

VIRGINIA WOMEN ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION
ROANOKE CHAPTER
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ATTORNEY: ELLEN S. WEINMAN
INTERVIEW DATE: May 23, 2023
INTERVIEWER: SHARON CHICKERING, ESQUIRE
COURT REPORTER: KELLY D. HOPKINS, CCR

MS. CHICKERING: I'm Sharon R. Chickering, Esquire, and the date is May 23, 2023. I'm interviewing Ellen Shelton Weinman, one of the first women attorneys to practice in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia. This interview is part of the Oral History Project of the Roanoke Chapter of the Virginia Women's Attorney Association recording the oral histories of the first women attorneys to practice in the 23rd Judicial Circuit of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

This interview is taking place at the law office of Woods Rogers Vandeventer Black. The videographer is Melissa Stephens, and the stenographer is Kelly Hopkins.

Ellen, do I have your permission to record this interview?

MS. WEINMAN: Sure.

MS. CHICKERING: Can you tell us your full name, where and when you were born, and the names of your family members and just a little bit about your childhood.

THE WITNESS: I was -- I'm Ellen Weinman, and I was born on September 24, 1951, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

MS. CHICKERING: Wow.

MS. WEINMAN: And I'm the second of six children.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: So I have three brothers, two sisters. And my dad went to work for IBM. He graduated from LSU and went to work for IBM when it was a brand new company.

MS. CHICKERING: Wow.

MS. WEINMAN: He worked at IBM his whole working life. We moved around quite a bit. He started out as a salesman and worked his way up to finally we lived in corporate headquarters. So when I was a kid, we moved a lot.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: I don't think I went to school in the same school -- the same place, you know, three years in a row.

MS. CHICKERING: So what different places did you live?

MS. WEINMAN: We lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. We went back to New Orleans. Then my dad worked for the NASA project for part of the time, so doing what IBM was doing with them. So we

moved around and a lot just with -- traveled a lot. We moved to Birmingham, Alabama, and then to Connecticut when he worked at corporate headquarters. The year I graduated from college, my parents moved to Bethesda, Maryland.

MS. CHICKERING: Did they stay?

MS. WEINMAN: That was the last place they lived. He retired from Bethesda.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. Okay. What kind of childhood was it?

MS. WEINMAN: When you grow up in a big family -- you know, and we moved a lot, so my brothers and sisters were oftentimes the only people I knew. My parents had this idea that you should move at the very end of the school year so you were settled by the time school started again. But that generally meant you didn't get to meet many kids until school started again. So my brothers and sisters were pretty much people -- you know, we were fairly close.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: I have one brother who is just 18 months older than I am.

MS. CHICKERING: Wow.

MS. WEINMAN: The younger ones are -- one is five years younger, one is five more years younger, and then the three little ones are 18 months apart.

MS. CHICKERING: Goodness. Busy family.

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: So what is your educational background and college experience?

MS. WEINMAN: I went to undergraduate school at Hollins. Then I went to law school at William and Mary.

MS. CHICKERING: So you graduated from Hollins?

MS. WEINMAN: In 1973.

MS. CHICKERING: And William and Mary?

MS. WEINMAN: '77.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So tell us a little bit about Hollins College and what your experience was like there.

MS. WEINMAN: We had been living in Wilton, Connecticut. So we lived in the south most of our life. Then we went -- moved up to the north. My mother was fairly anxious for us to go back to school in the south. My older brother was

at the University of Virginia. So I looked at schools close to where he was.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So Hollins is an all female school.

MS. WEINMAN: Yes. It was then. It still is.

MS. CHICKERING: What was your major?

MS. WEINMAN: Politics.

MS. CHICKERING: Politics. I didn't know there was such a major.

MS. WEINMAN: That's what they called it. It was political science, but they called it politics.

MS. CHICKERING: How was your experience at undergraduate school?

MS. WEINMAN: I enjoyed my time at Hollins.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you like the fact it was all female?

MS. WEINMAN: Yeah.

MS. CHICKERING: Then what made you decide to go to law school? Did you always have an interest in the law?

MS. WEINMAN: I think it was just

something to do in the beginning. I mean, it was better than working, going back to school.

MS. CHICKERING: So, generally, how many women were in your law school class.

MS. WEINMAN: I think there were probably 10.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. Were there restrictions to the admission of women at William and Mary prior to your application and admission?

MS. WEINMAN: I don't think. I don't think so. I don't know. I mean, there weren't many women. That's true, but there were some.

MS. CHICKERING: So it must have been awfully odd going from an all female environment to law school experience where you were 1 of the 10 out of a large class.

MS. WEINMAN: Law school is a lot more work than undergrad school.

MS. CHICKERING: That's true.

MS. WEINMAN: You didn't have a lot of time to fret about stuff.

MS. CHICKERING: Describe your law school experience.

MS. WEINMAN: It was a good experience.

I mean, I enjoyed law school. It was not -- it was a lot of work, but it was a good place to be.

MS. CHICKERING: And did you feel that the male students treated you and the other female students any differently or the faculty?

MS. WEINMAN: I don't recall that there was any real -- anything that was really different.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. All right. So once you graduated from law school, how did you come back to the Roanoke Valley?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I had worked as a -- the last summer before when I was in law school, I did an internship in the commonwealth attorney's office in Roanoke County.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: So they gave me a job.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So tell me a little bit about that. Who was the commonwealth attorney?

MS. WEINMAN: John Lampros.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. And what was your experience like when you were doing the internship? Obviously, you liked it because you went back.

MS. WEINMAN: They were very easy people

to work with. You know, we got to do third-year practice then and stuff. And that was really the only place -- I mean, I talked to other people about jobs. That was the only place that was going to let me do trial work.

MS. CHICKERING: And that's what you were interested in doing?

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So were there any males -- any female attorneys in the office at the time that --

MS. WEINMAN: No.

MS. CHICKERING: -- you took the position?

And tell me a little bit about third-year practice and how that was interesting to you.

MS. WEINMAN: I mean, I got to actually be in a courtroom and do things. I thought I would like to do trial work as opposed to, you know, doing deeds and stuff like that.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you like criminal law?

MS. WEINMAN: Yeah, it was interesting.

MS. CHICKERING: So how long were you at

the commonwealth attorney's office?

MS. WEINMAN: A couple of years. I'm trying to think if it was three or four years. It was a while. I left the commonwealth attorney's office. My son was born in 1980.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: I went back to work not too long, you know, two months after he was born. I really didn't like working at that point in time. So it was sort of -- and my husband was a professor at Hollins. He had a sabbatical. So we went to Kentucky for him to work. He worked at the University of Kentucky for a year, and so I just didn't work.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. How did you meet your husband?

MS. WEINMAN: At Trust.

MS. CHICKERING: Tell me about that.

MS. WEINMAN: Well, when I was at Hollins, we started Trust, which was Roanoke Valley Trouble Center. It was a place -- they had a 24-hour hotline and a place for emergency housing and different -- you know, people could call in with problems and stuff like that. He was a part

of the people that worked on the board and stuff.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. Was he part of Hollins College?

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. What --

MS. WEINMAN: He taught statistics.

MS. CHICKERING: Statistics. Okay. So were you married during law school or after?

MS. WEINMAN: No. It was after I got out.

MS. CHICKERING: Just after law school. Okay. Was he one of the reasons you wanted to come back to Roanoke as well?

MS. WEINMAN: Oh, yeah.

MS. CHICKERING: The primary reason, probably.

MS. WEINMAN: Sure.

MS. CHICKERING: So when you had your son, were you still at the commonwealth attorney's office?

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: And how did they handle, you know, the fact that you -- you the first female attorney is now coming in saying --

MS. WEINMAN: I think everybody was -- toward the end of the pregnancy, people were on edge. Just I think -- you know, I mean -- Judge Hoback was the judge in Roanoke County at that particular point, and, you know, he pretty much ran that courthouse.

MS. CHICKERING: Yes.

MS. WEINMAN: When I would go in to try cases in the morning, he would say to me, Are you going to have that baby today? I would say, I don't think so.

And he -- but people were very -- when I was pregnant, I got treated really, really, really well. People were really good to me. He would say, Do we need to take a break? You know, he'd often ask me, Do we need to have a break now; do we need to do this; do we need do that? People were really good to you.

MS. CHICKERING: Then how long were you out after you had the child?

MS. WEINMAN: I think it was a couple of months before I went back to work, because I had a lot of sick leave and stuff.

MS. CHICKERING: You didn't have to talk

to them about extended maternity leave --

MS. WEINMAN: No.

MS. CHICKERING: -- and stuff like that?
So that didn't really come up as an issue?

MS. WEINMAN: I didn't work that much.
Chris was born in November. I think I went back to
work January, February, something like that. Then
when Dave went to -- we went to Kentucky in the
fall. I didn't work that much after he was born.

MS. CHICKERING: How long were you in
Kentucky?

MS. WEINMAN: Just a year.

MS. CHICKERING: When you came back, what
did you do?

MS. WEINMAN: I worked for Marshall Mundy
for a while part-time.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. Tell me how you
decided to apply there and what your experience
was.

MS. WEINMAN: Well, part of it was just
being able to work part-time. I have to think
about that for a minute. Working part-time is
really what I wanted to do. It kind of got to
where it was hard to do just part-time. Other

people's schedule and my schedule didn't work so great. That's when I decided I would go on my own just to -- because I could control things better.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure, sure.

MS. WEINMAN: It seemed like people always needed to meet when you needed to get to day care. It was that kind of stuff.

MS. CHICKERING: I was going to ask you how you balanced all that.

MS. WEINMAN: I had a really hard time in the beginning. We went through two or three child care options. Then we met a lady who lived around the corner from us. Her name was Betty Shoop. She was like a second grandmother to Chris.

MS. CHICKERING: That's lovely.

MS. WEINMAN: Once we hooked up with Betty, it was great. I mean, she took care of everything.

MS. CHICKERING: That's wonderful. So you decided to open your own office. Where did you --

MS. WEINMAN: Salem.

MS. CHICKERING: -- land?

Did you pick Salem on purpose?

MS. WEINMAN: Yeah. That's where I -- I mean, where I had worked when I was in the commonwealth attorney's office.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. Tell me how you grew your practice and how you ended up practicing in the areas that you did.

MS. WEINMAN: I don't know that it was ever anything deliberate that you sort of said. It just kind of happened.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: I don't think it was anything that I really did deliberately, but I never managed to make, you know, a real firm that was making tons of money.

MS. CHICKERING: That wasn't what you were looking for.

MS. WEINMAN: Right.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So tell me how the clientele responded to you as a woman attorney.

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I mean, people obviously choose whether you come to a lawyer's office. I don't ever recall any problems with clients. It was more other lawyers sometimes.

MS. CHICKERING: Tell me a little bit

about that.

MS. WEINMAN: Well, there were -- I think when I first started to practice law, I think some lawyers thought they could take advantage of you. I had experience with Harvey Lutins, for example, where he was in the courtroom and it was in general district court. And he's spouting off about this case, this and that. He had a book in his hand. He was looking at it like he was reading from it and stuff.

Charlie Phillips was sitting behind me. He said, Ask him to let you see it. I said, What? He said, Ask him to let you see it because it's not -- what he's reading -- what he's saying is not what he's reading and he doesn't have a case. It was pretty much that's true. He was just making it up.

MS. CHICKERING: Oh, my goodness.

MS. WEINMAN: Once you said, Let me look at that, I would like to read that, it was -- he kind of he backed off.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you find that there were some attorneys that were less open to working with women attorneys --

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: -- some like Charlie Phillips who were more supportive of you?

MS. WEINMAN: Right. I went one place -- when I was working for Marshall, I went to take a deposition. When the lawyer -- the senior lawyer at this firm, Woods Rogers, realized it was going to be me instead of Marshall, he sent somebody else in to do the deposition because we were not equals.

MS. CHICKERING: So how many women attorneys were in the bar initially from your recall?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, Anne Edenfield and Angelica, Diane Strickland, and Linda Steel and Melba Pirkey.

MS. CHICKERING: So tell me a little bit about how you-all worked together or didn't. Did you support each other? Did you socialize?

MS. WEINMAN: We would have lunch together, you know, once a month, maybe.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: And I think people thought we were having powwows to, you know, make plans to how we were going to take over. It really wasn't

that.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you find it was nice to have a group --

MS. WEINMAN: Oh, yeah.

MS. CHICKERING: -- that you could actually socialize and identify with?

So were there times that you felt that the judges were or weren't supportive of you?

MS. WEINMAN: I never felt the judges weren't supportive.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So have you seen progress in the way that legal employers and the courts have handled and supported women during their pregnancy, nursing, and care of their children since you were a new mother?

MS. WEINMAN: I think so. I think people are getting -- I mean, there are a lot more women lawyers now --

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: -- than there were then. I think their -- I imagine child care is still hard for people. I know my daughter-in-law is a nurse, and she has -- in Nashville and she has -- you know, day care is a difficult thing to keep. And

once you find it, you have to put up with a lot of stuff because there aren't that -- there's no other place for you to go. If they say, We're closing today because the weather is bad, then you have to figure out what to do. You can't just say I will take my kid out and we will go over here. It doesn't work that way.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure, sure. So you decided fairly early on or at least as you noted that your practice tended towards more domestic --

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: -- work. Tell me about that.

MS. WEINMAN: I did a lot of family law. I did a lot of work with battered women. Darlene Young at the Turning Point called me one day and asked me if I could help her out with something. I ended up doing a lot of work with them. I also did a lot of work with adoption.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: My sister was having trouble finding -- getting pregnant. So I started looking into adoption to try to help her out. I got involved, you know, in sort of -- that sort of

helped me find -- working out to find a baby for her. And once you do that, it's fun. That's kind of a fun thing to do.

MS. CHICKERING: So tell us a little bit about what the Turning Point was.

MS. WEINMAN: The Turning Point was a battered women's shelter --

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: -- that the Salvation Army ran and they still do on Salem Avenue. The women -- you know, people could come there and they would need legal help.

MS. CHICKERING: And you actually kind of made a lifelong practice of actually being very supportive of disenfranchised type of women, women in those types of situations?

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: Was that important to you and was that a focus of your practice once you got involved in that?

MS. WEINMAN: I was raised -- I mean, I was really lucky. I lived a very charmed life. I always had everything. But one of the things my mom and dad always talked a lot about was those to

who much is given, much is expected. Because you have been so lucky, you need to make sure you take care of other people who aren't so lucky.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure, sure. So you also did domestic work in terms of custody and visitation and divorces. I remember one time you used to say if litigants -- if you felt a litigant hated -- if the litigants hated each other more than they love their children that you wouldn't represent them.

MS. WEINMAN: I would tell people that when they came in for the first interview. I would say, If I ever get to the point where that's obvious to me, that's the end. I'm not going to do it anymore.

MS. CHICKERING: How often did you run into that?

MS. WEINMAN: Every now and then, you did. Most of the time people would -- people do love their children more than they hate their spouses, most people do.

MS. CHICKERING: So you also severed as a guardian ad litem.

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: Tell me a little bit about that.

MS. WEINMAN: Well, when -- representing children is always more -- kids are the victims. They are not -- you know, they don't cause the trouble. They don't do things on purpose to make things -- to cause trouble. It's easier to represent kids than it is parents, I think.

MS. CHICKERING: What was your experience doing that?

MS. WEINMAN: The divorce is really hard on children, that you ought to figure out a way to stay together as much as you can because it's just not good what happens to kids and that kind of thing.

MS. CHICKERING: Certainly that's an area of the law where your remuneration is determined by the court and certainly isn't considered financially lucrative. What prompted your decision to come deeply involved with that?

MS. WEINMAN: Because I like kids, and children are just more fun to be around.

MS. CHICKERING: How much of your practice was devoted to pro bono work?

MS. WEINMAN: I don't know how much. Too much probably.

MS. CHICKERING: Well, that was your choice, right?

MS. WEINMAN: I had to make enough money to pay my secretary's salary and expenses and stuff. I didn't have to make any more money after that.

MS. CHICKERING: Right, right. In addition to focusing your practice on areas affecting women and children, you also became actively involved with other organizations that sought to protect those women and children. You mentioned the Turning Point and you also mentioned, I believe -- what was the Trust?

MS. WEINMAN: Yes. I worked at Trust when I was in college.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: And I continued to volunteer for a while afterwards.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: But then Trust kind of closed up after a while.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So tell me what

other organizations did you get involved with.

MS. WEINMAN: I'm trying to think. I had a stint on the board at Children's Trust, CASA. Where else?

MS. CHICKERING: Mental Health Association of the Roanoke Valley.

MS. WEINMAN: Yeah, mental health, I did several times on the board there.

MS. CHICKERING: For a while, you were kind of in charge of National Adoption Day in the Roanoke Valley --

MS. WEINMAN: Right.

MS. CHICKERING: -- correct? Tell me a little bit about that.

MS. WEINMAN: We did Adoption Day -- when did we start that? I did it for about 10 years. It was part of the Best Practices thing when they started doing Best Practices in the juvenile court. Then we did the Adoption Day where we had a celebration in November. And actually the judges came in on a Saturday -- actually Judge Swanson came in on a Saturday because he pretty much did it. I think Judge Weckstein did it once, but he was late getting there. So we kind of counted on

Judge Swanson to be the one to do it.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: Then they would have a public display at the thing. We would do a celebration at Andrew Lewis Middle School afterwards.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay. So there came a time when you decided to actively pursue an appointment to the juvenile and domestic relations court; is that right?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I did talk about being a judge a couple of times. I was a substitute judge for a long time. That never worked out.

MS. CHICKERING: Tell me a little bit about the sub judging. Did you enjoy that?

MS. WEINMAN: I mean, it's a different perspective. It's a very different place to be. Some parts of it I thought were -- yes, I enjoyed doing it, yeah. You get to go -- I would get to go to different courts. It wasn't just around -- in fact, more outside of Roanoke than -- because I guess they liked for you to have -- they don't want you to be the judge for people you practice law

with.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: I would say the thing that I didn't like about it is you didn't get any feedback. Pretty much, you know, there was nobody that did that job that watched you do the job.

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: So there was no real feedback about what you were doing.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you get feedback from the attorneys that appeared in front of you?

MS. WEINMAN: Not much.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay, okay. So tell me about your experience with the process of putting yourself out there for the juvenile --

MS. WEINMAN: It was a very unpleasant experience.

MS. CHICKERING: In what way?

MS. WEINMAN: You never knew whether people were telling you the truth or not.

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: I mean, people would tell you they were -- and you just never knew what they were going to do. I think there was probably -- a

lot of it had to do with being a woman. That was not something that was -- that we were doing well in Roanoke.

MS. CHICKERING: Yeah. I would agree with that. Did anybody directly ever say my problem is that you are a woman? Or was it just more implied?

MS. WEINMAN: I don't think anybody ever -- I can't remember that anybody ever said that to me, but it was clear to me that was true.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: But people told you they were going to support you when they really had no intention of doing it. I mean, they were telling everybody that.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure, sure. You know, there's really, at this point, one circuit court judge that we've ever had in the Roanoke Valley, and that was Judge Diane Strickland.

MS. WEINMAN: Right.

MS. CHICKERING: Who, as you indicated, was one of the first female attorneys also practicing in this judicial district. She retired in 2002. Then she was on the general district

court bench and then Jacqueline Talevi was. We've had four that have been appointed to the juvenile court bench.

What are your observations of all that and your thoughts about the fact it's been 20 years since we had a circuit court judge who's a female and there's only been one and there were such sparse appointments that we have had?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I think it takes time. You know, in the beginning, there weren't that many women. When I first started practicing law, there weren't that many women in Roanoke. When Judge Strickland became a judge, there still weren't all that many women practicing law. Now there's a ton of women practicing law. But there are also -- you know, the more women there are -- what's the right way -- there are mediocre women lawyers now.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: When I first started practicing law, there were no mediocre women lawyers.

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: That was all there was to

it. There just weren't. And now there are. In fact, there are probably even some not good lawyers that are women. Whereas, I don't think that was true in the beginning. So the more you have, obviously the quality --

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: -- dissipates some.

MS. CHICKERING: Right. You mentioned that the earlier women attorneys that you-all would get together and kind of socialize and support each other. There also came a time when you became involved in the formation of the Roanoke Chapter of the Virginia Women's Attorney Association. Tell me about that and what prompted you and --

MS. WEINMAN: There was a statewide organization, and they were having some women. I think that was a good thing that women got more organized so they were making more strides across the board.

MS. CHICKERING: So what do you feel your accomplishments were as part of the Virginia Women's Attorney Association forming the chapter here?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I think it gave --

you know, it kind of ebbed and flowed some. I mean, there were times when people were more involved and times they weren't. But I think it gave people an opportunity to meet. I certainly met a lot of women that I would not have met that were doing -- practicing in other places like the larger firms and things like that. Because the kind of work I was doing, you didn't meet those people.

MS. CHICKERING: Right.

MS. WEINMAN: You got to meet a lot of people that were probably doing different things than you were.

MS. CHICKERING: And do you feel like that some of the problems instituted like You Be the Judge and some other things were supportive of trying to actually help women make inroads into --

MS. WEINMAN: I think they helped. I'm not sure they helped people in the Roanoke Valley. I think they helped statewide. I mean, there are a lot more women judges in Virginia now than there were 20 years ago.

MS. CHICKERING: And you were never part of the -- officially, part of the Roanoke Bar

Association because your practice was always in Salem.

MS. WEINMAN: Right, the county.

MS. CHICKERING: What are your thoughts about the fact that for the first time since they incorporated in 1925 it's an all female board and an all female set of officers? Does that surprise you?

MS. WEINMAN: No. Like I said, it doesn't really surprise me. It took a long time for it to happen.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: Much more.

MS. CHICKERING: So tell me were there some people, judges or attorneys, that you particularly admired?

MS. WEINMAN: Judge Trumpeter, I have a lot of admiration for him.

MS. CHICKERING: Now say who Judge Trumpeter was.

MS. WEINMAN: He was a juvenile court judge, mostly in the county. I guess he did some in the city, but mostly in the county. He was very much child-oriented. It mattered to him what

happened in his courtroom. Sometimes you get the feeling that judges do it so much that it stops being personal and important to them. People stop being individuals.

I don't think that ever happened with Judge Trumpeter. He always, you know, probably too much, you know, became too much of a -- that it probably took too much of toll on his heart.

MS. CHICKERING: You mentioned Judge Hoback.

MS. WEINMAN: Judge Hoback, he ran the courthouse, you know. At that particular time, I think he was the oldest sitting judge in the Commonwealth.

MS. CHICKERING: Wow.

MS. WEINMAN: He had been on the bench longer than anybody else. He had been on the bench a very long time. He had rules. You know, having a boss is a good thing sometimes.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: Because in other places, there are different rules in different courtrooms. He was the boss in Roanoke County. Everybody did what the boss said, you know. I mean, he wasn't

ugly about it, but he was clear that his rules were there and you were to follow them.

MS. CHICKERING: You mentioned Charlie Phillips.

MS. WEINMAN: Yes.

MS. CHICKERING: Did you feel he was supportive of you?

MS. WEINMAN: Charlie -- I want to be diplomatic about how I say this. Charlie, I think, was supportive, but he also -- he could hurt your feelings.

MS. CHICKERING: That's true.

MS. WEINMAN: I mean, one time I even said to him because he wrote me this letter, I called him and said, you know, That really hurt my feelings. He said, Well, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I said, But it did.

Well, I didn't mean it, so it doesn't count. It was that kind of stuff. I wasn't trying to hurt your feelings. So if you got hurt, that's your problem. That's not my problem.

MS. CHICKERING: So what other accomplishments do you feel are important to you both legal and nonlegal throughout your career?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I got involved in adoption because my younger sister, you know, was in a situation where she was not able to have children. She really wanted to have children. So we worked -- I mean, that's my reason for getting involved in adoption was to help her out in that. It just turned into something that I did a lot of. Once you get involved, I guess you make contacts and stuff like that.

So that's something I really think -- I think we did a good job helping the ladies at the Turning Point. There were a lot of people who needed help and wouldn't get it if we weren't there to help them. We got other people -- and we did some training so other people got involved too to help do some of that work. And like I said, I tried to help people that needed to be helped. That's all you can do.

MS. CHICKERING: That's true. At this stage, you've truly been a trailblazer for not only women in the law in Virginia, but in particular the Roanoke Valley, but also for mental health reform, protection of children, and protection of abused women.

What are your observations of the progress or lack thereof of the equality of women attorneys in Virginia and elsewhere and women on the bench?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I think that we are making progress. I think things -- obviously, there's a lot more we need to do. I mean, the unfortunate part in this country is you have to have financial resources to get legal help. There are a lot of people that need legal help that don't have financial resources to do it. We need to do a better job of that. You know, legal aid doesn't have enough people to do what they need to be able to do. That kind of thing.

MS. CHICKERING: In the domestic arena, they are sort of constrained from helping people by their own rules.

MS. WEINMAN: Right.

MS. CHICKERING: Unless it's a no-fault divorce.

MS. WEINMAN: Right. And, you know, divorces are very difficult, and there are a lot of people that end up staying in a situation that is very uncomfortable and even dangerous for them

because they -- they're financially dependent and they -- you know, they have no way to support themselves outside of that. So there needs to be more help for people like that.

MS. CHICKERING: Is there any particular case that's memorable to you or important from your recall?

MS. WEINMAN: No, not any one.

MS. CHICKERING: Okay.

MS. WEINMAN: You know, there were a lot of people that I think it made a difference to be able to help them, to be able to help do -- and a lot of kids that makes a difference to help. There needs to be more guardian -- right now, I work -- I volunteer at CASA. I have done that ever since I retired.

MS. CHICKERING: Do you want to talk about what CASA is first?

MS. WEINMAN: Court-Appointed Special Advocates. They are people who are appointed by the court to help advocate for the child. I see -- as a CASA volunteer, I see a lot of crummy guardian ad litem.

MS. CHICKERING: I'm sure you do.

MS. WEINMAN: And that's disturbing to me that people aren't doing -- advocating the way they should for a kid. You see a lot of people who never even see -- they never go visit the kid. Somehow they have told the court they did because you are supposed to have at least one face-to-face meeting with the child. I mean, you know they didn't, but they do. That disturbs me and that the court doesn't do anything about it. The judges don't make people -- don't insist that people do a better job.

MS. CHICKERING: Right, right.

MS. WEINMAN: And they don't.

MS. CHICKERING: Ellen, do you have any message that you want to give women that are just coming into the practice of law today?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I do think that you ought to try to give back some. I mean, you probably don't need to give back as much as I did because people need to take care of themselves. But people ought to -- you are privileged when you are a lawyer. You ought to give back to help out. I think that's one thing. I don't think women have to put up with as much any more in that sense, but

maybe they do and I don't know it.

MS. CHICKERING: Sure.

MS. WEINMAN: I wish people would be a little less -- I mean, I remember that I got called that I was mean. You know, men are aggressive. You know, they are -- I was mean and pushy. You know, it was a whole different way of looking at things, I think. I think that's changed some. I hope it has.

And I wish -- like I said, I wish they'd do a better job as guardian ad litem. That's the part -- I watch that at CASA all the time. Even people who I thought were good guardians ad litem do not do what they should be doing, you know, which is a surprise to me.

MS. CHICKERING: Yes.

MS. WEINMAN: As a CASA volunteer, they don't return my phone calls. You call up somebody who's the child's guardian ad litem and they don't call you back. You say, What?

MS. CHICKERING: Yes.

MS. WEINMAN: So I make an appointment. Then you have to talk to me.

MS. CHICKERING: That's a good way to do

it without being mean, right?

MS. WEINMAN: Right.

MS. CHICKERING: What would you most like your legacy to be?

MS. WEINMAN: Well, I have two grandchildren. I think the most thing that I'm the proudest of is my son is such a good dad.

MS. CHICKERING: That's lovely.

MS. WEINMAN: I think that's probably the thing that makes me happiest is watch what a great dad he is.

MS. CHICKERING: That's lovely. I really enjoyed the interview. Thank you for doing it. This was just lovely.

MS. WEINMAN: Good. I enjoyed it too.

MS. CHICKERING: Thank you.

MS. WEINMAN: Sure.