

VIRGINIA WOMEN ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION

ROANOKE CHAPTER

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ATTORNEY: Angelica Didier Light

INTERVIEW DATE: May 10, 2023

INTERVIEWER: Sharon R. Chickering

VIDEOGRAPHER: Melissa Stephens

TRANSCRIBER: Mary J. Butenschoen

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1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** I'm Sharon R. Chickering,
2 Esquire, and the date is May 10, 2023. We're interviewing
3 Angelica Didier Light, one of the first women attorneys to
4 practice in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia.

5 This interview is part of the Oral History Project of
6 the Virginia Women Attorneys Association, Roanoke Chapter,
7 interviewing the first women attorneys to practice in the 23rd
8 Judicial Circuit of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

9 The interview today is being recorded at the
10 Charlottesville, Virginia, home of Angelica Light, and the
11 videographer is Melissa Stephens.

12 Angelica, do I have your permission to record this
13 interview?

14 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes, you do.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** All right. Could you tell us
16 a little bit about your childhood, when you were born, where,
17 names of your family, and just a little bit about growing up.

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** I was born Angelica Preston
19 Didier in -- actually, in Paris, Kentucky, but at two weeks old
20 I was moved up to Maumee, Ohio, where I was raised. My parents
21 were both from the South, but followed my grandfather up there,
22 who offered my father a job after he returned from the War,
23 World War II. I have two brothers -- had two brothers -- an
24 older brother, D'Arcy, and a younger brother, Joe.

25 My father worked in his -- in his father's cannery

1 for several years before becoming a salesman in Toledo, Ohio.
2 And my mother got her master's of teaching so that she could
3 actually teach at a private school where my grandmother was
4 sending my older brother, but there wasn't enough money to send
5 all of us. So she got a job there and was able to get free
6 tuition. So we had a wonderful private school education in
7 Toledo.

8 We had a headmaster who had gone to school at
9 Williams College. He was bound and determined to send his
10 brighter children out of Ohio to the East. And so I and two
11 others of my classmates went to Smith College in 1967.

12 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell us a little bit about
13 your educational background and your college experience.

14 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, I loved being at Smith.
15 It was very exciting. It was a brand-new world. I have to
16 tell you about the first morning when I came down to breakfast
17 in my dormitory, called a house. One of my new classmates was
18 sitting at the table, and she was reading the *New York Times*.
19 And I said, "Good morning." And her first words were: "What
20 do you think about this abortion business?" And I said to
21 myself, "I'm not in Ohio anymore. This is very different."

22 And it was very different. It was a wonderful
23 growing experience. And while I was there, from '67 to '71,
24 was the height of the Vietnam War Protests. And there were
25 some very exciting things that happened for me and to me during

1 that -- those years.

2 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So if I understand correctly,
3 you were involved in some protests?

4 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, that's true. We really
5 all were. And I think that generation became highly
6 politicized because of it.

7 One of the things that I had been involved in was the
8 local Episcopal youth group, and through that group I met a
9 bishop from South Africa, an Episcopal bishop who had been
10 thrown out of South Africa because he had given communion to
11 both blacks and whites.

12 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And he was living in California,
14 but he was doing a special retreat for the Princeton and Smith
15 youth groups at a Seabury House in Connecticut. So he and I
16 met there; had interesting conversations.

17 And in the fall of '69, he called our chaplain there
18 at Smith College and said, "Find Angelica and ask her if she
19 wants to be an aide. I'm going to the big march in Washington
20 in November."

21 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And what's the big march?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** The big march was the March on
23 Washington to protest the war.

24 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It was the big Moratorium March.

1 And I went, and we were with the celebrity brigade of
2 protestors, and that included songwriters, Arlo Guthrie, and,
3 let's see, who else was there? We had just a whole pamphlet --
4 oh, we had Dr. Spock; we had Harvey Cox, who was a theologian
5 at Harvard; we had Peter, Paul and Mary. They were all in a
6 great assemblage. And we were walking at the -- at the
7 beginning, at the head of the March, and we were surrounded by
8 a ring of dark-suited men. And they actually were almost
9 holding their hands around us.

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, wow.

11 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And they all had little lapel
12 pins, and we had no idea who they were. And later we simply
13 surmised that they were part of the FBI or Secret Service or
14 some organization like that of the federal government to ensure
15 that these high profile protesters didn't get harmed, perhaps
16 either by the other protesters or by the police.

17 So we got to the Washington Monument, which was the
18 place we were headed, and we sat in the grandstand. And the
19 opening words came from -- well, after Mrs. King spoke and
20 started the assemblage, and there were about 500,000 people
21 gathered there --

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

23 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- at the monument.

24 The next person up was Dr. Benjamin Spock, who was
25 the great pediatrician and writer who had produced the baby

1 book for the post-war parents. And he started his remarks with
2 "My children." And of course, we all were. We had been raised
3 according to his --

4 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

5 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- his suggestions and advice.
6 And I think our parents were ruining that advice that they had
7 taken, because my father was adamant about objecting to my
8 being involved in the protest. Oh, he was just afraid for my
9 safety, but he also said, "I'm a Marine. That's un-American to
10 do that." And but we -- we finally reconciled on that,
11 especially after my brother was subject to the draft and had to
12 go in.

13 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That was D'Arcy?

14 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Uh-huh.

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell me a little bit about
18 Smith College in terms of what kind of -- what kind of college
19 is that?

20 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It's an all women's college,
21 about 2500 women. It was part of the original seven sisters,
22 to include Vassar and Wellesley and Bryn Mawr and the other
23 fine women's colleges that sprang up early on in the late 1800s
24 to educate young women, and in the face of the fact that they
25 were not permitted to the men's Ivy League colleges, weren't

1 admitted. So the women's colleges were formed, mostly there in
2 the East.

3 And it was a -- a place of -- it was really
4 liberating to be on the campus with just all women. You know,
5 you didn't have to worry what you looked like. You weren't
6 jockeying for position in class to sit next to so-and-so. It
7 was just a -- it was a very freeing moment.

8 And our -- our president then was the son of a
9 Smithy.

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

11 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And he said, "This is where you
12 are first class citizens, and don't you ever forget it when you
13 go out into the world." And it was -- it was a place that
14 really, you know, gave us backbone --

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very nice.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- and helped us surmount some
17 of those barriers that we, as young women in the '70s, faced as
18 we were heading off into careers.

19 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what -- what time frame
20 were you at Smith?

21 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** I was there from '67 to '71.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. And if I understand
23 correctly, that was around the time that the Kent State --

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes.

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** -- shooting occurred?

1 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** No. That happened in 1970, so
2 it was after the March. It was in -- actually, I looked it up.
3 It was May 4th.

4 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, wow. So a month --

5 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** So 53 years ago --

6 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

7 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- last week. And it was -- I
8 was sitting in the student cafeteria over at the University of
9 Massachusetts because we could take classes at any of the black
10 colleges in the Connecticut Valley. And up on the big
11 television jumbo screen was the news clip --

12 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- of the shootings at Kent
14 State and the death of the four students and the wounding of
15 seven others. And it was galvanizing for all the students in
16 the area.

17 That next day we gathered at J.M. Greene Hall on the
18 Smith campus to try to figure out what we were going to do, and
19 a fellow from Amherst College jumped up on the stage and said,
20 "Here's what we're going to do!" And we basically said,
21 "Someone get the hook and get that guy off the stage."

22 So -- so we then planned our response, and much of
23 the unrest at that point was due to the bombing in Cambodia --

24 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- where Nixon had decided he

1 needed to take out what he considered to be the staging grounds
2 for the communists in Vietnam.

3 And so we -- we decided that we would stage a strike,
4 and we did. That was the spring of my junior year. We went to
5 sit-ins; we had seminars; we did not go to class. And my
6 father, who was very upset about this, he and my mother flew
7 out from Ohio to have a conversation with me about all of this.

8 And they were paying good money, and Mother --

9 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- was still working in order
11 to pay that tuition.

12 And he was not convinced by my arguments, but
13 fortunately we were going to be permitted to take our exams in
14 the fall when we returned. So I wasn't losing a semester as a
15 result of the strike.

16 And his comment to me, finally, was: "You know, I
17 sent you to college to get an education and not all these wild,
18 crazy ideas." And I truly thought for years I should have sent
19 that in to Campus Humor for the *Reader's Digest*.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes. Yes. Oh, wow.

21 So you went from Smith where?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** To Washington & Lee. Well,
23 first I had an interim. I did not realize that I wanted to go
24 to law school until my senior year, and I was taking con-law
25 courses both at Smith and over at Amherst, and I was just

1 fascinated. I was on fire. I thought it was the most
2 interesting thing ever. And I was a history major, but -- but
3 that played into it in a way because the Constitution is -- is
4 something that really --

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- comes from history --

7 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

8 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- and has a history all of its
9 own in terms of its interpretation.

10 So I decided I was going to come back to Northampton
11 after the summer, and I worked as a waitress at the local
12 Hilton and learned how to read the horse racing sheet. It was
13 quite an education.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** I bet.

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Then in November went on to
16 Boston where I had worked as a nanny the summer before. Stayed
17 with that family in the suburbs of Boston and worked at a law
18 firm, Nutter McClennen & Fish, a very old line law firm. And
19 I worked for a wonderful attorney by the name of Florence
20 Linde. And Florence Linde was Jewish and female, and she was
21 given the estates department to handle. So when the estate
22 matters were to be settled, she handled that.

23 We typed up all the inventories of all the property
24 in those estates, and, of course, at that point we didn't have
25 corrector tape. You started over --

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

2 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- if you made a mistake. And
3 I realized two things. Actually, she helped me realize two
4 things. That one, I couldn't type; and two, that I -- I was
5 underemployed.

6 And I realized when I went to sit in for -- as work
7 as a secretary for one of the young associates, he was a mess.
8 I don't know how he got hired in the first place. I said,
9 "God, I can do this."

10 So I at that point had applied to law school, or was
11 in the course of it, and applied to W&L simply because my
12 father sent me an excerpt from his alumni magazine that said
13 the law school was going to start admitting women.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So your father went to W&L as
15 well.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** He did. He did. And my
17 grandfather taught there. In fact, that's how my father had
18 met my mother. She was a year ahead of him. She had skipped
19 eighth grade because nobody in Lexington, Virginia, ever went
20 to eighth grade.

21 So she was there around on the campus. He started
22 dating her. He was -- he had to take -- he was a great
23 football player, and that's kind of why he had gone there.
24 They said, "Bring your track shoes." And he was having trouble
25 with Latin, so she agreed to tutor him, and they fell in love.

1 And six months into their dating, they found out they had been
2 born on the same day.

3 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, my goodness.

4 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** So it was fate.

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's great.

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And they were -- they were
7 always a lovely couple and great parents, but from another
8 era.

9 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** But interestingly enough, I've
11 always known that my mother had -- she had real ambition, and
12 she was glad to have me out there living out that ambition for
13 her.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very nice. Very nice.

15 So you do have a connection to Botetourt County; is
16 that correct?

17 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, that -- that, too.

18 My father's -- on my father's side, he is of the
19 Preston clan. There was a William Preston, who came over as a
20 Scotch-Irish immigrant during the mid 1700s. And he traveled
21 down the Valley from the Staunton area on down to -- down to
22 the Roanoke area, Roanoke Valley. He ended up at Fincastle.

23 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Built a home there, which was
25 basically a fort. It was attacked a few times by Indians, and

1 my father always found lots and lots of arrowheads in the
2 fields around Greenfield.

3 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

4 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Then William Preston moved on
5 down to Blacksburg, where he built the home Smithfield, which
6 is an historic site now.

7 But it was -- it was a big family. A lot of them
8 participated in the early days in Virginia government. And at
9 one point my son, who was a law student at the time working --
10 clerking in the summer, was sitting in the -- in the
11 legislative -- I guess he was in the House of Delegates section
12 of the -- of the buildings there in Richmond. And he saw a
13 portrait in a back room of a Preston. He said, "Is he one of
14 ours?" I said, "I think so. They all were."

15 But that large family, my grandmother was one of 10
16 children there --

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- in Fincastle, and so there
19 were lots of cousins around for my father, and lots of cousins
20 around for me. He had 17 first cousins, and I have 36 second
21 cousins from that group.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

23 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And I have two -- three of those
24 families living here in Charlottesville.

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow. So how did you find out

1 that you had gotten into W&L?

2 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, well, that was kind of fun.

3 I had applied. I hoped I'd get in. My law boards
4 weren't that great. The grades were fine, but somehow -- and I
5 should have known this, thinking back on it. My law boards
6 were fine, but not spectacular. W&L was probably the only
7 place I was going to get in. And I got in because they were
8 really looking for women. And interestingly enough, I think
9 they were looking for sort of safe women. All of us had
10 parents or grandparents who had gone to W&L.

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And with my grandmother living
13 there in Lexington and playing Bridge with the secretary of the
14 law school, and the secretary of the law school was kind of in
15 charge of putting the applications in this pile or that pile
16 before sending them in to the dean, I was pretty well assured
17 that I would have a place.

18 And I thrived. I really enjoyed law school. It
19 was -- we had a wonderful class of guys. Both the first-year
20 class and my brother's class a year ahead of me were filled
21 with veterans from service in the Vietnam War.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Do you think that made a
23 difference?

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It did. They were mature. Many
25 were married. My brother's class, many of them were married.

1 And they were serious about getting their degrees. And so
 2 there wasn't -- there wasn't a whole lot of playing around.
 3 The wives were out working, teaching in the schools around
 4 Rockbridge County under miserable conditions. And sometimes
 5 when I would see some of those guys sitting in the lounge
 6 reading *Field & Stream*, I said, "You need to be going home to
 7 your wife." And, "Oh, my gosh, it was a wonderful story."

8 Lexington is a lovely small town, and one day I was
 9 at the -- at the corner just enjoying some conversation with
 10 classmates. I'm walking back to the law school that was still
 11 on the front part of the campus at that point, and a woman came
 12 in with a small child in hand, and says, "Does anyone know this
 13 child? I found him wandering on the campus." Couldn't have
 14 been more --

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- than three-and-a-half or
 17 four. I said, "Oh, yes, that's a law student's child."

18 So I took the child and walked him down the colonnade
 19 and up the stairs, because I knew that the fellow was in my
 20 brother's class, and they were in con-law at the moment. So we
 21 went to the third floor, and I knocked on the door, opened it
 22 up, and I said, "Michael, I think you are missing something."
 23 And of course, everyone said, "Whoa, what is this woman doing
 24 carrying a child? This is what she's good for," you know --

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes, yes, yes.

1 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- it was all that kind of
2 reaction. But it was a funny -- it was a funny situation,
3 because I've always been -- I've always loved small children,
4 and I've been blessed to have two of my own. Right now, gosh,
5 nine grandchildren.

6 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

7 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** So it's -- it was a special sort
8 of realization on my part. Yes, I loved law school, but I also
9 really wanted a family.

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So at that time, W&L, the
11 undergraduate school, was still not coed.

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Correct.

13 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** It was all male. And the law
14 school was -- it was 1972 that first year that you --

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** That's correct.

16 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And that was the year that it
17 was -- that it became coed. Do you know what happened, why
18 they became coed?

19 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, that's another good story.
20 It seems that Ruth Bader Ginsburg was assigned to serve on the
21 ABA's school committee on women in the law.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

23 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Women in law schools, actually.
24 It was related to the schools. And they had an
25 anti-discrimination policy that was in effect. It was race and

1 religion and place of origin. Those were the three criteria.
2 And she said, of course, "Why not sex?"

3 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

4 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Which was always her podium.
5 And so they adopted that. And as soon as they adopted --
6 because she had found out that there was a law school that
7 didn't admit women, and she was just appalled.

8 And so they all agreed to put sex into the
9 requirement. The ABA approved it, and our dean had been
10 pushing for it. He'd come from the University of Michigan, and
11 he said, "That's the only way we can become a leading law
12 school." And so most of the faculty was in favor of it. There
13 were some older gentlemen who were not keen on it. They had
14 always been at W&L in an all male environment, but the
15 president of the University thought it was really fabulous, and
16 of course they had to do it because otherwise they were going
17 to lose their accreditation.

18 So it -- I was a beneficiary of that, as were the
19 other five women in my class.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So did you see it as a -- as
21 a real transition to go from an all women to almost all male
22 institution?

23 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, it's funny, I never really
24 saw it in those terms. I enjoyed being in the all female
25 environment, and I had plenty of guy friends all through high

1 school, and having guy friends at my class at law school was
2 fine. I didn't see a real problem.

3 The interesting point was that we had to keep helping
4 the older faculty members not use our restroom. We had been
5 given the male -- the male -- the men's faculty restroom,
6 which, of course, had its urinals in it.

7 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, yes.

8 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And so when we got the bathroom,
9 we put in cherry -- those little -- well, they were little
10 cherry tomato plants or something --

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- they had put in there,
13 decorative. They died.

14 But we got CBL and we got Professor Light to not come
15 in, and we -- we all survived. It was a small building, and
16 there were -- there were 72 in my class and the same in the
17 other classes. So we were all kind of, you know,
18 shoulder-to-shoulder in that building, and fortunately after I
19 graduated they had a new building to move into.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So you were one of six women
21 in that class?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** That's right. There was a
23 seventh who started that year, and she had been hired as the
24 assistant law librarian. She had a library degree, but she
25 needed her law degree in order to become a head law librarian.

1 And so Sally Wiant started with us, and she received her degree
2 a year after we did and became the head librarian when her
3 predecessor retired and was there for over 30 years.

4 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, wow.

5 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes.

6 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. So during that time
7 did you do any internships or anything like that?

8 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes. Every summer you needed a
9 clerkship to get your feet wet, and I was fortunate enough to
10 know a fellow in Toledo through my father's social circle, and
11 he was the head of Dana Corporation. So I got a clerkship
12 there in their law department, and that was a great experience.
13 I got to do a little traveling to Washington. I was dealing
14 with some of the regulatory matters that impacted the
15 automotive supply industry, and that's where I was working.
16 That was great.

17 The next year, my second year, I was participating as
18 a witness in a trial practice course, and in the course of
19 that, a third-year man, Curt Steele, in my brother's class,
20 interviewed me as part of the trial practice, and after I
21 played my part he was telling me about his clerkship at Norfolk
22 & Western Railway down in Roanoke. And I said, "Well, that
23 sounds interesting," because I at that point had already
24 figured that I was probably best suited for a corporate
25 practice. I had enjoyed that first summer arriving at 9 and

1 leaving at 5. And I said, "This could be a nice way to live."

2 And so I did. I applied for the job. Actually, I
3 think I may have been recruited, to a certain extent, because I
4 think Curt let the general counsel at N&W know that I was
5 interested in corporate work. That gentleman was named Martin
6 Burks. And Martin Burks had a very outspoken wife and three
7 outspoken daughters, and I think he knew it was really time
8 that the Railroad got with the program and hired a woman --
9 more women executives, and he was best placed to get a woman
10 lawyer.

11 And so I went down, interviewed for the job, and it
12 was -- it was an interesting interview. He said, "Now,
13 Angelica, I think I know your Great Aunt Susan." I said,
14 "There at Fincastle?" He said, "Yes," he said, "I used to
15 spend the most wonderful summer afternoons sitting on the porch
16 chatting with her and her brothers and sisters, and we had high
17 times there at that house at Greenfield in Botetourt County."
18 And I said to myself, "I think this is going pretty well."

19 And sure enough, 30 minutes later after some
20 chit-chat -- I had written a law review article. We talked a
21 little bit about that. -- he called in the Vice President of
22 Law, Jack Shannon, and they offered me the job, the clerkship.
23 And I was so excited that I was actually going to be earning
24 some real money that I went to Tanglewood Mall and bought a new
25 pair of shoes. It was a great day.

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So did you feel that your
2 gender affected your practice in -- at the Railroad in any way?

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Not really. I was fortunate
4 enough to be in the law department, which was highly respected
5 at the Railroad. Because the chief executives had always come
6 out of the law department. And the lawyers always ran N&W.
7 They came from the Pennsylvania Railroad, our predecessor, and
8 it was a tradition that senior executives be lawyers.

9 And so it was every operating decision, every
10 corporate decision, had to be approved by the law department.
11 And to do that the lawyers were always involved at the
12 beginning of these projects to make sure that, one, they were
13 smart in business because lawyers do have a lot of brains; and
14 two, that they were ethical; and three, they were legal. And
15 so it was -- it was really -- it was really fun to be involved
16 in projects proposed by the operating department.

17 And the operating department is run like the
18 military. I mean, those trains are supposed to run on time.
19 And so it had sort of a crusty vice president of operations in
20 charge of it, but all the -- the employees under him were very
21 accepting of me. In fact, I knew that I had really made it
22 when I was talking to a superintendent down in West Virginia,
23 and I -- I suggested that we follow -- we do this or we do
24 that, and he said, "Yeah, ma'am. Yeah, ma'am." I've never
25 forgotten. He was a lovely gentleman.

1 And when I -- during the course of my practice I was
2 often out in the field examining the railroad lines. We had a
3 major program to divest, or abandon, these little used railroad
4 lines that were costing us money and not earning as much
5 income. So I had been asked to take on this project to get rid
6 of about 2200 miles of railroad line to trim us down and make
7 us more profitable.

8 And so I would go out with the superintendents who
9 were in charge of those lines and some of their assistants, and
10 we'd get on a high rail car, the ones that you drive, you know,
11 over the track and then you turn --

12 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- on the track.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And I saw lots of cornfields.
16 And it was -- it was really fun. It was fun to be out on the
17 road, and I loved being with those operating guys. They were
18 always respectful, always appreciative of the work that I was
19 doing.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell us how the -- some of
21 the rail abandonment project came out in Southwest Virginia.

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes, I was charged with
23 abandoning two of the lines out in far Southwest Virginia. And
24 one of them is the Virginia Creeper line. And the project
25 involved getting rid of a line that had two major trestles

1 crossing the New River. And the challenge was how could I take
2 that wonderful scenic route and blend it into the Rails to
3 Trails program that was being supported by the federal
4 government at that point.

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And so I had to figure out to
7 get the operating department to come with me on this project to
8 make it a Rails to Trails site. And I looked at the law, and
9 they said, you know, there was a statute in Virginia that
10 required utilities to remove their abandoned equipment when
11 they were ceasing operations in a particular area. And I'm
12 thinking, well, it was probably gas and electrical they were
13 thinking of, but a railroad is a utility.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** True.

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** So I told the operating
16 department, I said, you know, "We're going to have to take
17 those trestles out." And they said, "What do you mean?" They
18 said, "We always leave them." I was like, "Well, the statute
19 right here says you've got to take them out."

20 "Hmmm, well, what about that Rails to Trails thing?"

21 "Oh, I think that would probably work."

22 You know, it's always a good idea to make a man
23 think --

24 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Sure.

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- a thought first, right.

1 And so we have a couple wonderful trails down there,
2 the one from Abingdon down to Damascus.

3 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Is the Virginia Creeper?

4 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yeah.

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Right.

7 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

8 So at that time it was Norfolk & Western.

9 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It was.

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. And was the -- was
11 Roanoke the actual headquarters?

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It was.

13 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

14 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** It was. It was the only major
15 railroad headquartered in a tiny town, relatively, to Chicago,
16 to New York, to San Francisco.

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right. Right.

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And we were -- it was a family
19 operation, almost. I mean, we all knew each other, we all
20 lived in the same neighborhood, and it was -- it was very
21 smartly run. Jack Fishwick was the CEO when I started, and he
22 was a phenomenal -- he was a fine lawyer and expected all the
23 rest of us to be, but he was a sharp businessman.

24 In fact, the carpet in the law department offices was
25 made from old Pullman car carpet.

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

2 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** When we got rid of the Pullman
3 cars, the carpet was saved and used in the law department.
4 That's how tight Jack Fishwick was, and he -- of course, we
5 also owned the Hotel Roanoke.

6 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

7 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And that was where, you know,
8 the nicer things were. We didn't get the nice things.

9 And it's -- but it was -- it was such a well-run
10 railroad that we had plenty of cash on hand and we had some
11 very nice salaries. They were higher than any of the other
12 attorneys in Roanoke were making at the time.

13 But at the time of the merger, it was with Southern
14 Railway --

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- another Southeastern Railway
17 company. We -- and we had to -- we had to merge because
18 Chessie had merged as well with the -- let's see, the
19 Southern -- what was the Southern railroad?

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So Chessie was Chesapeake and
21 Ohio?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yeah, that was --

23 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- the Chesapeake and Ohio, and
25 they merged with L&N and with Seaboard. And so they had

1 merged, so we kind of did a defensive merger with Southern.
2 And it was decided that the headquarters would not be in
3 Washington, D.C., which is where Southern was headquartered,
4 but in Norfolk.

5 And we always thought that our CEO, Bob Claytor, at
6 that point, had a daughter and two grandchildren in Norfolk,
7 and a sailboat up at Delta, Virginia; Deltaville.

8 I said, "Maybe that's the reason."

9 "No, no, no, it's just even way between."

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

11 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Right. Right, Bob.

12 So we had a -- we moved our headquarters -- well, the
13 merger happened in 1980, and departments of N&W started moving
14 down to Norfolk, and finally they took all of the law
15 department in 1989. And at that point I had to resign from the
16 Railroad.

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So we'll get back to where
18 you went next, but let's go back to when you first started to
19 practice. And there were how many other women that you
20 remember that were practicing law at that point when you first
21 started at the Railroad?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, there was only one other
23 woman executive at the Railroad. But women in town, we had
24 Diane Strickland and Anne Edenfield at Legal Aid, and I think
25 Linda Steele came the next year, and Diana Perkinson, and there

1 was one more that I recall who had been there for some time.
2 She may have -- she wasn't in bankruptcy. That was Diana.

3 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That was Diana Perkinson,
4 yeah.

5 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** There was another woman.

6 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

7 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And but we were a small group.

8 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Did you-all -- did you-all
9 socialize?

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, we did, yeah. Oh, we did.
11 Especially Diane and Anne and Linda and I.

12 And one day we were having lunch together at the
13 Jefferson Club at the top of the bank building, and somebody
14 saw us. And later Diane or Anne said, "You know what they are
15 calling us now?" I said, "What?" "The gang of four." Said,
16 Really?" That was -- was, you know, top lieutenants in
17 Communist China, you know, plotting all sorts of awful things.
18 And we said, "Well, maybe that's what we -- thought we were
19 doing." The fact that we would eat together must have meant
20 that we were plotting something.

21 But we would share stories. I mean, poor Diane was
22 told she couldn't wear pantsuits at Woods Rogers.

23 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** I mean, really. And, you know,
25 there were -- I couldn't ride the inspection trains. The

1 rather stuck-in-the-mud Vice President of Operations said, "No
2 women on the inspection trains." I don't know what they did on
3 the inspection trains. I guess they drank a lot. Maybe
4 they -- I don't know what else they did. But anyway, I was not
5 permitted to go on the inspection train. But that was the
6 only, quote, discrimination I think I ever faced.

7 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So there came a time when
8 many of you started having children.

9 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes.

10 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell me about the joys and
11 heartbreaks of trying to manage children and practice and how
12 you supported each other and your experiences.

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, Diane was the first. She
14 had the first baby. And we all kind of watched how she was
15 balancing work and motherhood. And then I became pregnant
16 in '81, and I said, "I don't have a wardrobe for this." And so
17 I had business up in Washington, and in Alexandria there was
18 this wonderful fabric shop that had lots of men's suiting in
19 it, because the tailors from Washington would come over there.
20 And so I bought several yards of it, different checks and
21 tweeds and whatnot, and took them back to my seamstress in
22 Roanoke. And she did from a Vogue pattern, which I always
23 loved, a nice jumper and a short jacket. And it was perfect
24 because you could expand as you needed to.

25 And so I got through my winter pregnancy. And then

1 Diane said, "Can I borrow?" I said, "When are you due?" She
2 said, "February." I said, "They are perfect." And so we --
3 you know, people had to sort of plan their babies around the
4 wardrobe that went around town. I never did see it back again.

5 We -- we all managed. I nursed for nine months, and
6 fortunately the headquarters for N&W were only nine minutes
7 from home in South Roanoke, and so I would go home every day at
8 lunch and nurse. I tried very hard not to travel during that
9 time. Part of my job did involve traveling, but I was able to
10 limit that.

11 And then my second child came along three years
12 later. The first time I inquired, you know, "What's going to
13 be the leave policy here?" Well, they didn't have a leave
14 policy for executive women because the other executive woman
15 didn't have children. So the labor relations -- head of labor
16 relations came upstairs, and he and Vice President Law called
17 me in and said, "Okay, here's what we can do for you.
18 Fortunately, you've worked here for six years so far, so you
19 get six weeks paid time disability." I said, "Disability?
20 This is pregnancy."

21 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right.

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** "Well, it's disability," okay,
23 "and then after that you can apply for railroad retirement
24 benefits, which would take care of disability."

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

1 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Railroad disability.

2 So I said, "Okay, so how does that work?" "Well, you
3 get 50 percent of your pay." I said, "Well, it's better than
4 nothing."

5 So I -- I took the full 12 weeks after with him and
6 fortunately found a woman to come into my house. Because given
7 the fact that I would travel, I -- I needed a place where, in
8 case he was sick, I would be able to still do my job. And was
9 fortunate enough to be able to afford that.

10 Second time she was already in place, and so I only
11 stayed home, really, about two months with my daughter.

12 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** She's always resented it, I'm
14 sure.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So did you feel that they --
16 that they were somewhat supportive, even though the maternity
17 leave wasn't what you would have hoped it would have been?

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Right. And -- and second -- and
19 fortunately, with the second child, I was -- I was able to
20 get -- my boss said, "Look, I'm just going to pay you on the
21 side anyway." So I got my full salary the entire time I was
22 out with her.

23 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yeah.

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So you worked at Norfolk

1 Southern until they relocated to Norfolk, and then did you
2 relocate with them?

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** No. My husband then was a sole
4 practitioner, and he had grown up in Roanoke and had a group of
5 clients, and I thought it would be very hard at that point in
6 his career to -- to start anew, and so I decided that I would
7 resign. I hated to leave the company. It was wonderful to me.
8 And took a job with Shenandoah Life, which is home-based there
9 in Roanoke up on Brambleton Avenue. And they had one attorney
10 who was nearing retirement age and they were looking to
11 backfill in behind him. So I joined as an attorney, and he
12 retired in about two-and-a-half years. And I became general
13 counsel, vice president and general counsel, at Shenandoah
14 Life.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Shenandoah Life.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yeah.

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** How long did you stay there?

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** I was there just five years.

19 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

20 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Because in that time our divorce
21 became final and I remarried. And my husband, who was with
22 Norfolk & Western, Norfolk Southern, was already located in
23 Norfolk, and so I moved down there.

24 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what do you think your
25 accomplishments were at Shenandoah Life?

1 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, it was figuring out how to
2 handle a much broader range of legal matters. We had some
3 cases involving claims against the insurance policies that we
4 were not exactly sure were valid. We had regulatory issues
5 with the State Corporation Commission, and we had
6 investment-related issues as well because it was a large
7 investment portfolio to backfill those policies.

8 It was -- it was fun. I found myself getting into
9 tax more than I had -- I had taken the baby tax course at W&L.
10 And my philosophy about tax was, you know, when you ran out of
11 fingers in the regs, you better just take the last answer
12 because you were just -- you know, that was going to be the
13 answer because you had no more fingers. Unfortunately, that
14 was my full facility in tax.

15 All fascinating questions. I really enjoyed it, and
16 I was sorry to leave that because I was in charge of the
17 department.

18 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Right. Were there other
19 women there?

20 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Not in the law department, no.
21 Just our staff was all female, and I hired a male attorney to
22 be at my second-in-charge.

23 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. So you moved to
24 Norfolk when?

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** In 19 -- no -- yeah, 1994.

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

2 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** 1994. So I was there from 1990
3 to the end of 1994.

4 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And how -- how old were your
5 children?

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Let's see, the children then
7 were about, let's see, they were more like 9 and 12. 9 and 12,
8 right.

9 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And my son went into private
11 school there, Norfolk Academy, and my daughter spent one year
12 in the local elementary school, and then she went out to
13 Norfolk academy as well. And there were a lot of railroad
14 families that went to that school, so we joined the herd.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell me about your
16 experience in Norfolk. What did you do when you got there?

17 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** I was a -- I was a little
18 adrift, I have to admit. I did not want to go into private
19 practice. Boy, did I know that. I actually did a little bit
20 of interviewing with some of the firms that my husband knew
21 people in, and I said, "I just don't think I can do that and
22 raise these children." Not the way I wanted to. And so I did
23 some volunteer work. And I got engaged in a program called
24 Kids Voting USA, which was founded by a newspaper editor out in
25 Arizona to get children -- it was based on a program he had

1 seen in action in Costa Rica where children actually went to
2 the real polls and voted in their own local elections. So it
3 was not one of these things held in schools. They actually
4 went to the polling place, and he thought that that would make
5 all the difference. Of course, Costa Rica had a law requiring
6 adults to vote, so they trained their children early in the
7 voting process. So I said, "Well, that sounds like a really
8 good thing to be involved in," so I started a chapter there in
9 Norfolk. And we had schools in Virginia Beach and Norfolk and
10 Chesapeake all participating.

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And it was -- it was a fun
13 experience. And I worked out of the newspaper offices there at
14 *The Virginian-Pilot*. Well, in that process I got to know the
15 publisher, and when the Norfolk Foundation, the community
16 foundation there, was looking for an associate executive
17 director, there was -- it was a small town, and so the
18 publisher of the newspaper contacted the head of the Foundation
19 and said, "I may have a very good person for you."

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Oh, wow.

21 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And so I was -- I was able to
22 secure that position at the Norfolk Foundation in 1990 and just
23 loved the work. It was wonderful.

24 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So tell me about it.

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, they wanted someone with a

1 law degree. The existing executive director was a former
2 lawyer, had worked for the newspaper, as a matter of fact, and
3 there is a fair amount of trust and estates knowledge that is
4 helpful in working with the attorneys in town who would be
5 advising clients about where to make bequests.

6 And so that was really our bread and butter, was -- a
7 community foundation, of course, is built not by the assets of
8 one philanthropist but by the assets of many philanthropists in
9 the community. And so we relied greatly on the T&E trade to
10 bring those clients to us. And we had a -- we had a great
11 opportunity to cultivate them.

12 When we called them together, we decided to set up an
13 advisory committee of these T&E lawyers, and they all would
14 come, and we'd feed them lunch once a quarter and got to know
15 them well, and they got to know us well, and we grew our
16 Foundation from a hundred million to two hundred million --

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

18 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- in the ten years that I was
19 there.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's amazing.

21 So what kind of work did the Foundation do?

22 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, it was -- it was a
23 repository for these assets, and we would take a percentage of
24 those assets every year and pay them out into the community.
25 And we had a very large scholarship program because many donors

1 are particularly interested in promoting education for those
2 who might not otherwise be able to afford it.

3 So we had a large scholarship program, plus we had a
4 focus -- focus areas within the arts, within education, within
5 I would say health and the environment. And so -- and social
6 services. So there were lots of areas in which we could make
7 grants. We had contacts with all of the nonprofits in town,
8 and they could apply based on what time of year it was and who
9 -- which area was up for grants that particular quarter.

10 We would receive those grant proposals. Our grant
11 officers would work with those organizations and make sure that
12 they were -- they were tailored well to our priorities and that
13 they would be useful contributions. So we would pay out about
14 15 million a year into the community.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** About a million and a half of
17 that would go to the scholarships. And it was a really
18 heartwarming thing to go to Old Dominion University's
19 Philanthropist Day where they would thank all of their donors
20 and you hear some of the stories from those who had received
21 scholarships from the Norfolk Foundation.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very nice. Very nice.

23 So I hear in a lot of what we're talking about is
24 that a lot of what guided you was -- was a work-life balance.

25 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Uh-huh.

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Especially when you have
2 children. Do you want to talk about that?

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, from the very start, as I
4 started working at Dana Corporation in Toledo, Ohio, I said,
5 you know, I -- I have more to my life. I want more to my life
6 than working long hours that I had heard about in law firms.

7 And as I came back from my first clerkship and talked
8 to some of my classmates, I could see that they were really
9 grinding it out in these summer clerkships. So -- and my
10 mother had always worked. She had always taught. But that was
11 9 to 3:30. And so -- 8 to 3:30. So that was my model. I
12 admired her a great deal. She could have been a great lawyer,
13 or she could have been a great CPA, but she just didn't have
14 those opportunities. And she was always in my corner
15 encouraging me to do that.

16 And I -- I felt that if I could have a balanced life
17 I could raise children the way I wanted to raise them, if I was
18 lucky enough to marry and have children, and so that's what I
19 set myself up for. It -- it was important to me to give as
20 much of myself to them as I gave to the company, and I was very
21 fortunate in that my employers respected that, both at the
22 Railroad and at Shenandoah Life, and, really, at the
23 Foundation. Fortunately, I became the CEO and I could set the
24 standards.

25 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

1 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Yes. I'll never forget when my
2 staff started coming in and saying, "Guess what? I'm
3 pregnant." I'm going, "All right. Now I need to figure out
4 how to handle this as equitably as I received."

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So even though you were
6 practicing at Norfolk Western and Shenandoah Life, you also
7 were part of the legal community, not just with the women
8 attorneys, but I believe you -- you got involved in golfing and
9 some other things?

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, oh, that -- that -- the bar
11 there in Roanoke was very convivial, and one individual in
12 particular stands out, and that was Dick Pattisall. He was
13 just a big love. He really was. Just a big bear. And he
14 always held a golf tournament out at Hunting Hills Country Club
15 in the summer, and he invited lawyers to sign up. It was
16 called the Dick Pattisall Open. And we would show up out there
17 at Hunting Hills, and we'd be put into foursomes.

18 And I had played golf since I was a youngster. I had
19 gotten -- my father had got me a set early on because he had to
20 learn how to play because he was a salesman, and I had summer
21 jobs during college at the pro shop at his small country club.
22 So the pro would take me out on quiet afternoons, and we'd hit
23 balls, and so I got a pretty decent game at that point.

24 And so I would sign up and so would Joan Gardner, who
25 works at Blue Cross Blue Shield as their general counsel there

1 in Roanoke. And she was a finer golfer than I. But we were
2 popular because many of the hills there -- holes at Hunting
3 Hills are doglegs, and so -- so she and I would hit it right
4 down to the corner, and the guys could then -- because on a
5 captain's choice you get to -- the team chooses which ball they
6 are going to play next. And so ours would be safe, and then
7 they could hit theirs over the corner, over the dogleg, and be
8 much further up the fairway if they got to the fairway. Most
9 of the time they landed in the trees, but -- but it just -- so
10 we were -- we were just the belles of ball when we got to the
11 Dick Pattisall Open. It was a lot of fun.

12 And, you know, there were outings. The bar outings
13 were fun. It was just a really receptive community, and I had
14 lots of friends throughout the bar. And the older gentlemen
15 were cordial and welcoming. So I felt -- you know, maybe I'm
16 just an optimist, but I never really felt any of the
17 discrimination that I fear my comrades in the private practice
18 realm felt. They might run into it in the courtroom, might run
19 into it in depositions, and I -- so I was really quite lucky.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** And actually that you -- the
21 woman that you worked for at the Boston law firm did run into
22 that; did she not?

23 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** She did. She was never going to
24 be a senior partner. One, she was Jewish; two, she was female;
25 and she was never going to make it to the senior level. And so

1 she was called a junior partner. Here she was, 54 years old.

2 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** But she -- she just was so
4 encouraging, and she was excited when I went off to law school.
5 And for years afterwards I got a card from her every Easter. A
6 Happy Easter card.

7 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So of all the people that you
8 worked with during your career, are there any that you
9 particularly admire?

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Any of the lawyers?

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Uh-huh. Or other.

12 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Gosh, I would have to say,
13 really, there in Roanoke Diane was sort of our leader. She got
14 there a year before I did. Maybe two. And she -- she really
15 broke the barrier for our class. I call it our class of women
16 that came into Roanoke. I admire her.

17 And I also admire my -- a law school friend, Harriet
18 Dorsey, from Blacksburg. She was a year behind me, but a year
19 older. And she went to Blacksburg because her husband was
20 going to Virginia Tech when she graduated. And she encountered
21 all sorts of issues with the bar down there. And she worked
22 her way through it and she developed a great practice with
23 another law school classmate. And she had to work for
24 everything she got, and I felt like my life was just so much
25 easier.

1 I admire senior members of the bar who had built
2 practices. They were always very cordial to me. I didn't have
3 to work for them.

4 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** That's true. That's true.

5 Yes. In speaking of Judge Strickland, in the Roanoke
6 Valley, there's only been one circuit court -- female named to
7 the circuit court bench in the Roanoke Valley, and that was
8 Judge Strickland. And she was one of two judges that were
9 named to the general district court bench along with Judge
10 Jacqueline Talevi. And since then there have been four women
11 that were named to the juvenile court bench. But Judge
12 Strickland retired in 2002, and there's not been another female
13 named to the circuit court bench in Roanoke, in the Roanoke
14 Valley, since that time.

15 What are your thoughts on all of that and diversity
16 in the -- on the bench and in the bar?

17 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, I think, unfortunately,
18 that the judgeships are sort of considered to be retirement
19 positions for senior members of the bar. And I fear that the
20 women don't get those opportunities until they are fairly
21 senior, and -- and then there's competition for those
22 positions, and they are not being promoted by the bar
23 associations who vote on whom they'd like the legislators to
24 recommend. So I think it's sort of a catch-22. If you are --
25 you don't have the numbers, you don't have the prestige, you

1 don't have the support with the legislature. And I just --
2 that makes it hard for women. It's not fair. They ought to be
3 considered. I think in most cases the women are smarter than
4 the men. They always work harder because they have to work
5 harder.

6 And I've been on the outside looking in, except with
7 respect to my friend Harriet Dorsey, who has been a substitute
8 judge in the J&D. Was for years. But the times that she ran
9 for the nomination to the circuit court, she was never -- never
10 chosen.

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what are your thoughts
12 about that for the first time since the Roanoke Bar Association
13 was incorporated in 1925 they now have a full female board and
14 slate of officers? Does that surprise you?

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, it's amazing. I think it's
16 wonderful. But no, it doesn't surprise me. Because women have
17 to get organized. They have domestic responsibilities, they
18 have professional responsibilities, and it just -- you have to
19 get organized.

20 One little story: I once, in the house there in
21 Norfolk, lost my Day-Timer. I was writing everything down
22 before I had a phone. And I went crazy, and my children who
23 were, you know, 13 and 10 and trying to get ready for school
24 said, "Oh, my God. We've got to -- we've got to find this.
25 We've got to find this." And so they searched the house with

1 me, and we found it in my daughter's bedroom where I had been
2 reading her a story, and I had lost it in the covers.

3 Well, that just -- you know, you lived your life by
4 that book because you had so much to do. And women have always
5 wanted to tidy their nest, if you will. And that's maybe -- I
6 don't know whether that's genetic or what it is, but we just
7 want to make our communities better. And so many men do as
8 well, but -- but the women take on those extra jobs because
9 those in communities are important to them and their
10 families.

11 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So are there other life
12 accomplishments that you want to talk about?

13 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, gosh.

14 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** I'm thinking about the
15 Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program?

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, goodness, yes. Well, for 20
17 years I worked on that. At the Foundation when I first started
18 and became executive director and then the CEO, I was looking
19 for a signature project. And so I sent my great grants
20 director out into the community to sort of test what she
21 thought might be an appropriate focus area for us. And she
22 came up with early childhood education. She had been to a
23 great early learning center there in Norfolk, and she said,
24 "This -- this might be something we should introduce our board
25 to."

1 So our all -- oh, no, we had one more. We had six
2 women -- six men and one woman on our board. And we went to
3 the childcare center, and they had a kiva, a common room, where
4 all the children played at one point. And up above was their
5 meeting room with a big glass window looking down into the
6 kiva. So we had our board session -- we had a board meeting up
7 there. We always took our board off-site into the community
8 just so we could be seen and people didn't think that we were
9 some deep, dark, mysterious organization. Starting when I
10 started.

11 And I can remember seeing the senior lawyer at Wilcox
12 Savage, and Josh Darden, the senior businessman in the
13 community, looking down through that window to those children
14 and say, "Gosh, this is really important that they've got a
15 place to be," and boom, that was it. They all decided -- she
16 went around -- my grants director went around and talked to
17 each of the board members individually, and they all said,
18 "We've got to do something about quality early childhood
19 education."

20 So we got it started there in the Norfolk area. We
21 got to the point where one of the -- at a large business
22 association meeting, one of the bank presidents got up and
23 said, "Well, you know, the -- a child's brain is 90 percent
24 formed by the time they are five years old." I said, "We've
25 done it; we've got them; they know it's important."

1 So then we started working with the childcare centers
2 to improve -- to develop a quality rating system so that
3 parents would know which organizations were quality. And then
4 we expanded the effort to the State of Virginia, and we became
5 the early -- Elevate Early Education organization, E3, that was
6 primarily an advocacy organization to convince the legislators
7 in Richmond that it was important to fund early childhood
8 education. And -- and starting -- and not limiting it just to
9 the low income population. It needed to be statewide, and it
10 needed to be -- it needed to be economic, socially economically
11 equal.

12 And we did some assessments around the state and
13 discovered that based on four important criteria, such as
14 literacy, math, social skills, and self-regulation, that 42
15 percent of our children were not ready for kindergarten. That
16 was impressive to the state legislature. We got a JLARC study
17 done. They recommended that the state invested in it. And it
18 took us ten years --

19 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

20 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- to get to that point. And in
21 that process we said, "You know, we need to give the
22 legislators something they can touch and feel." And so we
23 started a school in Norfolk right at the edge of our downtown,
24 mostly black neighborhood. But it was close to downtown. It
25 was on the site of a Y. We had a philanthropist who helped us

1 buy the land, build the school, and endow it --

2 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** -- Jane Batten, and she was a
4 strong supporter of early childhood education. Stayed on --
5 still on the board. She's been on the board for 12 years now.

6 And the goal was to help our legislators see what
7 children can do from all income levels. And it's an
8 all-income-level school. We reserved about a third for low
9 income, a third for middle income, and we have a third high
10 income. And the quality is such that we have -- we're
11 oversubscribed on the high income on it. There were too many
12 people who want to be in on that. And we developed a
13 curriculum under the auspices of UVA, the Curry School of
14 Education, and it's a great curriculum which is now recommended
15 by the State for use in early learning centers all over the
16 state.

17 We developed the assessment tool, which is called the
18 Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Project, that is an assessment
19 given at the first six weeks of kindergarten and then at the
20 end. And what we assess are those four indicia: the literacy,
21 the numeracy, the social skills, and the executive function to
22 self-regulation. And we do it at the end. And we see how the
23 kindergarten teachers are doing any remediation for the
24 children who have come in with deficits.

25 And unfortunately, due to COVID, we're back up into

1 the 42nd percentile of children not ready.

2 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** But we have proven that our
4 curriculum works and that the VKRP works, and that now is a
5 required assessment in all public schools in Virginia, the
6 initial kindergarten assessment, so the teachers know what they
7 are working with and they are given the skills through the UVA
8 curriculum to do something about it.

9 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** So I'm -- I was chair for the
11 last two years, and I just rolled off this year, but I'm
12 passionate about that.

13 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Very wonderful. So you're
14 50-years-plus from graduation from W&L?

15 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Not quite. I graduated in '75,
16 so we're going back in two years.

17 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. But from your
18 admission in '73.

19 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, yes, yes. True.

20 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Yes.

21 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** True.

22 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So have you had any reunion
23 or meet-ups with your co-classmates?

24 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, gosh, well, not really.
25 Except for our regular reunions.

1 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay.

2 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Unfortunately, one is deceased;
3 one never came back; another one rarely comes back. Usually
4 it's just the guys and I.

5 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Okay. Okay.

6 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And Sally Wiant, who was always
7 in Lexington. She was our classmate through that time, and she
8 was getting her -- her position there in the law library.

9 But it was a very close class, and I was honored to
10 receive at the last reunion a special award from the school,
11 the just award given to a graduate from a class reunion. And I
12 don't remember exactly the name of it. I was very pleased to
13 receive it. I think it's Alumni -- Alumna of the Year, Alumnus
14 of the Year.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

16 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And it was -- but, you know, the
17 guys were so cute. They came down the steps with a big bouquet
18 for me.

19 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Nice.

20 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Very sweet.

21 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So you truly have been a
22 trailblazer not only for women in the law in Virginia, and, in
23 particular, in the Roanoke Valley, but also for the betterment
24 of -- of women in general.

25 What are your observations of the progress or lack

1 thereof of equality of women attorneys in Virginia and
2 elsewhere and women on the bench?

3 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, I would say that I -- I
4 don't have really close experience with women who have been out
5 there practicing and appearing before the courts, and so I look
6 at it from afar. And I'm amazed at the numbers of women going
7 into law school. W&L has I think a few more women than it has
8 men at this point.

9 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Wow.

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** And so there has been great
11 change over that time. And as -- as the women have flooded the
12 ranks of attorneys, you know, it's forced the change, and I --
13 I think as more women ascend the bench it gets to be a very
14 level playing field. I can only hope it will be there.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Do you have any message you
16 want to give women just coming into the practice of law today?

17 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, I guess I -- you
18 identified the theme, which was to find a practice that would
19 permit me to raise a family, and I am thankful I had the
20 opportunities to do in-house work. One, the hours were great.
21 Two, the benefits were great. The pension is great.

22 And what I -- I find is that I think women need to
23 understand themselves in making those career choices, and, if I
24 would have any advice at all, I would say: Look in your heart
25 and find what you value in life. And yes, you may not be

1 married now coming out of law school, but you're probably open
2 to it. And if you are and you're open to having children, you
3 need to think about how you're going to achieve a balanced -- a
4 balanced work-life arrangement.

5 And so my advice would be: Look at all the
6 opportunities -- in-house as one; the government is another --
7 and think before you leap.

8 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** So what would you like your
9 legacy to be?

10 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Well, I would say, first of all,
11 making a happy home for my husband; raising happy, healthy
12 children; enjoying my grandchildren. And I think leaving this
13 state a little bit better for having worked in the early
14 childhood arena.

15 **MS. SHARON CHICKERING:** Angelica, thank you for
16 participating in the Virginia Women Attorneys Association Oral
17 History Project. I really enjoyed the interview, and I
18 appreciate you participating.

19 **MS. ANGELICA LIGHT:** Oh, this has been a great fun,
20 great treat for me. Thank you so much, and I appreciate the
21 honor.

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