk up the Norco Bluffs. We'd have dinner back there with the Corps people. And Norco Bluffs were being eroded, and they were not paying the least bit of attention to it. But over in San

Bernardino County this little San Timeteo Creek was like 5 feet deep and getting a lots of attention. We have the Norco Bluffs 30 feet, and the houses were beginning to fall in. So every time we went, every year, I'd talk about Norco Bluffs.

San Bernardino County went to Ken Edwards. Ken Edwards came to me and asked me if I'd back off talking about the Norco Bluffs. And I said, "No. Why should I?"

He said, "Well, San Bernardino County is getting a little upset."

And I said, "So let 'em get upset." I said, "Norco Bluffs ... they're talking about this little creek. I'm talking about Norco Bluffs. Bluffs!"

So that night at the dinner table at the Inn, the Master of Ceremony said, "Supervisor Dunlap, do you want to say anything about Norco Bluffs?"

I said, "No thank you. You just did." (Laughing)

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: And then we went to sign the deal, and guess what? It wasn't in there. And San Timeteo wasn't in there either, until the final. And it got slipped in because Jerry Lewis was in the Office of Management and Budget. So I saw him at the signing party and I pulled him aside and I said, "I'm this close to not signing because of Norco Bluffs."

He said, Melba, I promise you that'll be taken care of,"

I said, "I'm going to hold you to that."

He did. The money came through. The money came through to help Norco Bluffs. Yeah. But there's a lot of ... just little things ... It's fun to be ... It was fun to be in a place like the Public Health Department and the Mental Health. John Ryan was giving a report when I was first on the Board, about mental health. And when he finished, I said, "Mr. Ryan, do you think that you could provide more programs and better programs if you were an independent department?"

He said, "Yes, ma'am. I do."

And I said, "Well then I think we should."

And Kay said, "Supervisor Dunlap, is that in the form of a motion?"

I said, "Yes, it is." And I said, "I move that we direct the Administrative Office to immediately take the necessary steps to make Mental Health an independent department with John Ryan, the Director."

And it was done. And Walt kind of moved in his chair and Norton shifted his feet and sat up. He said, "Well, Supervisor Dunlap, what we usually do is send this kind of a situation down to the Administrative Office, and they study it and they come back with a recommendation."

I said, "Supervisor Younglove, you've been studying this for 12 years. I think that's long enough." It was a 5-0 vote. That was it. Done.

The next week you couldn't get in the meeting room. 'Cause I've been up there often enough to say maybe there's a dozen people ... two dozen people ... it was **packed!** Mike Snuffin was the Personnel Director, and I knew his wife. We were good friends. He only sat with me. Even when I was running for office, he'd come and sit with me if I was in the Boardroom. That really amazed me, knowing how they work now.

But, anyway, I said, "What's going? Why is everybody?"

He said, "Are you kidding? They're afraid if they're not here they're going to miss out on something." (Laughing)

Judith: (Laughing)

Melba: He said, "Nobody's going to miss a Board meeting from now on with you girls here."

Judith: So this was staff that was attending the meeting?

Melba: Oh, yeah!

Judith: Staff.

Melba: Oh, yes. Yes indeedy! They were afraid we were going to do something else. Somebody else's department. So ... okay?

Cherstin: Very good. I'm going to turn this off.

