Norma Eagleton

A pioneering public official and true servant to her community and fellow citizens.

Chapter 01 – 1:13
Introduction

Announcer: Norma Eagleton is known for many accomplishments including first female Tulsa city commissioner and Oklahoma corporation commissioner. Norma was the first woman elected to a voting position on the Tulsa City Commission when in 1976 she was elected Finance and Revenue Commissioner. And she was the first woman to serve as an Oklahoma Corporation Commissioner having been appointed by Governor George Nigh in 1979, a position she held for 10 years.

At age 50 Norma attended night school to receive her J.D. from Oklahoma City University College of Law graduating in 1988.

When serving as a volunteer lawyer her main interest was the protection of children and helping young parents. With her understanding of family dynamics she chose mediation as her avenue of pro bono work. She believes mediation is an opportunity for Legal Aid clients to state their case and talk in a safe non-threatening setting to better focus on the children.

In this interview she talks about her early years in Claremore, Oklahoma, her entrance into political life and the issues she faced as an office holder and her experiences as a lawyer.

Listen to Norma Eagleton tell her story on the oral history website *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.

Chapter 02 – 7:11
Pierce Arrow

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today's date is November 17, 2016. Norma, will you state your full name, please?
Norma Eagleton: My name is Norma Haddad Eagleton.

JE: Your date of birth?

NE: I was born in Wewoka, Oklahoma, in 1934.

JE: Making your present age…?

NE: Eighty-two.

JE: I've got to ask you about Haddad, that's an unusual name.

NE: That's my maiden name, yes.

JE: So did you have a middle name?

NE: I was Norma Leigh Haddad when I was born.

JE: Okay. We're recording this in the facilities here of VoicesofOklahoma.com. So you were born in Wewoka, Oklahoma. It's a very, very small town, isn't it?

NE: It is, it's in Seminole County in Central Oklahoma. My mother was born in Wanette, an even smaller town, a small farming community then and almost a ghost town today in Potawatomi County, in Central Oklahoma.

JE: Interesting about Wewoka, it is the capital of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. And the first African American woman elected as judge in the United States, Juanita Kidd Stout, was born in Wewoka. She graduated from a segregated high school there at the age of sixteen; spent a significant part of her career as a judge in Philadelphia. She actually spent time here in Tulsa for summer breaks. And she was the first black woman to serve on any state supreme court. She's buried at the Westwood Cemetery in Wewoka.

So people of high stature, including yourself, were born in Wewoka.

Your mother's name?

NE: My mother's name was Edwina Beatty. She was born in Wanette, as I said, a small farming community in Potawatomi County. Her father was a prominent lawyer in the early days of the state. He was a graduate of the University of Missouri. He died in 1919, in the flu epidemic. Had he lived, I believe he might have been very prominent in our state. He graduated from the University of Missouri at a very young age. Was, I think, captain of the football team.

He left a wife, my grandmother, and five little girls when he died. My mother was eleven and the oldest. She then became part caregiver for her little sisters.

JE: What was your mother like? Her personality like?

NE: My mother was a strong and intelligent woman. She was not flamboyant but certainly determined. She was very creative. She was a fabulous cook—that was her art form. She loved to entertain and her cooking was wonderful and beautifully presented. She was artistic. She went to college, in those days, not everybody did, and became a school teacher.

JE: So about when would that have been?

NE: In the '20s. She met my father, who was home from Harvard. He was driving with a friend of his in a Pierce Arrow automobile. That was a sporty, luxury car.

JE: Yeah, yeah, sure, right.

NE: He told my son several times, "Sonny boy, if I'd been driving in a Ford you'd of had a different granddaddy."

JE: And what was his name?

NE: My father was Sam Haddad.

JE: His personality, what was he like?

NE: Well, my father was marvelous. He was very intelligent, very courtly, very kind and generous. He was truly a gentleman of the first order. And very fun-loving. I loved him very much.

JE: Brothers and sisters that you would have had?

NE: I have one brother, Richard, who is three years younger than I.

JE: What do you think you draw from your parents about yourself and personality? Do you think you favor one over the other or a combination of the two?

NE: I don't know, I don't know, I am what I am. My childhood was very, very idyllic. The family was very stable, very loving, very traditionally, really.

JE: How—

NE: My father was raised in Beggs, Oklahoma. His father immigrated from Lebanon, and my grandfather, who was George Haddad, was the giant of our family. He immigrated to this country without speaking the language. Went first to New York and then gravitated to Oklahoma. He was smart and strong and determined that his three sons would participate in the American Dream. He dreamed big.

He sent my father and his brother to OU and to Harvard and to Harvard Law School. My father then went to Columbia University Business School. So—I come from a family of students who took reading and learning and education seriously.

JE: So were you encouraged to read or were you a natural reader at a young age?

NE: I read all the time. I remember climbing up in our apple tree in our yard with a book or a magazine. I read all the time. We listened to the radio in those days.

My brother, was really very, very interesting and very intelligent also. He listened to the opera, even when he was a little boy.

JE: Wow.

NE: On the radio. But I read books.

JE: Do you remember what you listened to on the radio?

NE: I listened to soap operas.

JE: [laughing] What was the draw for your grandparents to come to Oklahoma?

NE: I suspect they came here because they knew some people here.

JE: Yeah.

NE: I can't tell for sure what sent them here. My granddad came to New York at first, and then he came to Beggs, and he opened a general store. He was a merchant and all the family

worked in the store. The store sold everything and stayed open until midnight, I think, and my father and his brothers worked in the store as well as going to school.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). The first house you have any recollection of, where was that?

NE: The first house I remember was in Beggs. We lived there. When my parents married they lived in New York while my father was finishing school. Then they lived in Wewoka. Then we moved to western Oklahoma to Mangum, and experienced the Dust Bowl, which I do not remember but my mother does. Then we moved to Beggs, and then finally, to Claremore, when I was six.

JE: What prompted those moves?

NE: This was the Depression and my father was working as a kind of a bank examiner. I think they were closing banks. He worked in banks in the first two towns, and then we went to Claremore and he ran a variety store. He owned a variety store in the kind of hay days of those stores.

JE: The depression was '29 to '39; you're five years old at the end. Did you hear stories about how it affected—it sounds like it actually helped your father work because he was examining banks that were closing?

NE: Oh, my father has always worked, our family always worked. Because I think we remembered the Depression, work was a privilege, it wasn't a chore and it wasn't a challenge, it was a privilege. We were so proud to have jobs and be working.

JE: Right.

Chapter 03 – 5:53
Oklahoma Weather

Norma Eagleton: I want to talk about Oklahoma a little bit.

John Erling: Sure.

NE: Because I've lived all my life, mostly, in Oklahoma, and it's spanned the better part of a century. There have been lots of changes and challenges and it was an interesting place to grow up. It was special. Oklahoma was a young state and optimistic. The musical *Oklahoma* had premiered on Broadway in 1942, and we grew up being very proud of our state. We hummed all the tunes from Oklahoma: "Oh, What A Beautiful Morning," The Surrey with the Fringe on Top," "We Know We Belong to the Land, and the Land We Belong to Is Grand." I remember thinking that Oklahoma must be a very special state and that everybody would envy us. That's probably not so.

Anyway, there were a lot of things that have changed and we happening in Oklahoma in my childhood. First, there was the weather. We have lots of weather in Oklahoma.

JE: What does that mean?

NE: Everybody had a tornado shelter or a safe place to go, because we were always hearing about tornadoes on the radio. Our safe place was under our dining room table. We had a great, big, heavy dining room table, and my mother would gather us up and we would hover under the table until all was well.

When I was eight years old, I watched the tornado, which wiped out Pryor, Oklahoma, in 1942. We watched it from our front yard. That was a terrible time; it killed fifty-two people, completely destroyed the downtown and much of the city.

Flooding was ever present in Oklahoma. I remember going with my grandfather down Route 66 to see it inundated by water. The Arkansas River had overflowed several times.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: Repeatedly, until the Kerr-McClellan Navigation Project took care of the flooding. In 1971, President Nixon came here for the dedication.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), at the Port of Catoosa.

NE: Yes. Senator Kerr was from Oklahoma, Senator McClellan was from Arkansas, and they shepherded this project through the United States Senate. We used to laugh and say, "It's a good thing Senator Kerr didn't live in Colorado, he'd had that river going up Pike's Peak.

JE: Yes.

NE: Transportation has changed a great deal since I was a child. We used to travel distances by train and by bus. Today, of course, we travel by airplane and turnpike.

JE: Talk about the cars back then, the first cars you might remember.

NE: The first car I remember was a Pontiac. My father was so proud of it, and as a child, I must have been maybe six, I was very proud that I learned to write. So I went out into the driveway and I wrote what I thought was our names and birthdays in the dust on the car. I was really scratching the car.

JE: Oh!

NE: It was a very sorrowful thing, but my dad was very kind about it. I don't remember being punished.

JE: So it would have been a '30-something Pontiac that you had, right?

NE: Yes, it was a Pontiac.

The Turner Turnpike was built in my lifetime. It opened in 1953, and it was the first of the turnpikes. Now we have ten of them in Oklahoma.

JE: Right.

NE: The passenger trains are gone. The Tulsa Historic Union Depot, an art deco marvel, was opened in 1933, built by the Public Works Administration. In its heyday, we had thirty-

six trains a day going through that depot. Now it houses the Jazz Hall of Fame; no more passenger trains.

JE: We might mention, there is a train now between Oklahoma City and Dallas, I believe, and they're trying to have a train—it's very difficult for that to happen—between Tulsa and Oklahoma City. So we ought to note that here, in 2016. Maybe in generations to come that will actually happen.

NE: Trains are wonderful. I remember our family went on the train from Oklahoma to Chicago to visit my uncle and his family, who lived in Chicago, and it was a very exciting trip. The dining rooms were very elegant with silver platters and linen napkins. It was a wonderful thing.

JE: Did you have your own car? A Pullman or what did they call that?

NE: No, no, we rode in the passenger cars. It was a day trip.

JE: Yeah.

NE: But it was a wonderful way to travel.

The next thing I want to say is that air-conditioning came to Oklahoma and totally reformed our lives. Our first air conditioner was a box in our kitchen window, full of hay, as I remember, dripping with water and a fan blowing through it. And that cooled our kitchen.

JE: So you made it?

NE: I think it was—it was—

JE: It was a manufactured air conditioner?

NE: ...manufactured, yes, but it was very primitive.

JE: Yes.

NE: Those were the first. We always had attic fans, and our family often went to Lake Claremore, which was ten degrees cooler, and tried to beat the heat. People had sleeping porches. Everybody had fans; at work places it was a chore to keep the papers from rattling off because you worked under a fan.

JE: Tell me—

NE: So it made a very great difference, not only in work but in living, when air-conditioning came to Oklahoma.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound), and we needed it when temperatures hovered around 100 degrees a lot.

NE: Indeed! As I say, we had a lot of weather.

JE: Right.

NE: We also had some snows and some cold weather.

Chapter 04 – 4:53
Claremore

Norma Eagleton: Claremore was a very special place to grow up. I'm reminded of the fact that it takes a village to raise a child, and it does indeed. Our family moved to Claremore, as I said, when I was six. Our town was small. We had about six thousand people. We had two railroad stations, two banks, lots and lots of churches, and one library. Schools and churches were the center of town activities and social life in those days. Main Street was the center of town.

Our telephone number in those days was 36.

John Erling: That's it?

NE: Three, six. Everyone knew everyone; we walked or we biked everywhere. Achievements were celebrated by most of the people in town as well as misbehavior. If you failed to greet someone on the street or were not polite your mother knew about it before you got home.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: That was instantly responded to.

JE: On Main Street then, was it a bustling business area?

NE: Indeed, it really was. This was before shopping centers and Main Street was really the center of commerce and the center really of community, community activity. People went into the stores and they visited and they bought things. It was a wonderful time.

JE: The Will Rogers Hotel, had that been built then?

NE: Will Rogers Hotel was there as was the Mason Hotel. Mr. Mason had a gun collection, a huge, gigantic gun collection. If you will believe this, he had thousands of guns in plain sight, within reach, on the walls and in cabinets in his hotel.

JE: But they were considered pretty classy places?

NE: Well, they were our hotels. I don't know how we measured class in those days except I do know that we went to Tulsa whenever we could.

I wanted to say something about working in my dad's store.

JE: And your father's store was what kind?

NE: It was a variety store—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: ...in the heyday of those kind of stores. Toy department was huge with wonderful dolls and tricycles and great toys. And we had candy. For a while, we had a lunch counter in that store. And we would work there, particularly at Christmas time.

I remember I learned, I think, to add and subtract by working on the cash register, which was a great privilege.

JE: How old do you think you were about that time when you were working?

NE: Well, I don't know. We always went down to the store, particularly on Christmas. I think the children went down even when we were very young because our parents worked with the Christmas crowds.

JE: Right.

NE: As I said, we were a working family. We worked, we studied, we read books, we played cards, we listened to the radio.

Will Rogers was a very, very important component of our town; it was his hometown. He, of course, was our favorite son, our attraction. The Will Rogers Memorial was built on the hill in Claremore. On Will Rogers's birthday there was a great celebration, a parade, floats, and bands, and we marched up the hill. I was in the high school band and I remember marching in the Will Rogers parade.

We had celebrities who came. Bob Hope came one year and entertained a crowd of many hundreds of people in the grounds of the Will Rogers Memorial.

Claremore's proximity to Tulsa was a special treat for us. Our family would close the stores on Thursday at five o'clock and drive to Tulsa. Tulsa was a wonderful place to visit. They had glamorous department stores, wonderful theaters, really, movie palaces with red velvet curtains that opened on the screen before the movie started. Statuary around. Stars that sparkled in the ceilings, they were really palaces. Their names were the Ritz, the Rialto, the Majestic, and the Orpheum. Now isn't that grand?

JE: Do you remember any of the movies you might have seen there?

NE: I don't—I'm sure we saw all the movies we could, and we had a movie house in Claremore too, in fact, two movie houses in Claremore. So movies were an important part of our growing up. Always went to the movie on Saturday afternoon. We loved movies and movie stars and read movie magazines and that sort of thing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: Convention Hall was also an attraction in Tulsa. It's now the Brady Theater. New York plays came to Convention Hall. Tulsa had a symphony orchestra, had an opera.

I had an aunt who lived in Tulsa and she took us to all of those events. So it was a very exciting place.

Chapter 05 – 5:45
Claremore High School

John Erling: Clar—

Norma Eagleton: Claremore High School, I want to tell you about that because that was an important part of our growing up. It was a two-story building near downtown Claremore. It housed classrooms, the principal's office, an auditorium. I do not believe we had a gymnasium in those days. We were blessed by some outstanding teachers, mostly women. In those days, women professionals aspired to be teachers. There were no women doctors or lawyers in Claremore when I was growing up. You hoped to be educated, you hoped to be able to teach if you needed to. Or all the girls took shorthand and typing in high school. We really expected to live exactly as our mothers had—to be married and have a family. But we took typing and shorthand in the event that our husbands died and we had to support ourselves. Or horrors, left us.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: And so we needed some training, just in case. Sports in our high school was football, boys football, and it was very important. There were no girl sports. Title IX was long distance in the future.

JE: Um, um-hmm (agreement sounds).

NE: I'm not even sure we had a gymnasium, I don't believe we did. Certainly, we didn't have gym for girls. Upon graduation—

JE: In what year?

NE: In 1952.

JE: I can point out that you were the valedictorian of your class.

NE: Well, that's right.

JE: When you graduated, what was your hope then to do next? What did you go on to?

NE: Well, we anticipated, as I think I told you, young women anticipated that we would learn the skills and the values of our mothers and our life would be pretty much like our mothers' lives.

JE: We lived in a segregated state. You had segregation in Claremore?

NE: Claremore was segregated, yes. There was—

JE: And so you had two different high schools?

NE: There was a black school and Claremore High School.

JE: Was that just taken as that's just the way it is? Did it bother you? Did you have any attitude about it?

NE: I don't think I was aware of the meaning and reason and results of segregation, as I was a child. My awareness came later when I went to Stephens College.

JE: Let me take you back. December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, you were seven years old. Do you have any recollection of how you may have heard about it or any thought about it?

NE: No, but I do remember the war and the rationing and how we would save tinfoil and knit socks and shawls and try to be patriotic. We bought savings bonds, war bonds, and stamps. We were very much aware of the war.

I had a couple of uncles who were in the war. My father was not young enough to be drafted but we were very much aware of the war.

JE: So there are many items that were rationed, tires, gasoline?

NE: That is correct.

JE: But you ran a general store?

NE: Ran a variety store.

JE: So you had items in the store. You were never—

NE: Those items were never rationed. It wasn't a grocery store and it wasn't a tire store. As I recall, the store went on about its business during the war.

JE: President Roosevelt died April 12, 1945.

NE: I do remember that. It was a very sorrowful time in our family. I remember my mother saying, "I just don't think I can call Mr. Truman president." Roosevelt was the only president I had known. He was dearly beloved in our family.

JE: Did you know then that he had polio?

NE: I think so.

JE: Speaking of polio, did you know anybody who had that? The vaccine came in 1955, Jonas Salk. Did you know anyone who had polio?

NE: I certainly did. Polio was a scourge and something that frightened us in the summertime. We didn't have any swimming pools in Claremore. If there had been a swimming pool, there was one, you're not allowed to go in it. And very nervous about crowds. And, yes, several students in our school got polio and it was a terrifying disease.

JE: You graduated in '52. Korean War was in that time period, '50 to '53. Did that impact your—

NE: Not until I married was I aware of the Korean War. I was in school and concentrating on being a student.

JE: You mentioned Stephens College, did you attend Stephens immediately out of—

NE: I did, yes. In those days they had what they called "field men," who came around to towns in Oklahoma, I guess, perhaps throughout the United States because its student body drew from all over the country. Field men came and talked to prospective students about Stephens and it seemed like a good place for my family and for me. And so I went to Stephens.

It was a two-year school for girls. It was sort of in transition from being a very protected place to trying to envision and train modern women. So we had curfew, on school nights it was nine o'clock. There was a big fence around the school and it was closed and doors were locked at nine. On weekends, you could stay out until eleven o'clock.

We had strict rules. Women were not allowed to ride in automobiles unless their parents were visiting and driving. We were not allowed to go into bars. We had lots of activities. We had dances and clubs and things on the campus, and we were near Missouri University so there were things to do. But not as children are today in school.

Chapter 06 – 3:48
College Days

John Erling: Stephens was in Columbia, Missouri.

Norma Eagleton: Columbia, Missouri.

JE: Did anything happen to you there that began to form your mind as to the future that, you know, maybe I can do more than take shorthand and support my husband?

NE: Stephens was perhaps the most defining experience of my life. First of all, I was pretty provincial. I had grown up in Claremore, we had visited relatives in Illinois and in Chicago and we had visited Tulsa, but I was pretty well a small-town girl from Oklahoma. And I got to Stephens and my roommates were from Illinois, and they were far more sophisticated than I was. My suitemates were from the South and they'd never seen snow.

So I met girls from other parts of the country, from other religions than my own, from other experiences. Stephens was at about two thousand students in those days, so the entire school collected itself together for events, for convocations and picnics, and we knew one another. And it was very enriching and expansive for me.

Our classes were very small, our teachers were very accessible. Often we had conferences with our teachers or discussion groups in the community rooms. An important experience in my life was our government teacher, who bemoaned the fact that his students in the 1950s were so docile and quiet. No one was out there agitating or marching. These were the Eisenhower years, these were the quiet times.

He took us one time, members of our class, to an NAACP meeting in Columbia. This was the first time I ever had focused on or been aware of race relations. It was startling to me. I remember going back home and writing a letter to the only movie house in town. I wrote it on senior class letterhead, I was the president of the class at that time, and I told them I was very sorry I would be unable to attend their movie anymore as long as they segregated black citizens to the balcony. And I never went back to the movie.

JE: Did you ever hear back a response from them?

NE: No, I never got a response. But that was my first awareness of the fact that we needed to do something, we needed to be involved, we needed to take some action.

JE: Class work came easily for you, apparently, and you enjoyed it.

NE: I loved school. I was always nervous about classes and grades and I'm sort of an overachiever, I think. But I don't know that it was easy. But I was a good student.

JE: By the time you graduate in 1954, that would be an associate arts degree.

NE: That is correct.

JE: Are you thinking then, "All right, now what? I'm beginning to see what I want to do"?

NE: No, I was not looking that far into the future. I remember my teachers suggested that Northwestern in Missouri would be a good school for me to go to. But my parents, and I must say, I myself were reluctant to go too far from home. We were encouraged to go near home because it was perceived that we would go to college and marry a person in that college and settle in Oklahoma.

And I bought into that. It sounded perfectly reasonable to me. So I went to OU.

JE: The University of Oklahoma and you earned your bachelor's degree there.

NE: That is correct, yes. I graduated 1956 with a degree in English and a minor in philosophy. And—

Chapter 07 – 3:05
John Eagleton

Norma Eagleton: And I met John Eagleton at OU.

John Erling: So it worked, you did meet a man?

NE: I did meet a man. Yes.

JE: It—

NE: And we married in 1956.

JE: And tell us about this man.

NE: John Eagleton? John Eagleton was a big man on campus. He was a wrestler, he was a law student, he was a sigma chi. He was very popular and very gregarious and it turns out he's very sociable, he's very energetic and active. He loves people and always has. He was in law school when I met him but he had a business degree and his aspiration was to be a tax lawyer.

So we moved to Dallas when he went to work for Peat, Marwick, and Mitchell, which was an accounting firm, while he studied for his CPA, certified public accountant's license. And he got it.

Then we went to New Orleans where he went to work for the Treasury Department, the federal government.

Then we came back to Tulsa after three years in 1961, I think, and he began to practice tax law.

JE: Children from your marriage?

NE: We have two children, Courtney and Rick. Rick lives in Tulsa, Courtney lives in Colorado.

JE: And what are they doing?

NE: Ricky is a lawyer. Courtney is a single mom who works at various things. She's very interested in animals and works in animal areas. She has two little girls, and Rick has three

children: twins and Jane. In fact, I say I have five grandchildren, all boys, except for the four girls.

JE: Nineteen sixty-one, President Kennedy proposes a moon landing. Do you remember that? Did you have—

NE: Oh, sure. We were very excited about that. By that time, we had television and we were watching everything.

JE: Tell us about the first television that came into your life.

NE: The first television my father bought for us when we lived in Dallas and were first married. I was sort of lonely in Dallas. Tulsa is a very special place, you can be a newcomer and become part of a fabric, it was open. Dallas and New Orleans were not so open, or at least to my mind. We were sort of isolated, and my dad came to visit us one day and he bought us a television. That was our first experience with it.

JE: You never had any programs that you might have watched back then?

NE: Oh, I watched all of them, I'm sure.

JE: Do you think the youth of Oklahoma, we were younger than Texas and New Orleans, do you think it was easier to meet here and meet new people?

NE: I think Tulsa was a very special place. I think it was a new city. It had not become jaded or tired or spent, as some of the rustbelt cities had. It was new and it was optimistic. A lot of new people came in with the oil companies, and Tulsa was growing very rapidly. So in a curious way, it absorbed its newcomers. You didn't feel like you couldn't become a part of the fabric of the city.

Chapter 08 – 6:42
Goals for Tulsa

John Erling: You've been a lifelong Democrat. When did that become important to you? Your family was no doubt a Democrat family.

Norma Eagleton: Yes, we were Democrats.

JE: And so did that become important at a certain time of your life?

NE: Well, when we first moved to Tulsa I did what most of my friends did and what I suspect my mother would have done. Again, we were aspiring for lives like our mothers. I was cookie mother and PTA mother and chauffeur to sports events and dancing class and those sorts of things.

Tulsa, however, was a very well organized town. They had a lot of auxiliaries, a lot of opportunities for volunteers to work. I was invited to join some of the young women's

auxiliaries, the Tulsa Boys Home, the Cerebral Palsy Association, and such as those.

Later then, I became involved in boards of the city, the Red Cross, and the United Way board.

JE: The League of Women Voters?

NE: The League of Women Voters came later. I guess I became interested in politics during the Lyndon Johnson campaign. I've talked about ways Tulsa has changed, Lyndon Johnson was the last Democrat candidate for president to receive plurality votes in Oklahoma. The state was Democratic when I was growing up and it's now Republican. There are no Democrats in state office; both legislatures and the governor are Republican.

JE: So you're saying he was the last Democrat president to receive a plurality?

NE: To receive Oklahoma's vote.

JE: Right. But before him, of course, President Kennedy is assassinated November 23, 1963. How did you hear about it?

NE: I do remember that. I was sewing at my home. My son was an infant, was playing in the room, and I heard about it. In those days, we were members of an organization called the Empire Club, which was a group of Oklahoma University graduates who met monthly for a big dance and dinner at the Tulsa Club. Various people were chosen or it rotated and different people were assigned to be hosts and hostesses on a particular night. And that the night we were supposed to host the Empire Club at the Tulsa Club. I remember calling them and telling them we'd have to cancel, we could not have it.

And they said, "Well, why?"

And I said, "Because the president has died." I knew it was very, very serious.

Then, of course, I remember the other assassinations, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King. I was beginning to become aware of what was happening in the world and the world was changing. It was changing so we weren't going to have lives just like our mothers'.

We had the Vietnam War, we had the Civil Rights movement.

JE: Did you have—

NE: We had the women's movement. We had the environmental movement, and the world changed. And Oklahoma is not at the cutting edge of change, even today, but we were changing too, we were becoming aware. My interest did shift. Several things were happening in those days.

I joined the League of Women Voters. I was elected to the board and advised that I needed to have a portfolio. And it was suggested that I take the local government portfolio. So I said, "Sure, I don't know much about local government but I can learn."

I interviewed the elected officials in the city and in the county and I went to meetings and I went to hearings and I read budgets and read reports and began to learn about city government.

JE: Who are some of the officials that you would have interviewed at that time?

NE: Bob LaFortune was mayor.

JE: Okay.

NE: You know, he was such a giant in the city. He's the one I remember the most. I got to know some of the commissioners later because I began to work in some city affairs.

The other thing that was going on in those early days in Tulsa in the 1970s was Goals for Tulsa. Goals for Tulsa was a study of Tulsa. Tulsa began to look at itself. It knew it was changing, and a group of young men from the Chamber of Commerce, I believe, established a two-year study of the city. We had committees, we had focus groups, we had field trips. We were studying the economy of the city, we were studying the demographics of the city, the neighborhoods, and we discovered some things that were new, at least to me, and I suspect to others, we discovered that citizens in North Tulsa and in West Tulsa and in the rapidly growing East Tulsa felt neglected and left out, and indeed they were.

City officials, in those days we had the commission form of government, the mayor and four commissioners, all live within a square mile of one another in near South Tulsa. The city was highly segregated in those days, both physically and culturally. Probably as a result of the Race Riot in 1921. Curiously, we didn't know much about the Race Riot in those days. The town was sort of silent about it. You had to dig to find out what had happened. Of course, later it was studied and many books and articles have been written on it. We're much more aware of it now.

JE: So in the '70s then, the early '70s, one day you heard about this Race Riot and said, "Really?" You'd lived here for some time and somehow it came to your attention.

NE: Well, I don't know if I said, "Really?" but I certainly said, "I want to know about it. Where are the records? Where are the newspaper articles?"

Well, they were not available. There were some records at the Red Cross, I think.

JE: Right.

NE: There were lots of stories and the stories did not all agree on what had happened.

JE: Let—

NE: I joined the Urban League board in those days. There was a strike in the municipal bus system. They needed volunteers to drive people from North Tulsa to South Tulsa to their work. And I volunteered as a driver. We called it the Jitney Buses. I became interested in politics and began to work on some campaigns.

The League of Women Voters launched a number of women of my age and many of my friends into public service, into government service.

Chapter 09 – 1:45
Active in Politics

John Erling: Was this the time then you would have met your friend Penny Williams?

Norma Eagleton: Yes, I met Penny Williams. She was in a campaign for Nelson Rockefeller for president. I was campaigning for Eugene McCarthy, and because those two campaigns were very small there was a joint ice cream social in Woodward Park and that's when I met Penny.

JE: And that's become a lifelong friendship.

NE: Yes. Penny and I have been friends for fifty years.

JE: Campaigns, city-wide that you might have worked in?

NE: The main campaign that I remember most about was the campaign for James R. Jones for Congress. This was very exciting, and we won. It was a wonderful campaign, met a lot of people. All my friends worked in that campaign and we were very proud of Jim and Olivia.

JE: But I know that even before then you get involved in precinct work, didn't you?

NE: Yes, I think I was in some precinct work but I don't remember being chair of the precinct. But I was beginning to be active in the Democratic party.

JE: My wife, Margaret, early in her life and career here went to a precinct meeting and she says, "Norma Eagleton was there!" This was like bigger than life to her.

NE: Hmm (sound of amazement).

JE: And she just looked up to you so much as many young women have, I'm sure, as you've become a leader in the community and then the state. But she immediately has that kind of memory of you at a time that you didn't know you were setting an example.

NE: [laughs] Well, that's interesting. Tulsa had not had women in its city government. No woman had voted in Tulsa city government until my election.

Chapter 10 – 2:40
City Growth Issues

John Erling: You were elected—

Norma Eagleton: I want to talk a little bit more about the city.

JE: Yes.

NE: And some of the things we learned from Goals for Tulsa. The city was growing very, very rapidly and rather haphazardly. We were growing south, leaving neglected areas in

the wake of new growth. Williams Company came and anchored downtown Tulsa, the north side of Tulsa, and that was very, very important because the city was beginning to deteriorate in that area.

And then, of course, we had the theater. But the growth south was causing many, many problems. It was outgrowing city services. New neighborhoods would spring up without fire protection, without water, without sewers. Sometimes the streets could not keep up and it was very, very expensive.

Then the neighborhoods in the inner city and in the near north and in the far north were sort of deteriorating and also calling on city funds. So it was a problem. Our growth was a problem. And also growth was causing flooding.

Here's what happened. First of all, we were built on the Arkansas River.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: And the early floods were the Arkansas River overflowing its banks. We were also dotted with lots of streams. There was Crow Creek and Fry Creek and Mingo Creek and Hakee Creek—

JE: Is there Joe Creek in there too?

NE: Yes, Joe Creek.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: Yes. And development occurred along the creek beds. They were attractive for neighborhoods. And guess what? Houses washed away into the creeks. Then neighborhoods began to flood because of drainage problems. This was no longer the Arkansas River, this was a drainage issue. And neighborhoods that had never flooded before began to flood. The flood plains were expanding because development brought parking lots, streets, and shopping centers, and run-off. Water ran off and did not seep into the ground so we had new flood plains.

Tulsa was not used to this. We didn't know what to do about it. We hardly understood what was happening. The first response, I think, was to try to shore up the banks of the creeks with concrete or riprap. So the water would move fast, away from the neighborhoods that were flooding. And, of course, they flooded downstream. We had new floods in new downstream neighborhoods.

Now this is part of my story when I'm on the City Commission. We dealt with that.

Chapter 11 – 5:28
Tulsa City Commission

Norma Eagleton: Tulsa had not had any women. They had a woman who was city auditor one time, but she couldn't vote. The auditor did not have a vote on the City Commission. And we had men, mostly from south Central Tulsa on the city government.

John Erling: But that's because she was an auditor, not because she was female.

NE: She was an auditor.

JE: Right.

NE: And auditor's position was not a voting position—

JE: Right.

NE: ...on the City Commission.

JE: Right.

NE: There were some women on the school board, two women, as I recall, on the school board. But women really were not active in the government in Oklahoma. And certainly not in Tulsa.

I want to talk about the City Commission for a minute. The City Commission was our form of government since the city's beginning. It was patterned after the Galveston city government. In 1900, Galveston had a terrible flood and their government needed to be a government which could respond quickly to emergencies. So they developed the City Commission form of government, which was the mayor and four commissioners. The city services in the early days were Police and Fire, Streets and Public Property, Finance, and Water and Sewer. Those were the chief public services that the city provided. So each one had a commissioner and the mayor. They had both executive and legislative duties.

The city, as it grew, developed many more areas of service. We had Parks, we had Urban Renewal, we had the zoo, we had the museums, we had the river parks, planning commissions, lots of different areas. So boards and commissions and trust authorities were established. Citizens participated in those; not very many women, however.

Cecil Bells was on the Park board. I don't know of other women but there were mostly men in our city government. And I kind of thing that Tulsa became perhaps aware of the fact that we didn't have women in government.

Anyway, the City Commission began to have some problems with all the boards and commissions that were around and it began to be problematic, primarily because it was not diverse. Nobody from West Tulsa, nobody from North Tulsa, nobody from East Tulsa, nobody from far South Tulsa on the City Commission. We were beginning to have lawsuits

threatened because of the failure of diversity in our government and lawsuits were threatening public schools because of segregation.

So all of these things were coming to bear in the early '70s. And Mayor LaFortune established a Charter Review Committee. He called the League of Women Voters for the names of two women who might be members of that committee. And the League nominated Estelle Hamilton and me. We served on the committee with the men.

I was the secretary. We studied forms of government and we decided that the most efficient form of government and the fairest form was to have a mayor council, where the executive power would be vested in the mayor and the council would be the legislature. The council would be elected by district so there would be some diversity in the city, because up until that time bond issues were failing.

As I said, people felt neglected and didn't that they were part of the city and had a stake in the city. So the Charter Committee made its recommendation, strong mayor/council form of government and we had a campaign. We went to speak in groups all across the city—and we lost the election.

JE: And this is in...?

NE: The early '70s.

JE: And you lost the election.

NE: And the elec—

JE: And why do you think you lost that?

NE: I guess it was just too new. I think the city had to become educated, maybe had to go through a lot more. We did have the commission form of government. It stayed in effect until 1989, when another charter election put in the mayor/council form.

JE: Interesting, they voted it down to begin with when they knew there wasn't enough diversity and they weren't representing their district where they lived and they still voted it down.

NE: Well, I remember the campaign against the charter. A very clever and skillful publicist ran that campaign. His name was Willard Mason. He had a wonderfully creative television advertisement against it. He had a checkerboard with a number of checkers. And he said, "Here is the city government now. We can vote for five people: the mayor, the commissioners. Here's the city government that they want: you can't vote for this one," and he would take a checker off this. "You can't vote for one, you can't vote for this one, you can't vote for this one," until he had eight checkers removed. "You can vote for this one and the mayor." So you only had two checkers left on the board.

JE: And he wasn't doing the city any favor.

NE: Well, not in our way of thinking.

JE: At that time, right.

NE: Not our way. But the City Commission survived. The other thing is, the City Commission was a scandal-free government. It was really a pretty good government. It's problem was lack of diversity. Lack of involvement from other sections of the city.

Chapter 12 – 2:42
Tulsa Floods

Norma Eagleton: Anyway, after the election lost the mayor appointed me to the city's utility board.

John Erling: Is that LaFortune?

NE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Mayor LaFortune. That board had never had a woman and he appointed me as the first woman to that board. I had learned in the League of Women Voters, you know, how to be a good public servant. You had important questions to ask:

1) Is it legal?

2) Who benefits?

3) Who pays?

And this served me well. I began to ask questions, I began to read reports, I began to visit neighborhoods, and to understand what the city did. My friend Anne Patton used to say, "You can take over a whole society with new and used water." She said, "It's a very powerful board." And powerful board it was.

We were struggling with how to get city services out to the new areas. Who would benefit? Who would pay? So by that time, the city was beginning to flood. We were having terrible floods, about every two years, '70, '74, '76; the most horrible flood was the '84 flood. The city had to begin to deal with flooding. We were losing lives, we were losing neighborhoods. The flood victims began to agitate and begin to come to City Commission meeting and began to know more about flooding than the city did.

We didn't have a hydrologist, Streets and Public Property was run by a staff member who was a street person. We knew about streets; we didn't know about hydrology. We didn't have a hydrologist in the city, so the city really didn't know what to do. And as I said, we began to shore up the banks of the streams and the water just flowed downstream and caused another flood.

But the flood victims began to understand what was happening. It was very, very interesting. They began to go out in a rain and measure water and look at the water flow, map the water flow and figure out what had happened to the creeks, where the flood plains were likely to be affected. They would come to City Hall and they would

instruct the government about what was happening in their neighborhoods along their creeks.

Finally, because of these repeated floods, the city had to do something. I guess that's about when I decided to run for office. I watched some of the floods, I'd been on the Water board. Several women were on boards by that time, and women were networking and we were all talking to each other, trying to understand what to do, what was needed.

Chapter 13 – 4:43
First Female City Commissioner

Norma Eagleton: Bill Morris, who was the Finance commissioner was very, very concerned about the flooding and he decided not to run. I'd been sort of watching the floods from the Water board; the Utility board had been involved in city activities. And he said, "Norma, would you like to run for my spot?"

And I thought, "Yes, I will."

John Erling: Was party affiliation a big thing? Here's LaFortune, a Republican appointing you to utilities as a Democrat.

NE: Bob LaFortune was a prince. He was kind, he was generous, he was inclusive, he was not partisan. He was a very, very special mayor.

JE: So then when you were running for commissioner a party affiliation was not an issue?

NE: Yes it was.

JE: Okay.

NE: There were two Democrats on the City Commission when I arrived and three Republicans. Democrats were a little bit of a curiosity in those days. We would remember Lyndon Johnson, his election had gone and the city and state were turning Republican.

JE: Was that an easy election for you?

NE: Yes, my friends and I had worked on elections for years and we knew how to run a campaign. And it was a fabulous campaign. I think I won every precinct in this city. Besides that, the city was kind of ready for a woman. I think they might have been a little embarrassed that they hadn't had a woman in public office before.

JE: Did they use your gender as an issue to vote for you?

NE: Well, I didn't. Everybody knew I was a woman, it was clear I was a woman.

JE: I know, but was that a campaign point?

NE: No.

JE: No.

NE: No it was not. It may have been very important to some people, certainly to my friends.

JE: Yeah.

NE: But I didn't run as a first woman. Remember, I told you I was in lots of organizations throughout the city. The Boys Home, Cerebral Palsy Organization, the Red Cross, the United Way, the Urban League, I knew a lot of people. And the city was ready for a woman.

JE: Okay, so you had a name, you had high name recognition by the time you came to that election, more than likely.

NE: Perhaps.

JE: Right.

NE: Yes. And I had a good campaign. All my friends who knew how to run campaigns—

JE: Did you enjoy campaigning?

NE: Yes, it was exciting.

JE: Did you knock on doors?

NE: Oh, sure! Knocked on doors, made telephone calls, made stump speeches all over Tulsa. Went on the television, had signs and slogans. I think we raised thirty thousand dollars for that first campaign, which was a lot of money.

JE: Yeah.

NE: For a campaign.

JE: That had to be a big victory party when the first female—

NE: It was, it was very exciting.

JE: Yeah.

NE: And I was a curiosity at City Hall. I was invited to make speeches all over town because, you know, they wanted to see what I was like, what did I know? I discovered when you make a speech, a political speech, people really don't come for information very much. They want to know two things, they want to know if you know what you're talking about, and can they trust you?

So I made speeches all over town. On the day I arrived in City Hall on the executive floor, which was the eleventh floor of City Hall, there were two bathrooms; one was marked Executive, and the other was marked Woman. There was a little bit of consternation.

JE: [laughing] Did you—was there any, I don't know if prejudice is the word because the other four were men, do you think they treated you differently because you're a female?

NE: I think they were very good to me. City government was very polite in those days. Politics was not nearly as scrappy as it is today. And city politics was very cordial, civil, and kind.

I will say, it was interesting, city officials would be invited to a lot of events. And I would get invitations to Mr. Norman Eagleton, and invited to bring my wife. I remember one time the City Commission had a meeting at the Petroleum Club. I guess the lunch

was served in the men's grill and women were not allowed. And they had to find an anteroom that I could be served. Or they asked me if they could bring my lunch to me.

JE: Did that bother you?

NE: No.

JE: Or did you just take it in stride.

NE: I thought it was funny. I thought it was funny, but I knew we had work to do.

JE: What were some of the names of the commissioners that were on board at that time?

NE: Michael Kerpen was the Police and Fire commissioner, Bob Franden was Streets and Public Property, John Thomas was Water commissioner, me, and then Mayor LaFortune, of course.

JE: Okay, so four, yeah.

Chapter 14 – 4:05
John Williams

John Erling: Flooding, obviously, was a major issue.

Norma Eagleton: Flooding was a huge issue. It was our tragedy, it was perhaps the chief problem. Flooding and development; how to get city services to new areas, how to keep older areas from deteriorating, how to allocate resources. The city was changing a lot. How to maintain the viability of the downtown, was a concern.

As I say, the Williams Company anchored the north of the downtown.

JE: Let's talk a minute about downtown. Some of those department stores that you remember from downtown Tulsa.

NE: Well, there was Brown Duncan and Vandevers and Seidenbach and lots of specialty stores, Miss Jackson's. There was wonderful Nelson's Cafeteria, Bishop's were everybody ate.

JE: Clarke's Good Clothes.

NE: Clarke's Good Clothes, Renberg's.

JE: So it was really—

NE: It was very, very lively. It began to change, of course, with the advent of shopping centers, Utica Square being the first one. And then Southroads in Southroads Mall. And then finally, Woodland Hills.

JE: So were you here long enough then to see that happening?

NE: Yes.

JE: And there was nothing you would do about it because you just thought that was the trend.

NE: Well, there was a lot to be done about it. We were attempting to deal with transportation. The Performing Arts Center was built during my time. And as I said, the Williams Center Complex. John Williams spearheaded that. He was a wonderful Tulsan.

JE: He was a giant, wasn't he? Of this town?

NE: He was a giant, yes. The city was involved in the theater and John Williams is, of course, very involved. I remember going to a meeting one time when we all decided on one particular position. We went to the meeting, we came out and we did not prevail. And I thought to myself, "We were outnumbered; there was one of him and only five of us." Yes, John Williams was a giant.

JE: But and he—

NE: And this city has a lot to thank him for.

JE: And the fact that John Williams and Mayor LaFortune were very tight and they could work together.

NE: Bob LaFortune could work with anyone, he was wonderful. And I'm sure John Williams trusted him, as everybody admired the mayor.

JE: Yes.

NE: I remember when the Performing Arts Center opened, Ella Fitzgerald came to sing. That was very, very wonderful. And that has been a marvelous, marvelous treasure in the city.

JE: It's one thing of many things, it has lasted to this very day. So you're spending three years at the City Commission?

NE: Yes. And while I was there another thing happened. We were working on flooding, the citizens were teaching us to do. We learned, we hired a hydrologist, Charlie Hart, who just recently retired from city government. He was wonderful, a wonderful Public Works chair. But he was our first hydrologist and we began to learn about what happened to water. We began to learn that you didn't want to rush the water down the creek, you wanted to keep it and let it seep into the ground. So you wanted sort of holding ponds.

Stan Williams was at the TMAPC at the time, and he spearheaded the development of storm water management and the storm water ordnances, which were very revolutionary. It was a pretty good fight because developers had been used to developing and this is a city who likes freedom to do what you want to do with your own property. So there was a little bit of a dustup, a little bit of a fight. But it was one of the really proudest moments of Tulsa, when we adopted those ordnances.

JE: And did that happen during your time on the commission?

NE: No, it began during our time on the commission.

JE: Right, right.

NE: We began working on them and we began identifying the problem. But the ordnances were adopted in '85 and '86.

JE: Is that when Mayor Terry Young was the mayor?

NE: Yes, Mayor Terry Young was mayor.

JE: And he spearheaded and was a promoter of that.

NE: He certainly was, yes. Yes.

Chapter 15 – 5:02
EMSA

Norma Eagleton: Should we talk about the EMSA?

John Erling: Was that during your time on the commission?

NE: Yes.

JE: EMSA?

NE: Emergency Medical Services Authority. Ambulances began to be a problem. Historically, ambulances were run by funeral homes with their hearses. It was called a "scoop and run" operation. They would run to an accident, and maybe all the funeral homes in town would be sending their ambulances to a traffic accident. Stories are that they fought over the dead bodies while the wounded sort of lay there.

I don't know if that's true, but it was an imperfect system. The idea was to try and get the injured person or the heart attack victim to the hospital as soon as possible. Sometimes in the event of a trauma, moving the victim was the worst thing to do. And we learned in those days that you were safer on the fields of Vietnam, from a trauma injury, than you were on the streets of America.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

NE: Because in Vietnam they knew to take the hospital to the victim. They took a small hospital unit to the victim.

So we had funeral homes providing ambulance services. Then we had an entrepreneur called Pat Mace, who had a very fine nurse, and he began to run a private ambulance service. It was a pretty good service, we thought, certainly improvement over what we had, but it wasn't sustainable. And there were problems. Pat Mace was pretty independent and was not going to be told what to do. There was a little bit of oversight from the Health Department, but he was running the service as he thought best.

There was some concern about whether some of the areas of the city were being served. The response time was different in various parts of the city. So the city had engaged a consultant to come and review our ambulance system. Pat Mace also began

to come to the city for subsidies. We would give him subsidies but it was difficult to have accountability to get an audit.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: Because he was an entrepreneur, he was an independent businessman. Government, if it's involved, it has to have accountability. So we knew we had to do something. We brought these consultants in and they examined our city and our system and they designed, really, a very, very innovative way to provide emergency medical services based on what was happening in Vietnam, in those hospitals.

Instead of taking the patient to the hospital as fast as you could, the idea was to take the hospital in a highly equipped ambulance vehicle to the patient and treat them on the spot. And then move to the hospital as you could.

How do you pay for it? Well, there are lots of ways. The big system in Los Angeles was run by the Fire Department, but they're not any cost savings if the government is running the system. Because if you have an accident or you have an injury or something goes wrong and immediately you have to put more money and more resources to the system.

So what they devised for Tulsa was a public utility model where the system would be run by the private sector, but the city would set up the regulations, would bid the contract, would own the ambulances, and would supervise and regulate the system. They'd be the only ones who could operate in the city, but they had to serve the entire city, not just the portions that could pay.

JE: Right.

NE: Okay? The emergency room doctors became the quality control. We started the EMSA authority and EMSA was born. That was one of my projects.

JE: Somewhere in there is Dr. Gustafson of St. Francis Hospital.

NE: Dr. Gustafson was very important. He was on the EMSA board, yes, the Trust Authority.

JE: But he—

NE: Beau Farmer was another of the doctors who was on the Trust Authority. Dick Horkey from Helmerick & Payne was on the Trust Authority. We had a lot of wonderful help.

JE: Some of the things that we have today we take for granted like they were there all the time. But Dr. Gustafson also established an emergency room facility at the hospital. That hadn't been done before. And to advertise where it was and put up signs, "This is where you come."

NE: Jerry Gustafson *is* a very fine Tulsan.

JE: Right. He was in Dallas when President Kennedy was assassinated, in the hospital there. He didn't attend to the body but he was there.

Chapter 16 – 6:12
Oklahoma Corporation Commission

John Erling: So you've established EMSA.

Norma Eagleton: And the theater. Flooding ordnances were getting going. I want to say it was a real privilege to serve under Bob LaFortune. He was just, he was just an elegant mayor. He was wise, he was patient, he was respectful, courtly, and very inclusive. Tulsa is very fortunate to have Bob LaFortune.

JE: We don't know all the mayors going way back when, but he would be the father of our city.

NE: Well, I loved serving under Bob LaFortune. I'm very, very proud of the lady mayors who followed him also. It pleases me greatly that Susan Savage and Kathy Taylor have been good mayors. So the city has grown up.

JE: Right.

NE: Women are participating.

One funny thing happened when I was at the city, I was mayor for the day. Because Bob LaFortune was out of town, and the Broadway musical *Hair* was coming to a facility at the city. And there was great turmoil about it because it was a little bit raunchy. There was some protests about *Hair*.

JE: There was nudity on stage.

NE: They called—because there was nudity on stage. I began to get some calls, so I called the police chief, and I said, "Chief, is it okay to have nude bodies on the stage?"

He said, "It's okay, it's not against the law unless you serve food."

So I said, "Very well, I'll have a couple of tickets to that show."

JE: [laughing] So nothing major came out of that?

NE: No.

JE: Out of, out of a protest?

NE: It was okay.

JE: So?

NE: I ran for office twice for city finance commissioner and was elected. In the middle of my second term, Governor Nye called and asked if I would accept an appointment on the Oklahoma Corporation Commission. Jan Eric Cartwright had served on the commission, had run for attorney general, and was elected. That left a vacancy on the commission for Jan Cartwright's last two years.

Now they had not had a woman on that commission either, and I think maybe the governor was sort of looking around perhaps for women. I accepted.

JE: Was that something that you had to think about for a while?

NE: I certainly did. It was a big move for me.

JE: Because not only was it a move as far as office was concerned, you moved to Oklahoma City.

NE: I didn't actually move, I had an apartment there.

JE: Oh.

NE: I commuted. I drove over there on Monday morning and drove back home on Friday afternoon after work.

JE: But it did change life, there's no question about it.

NE: It was a change of life, it was a whole new area. I loved working in the city, it was really quite different. My children were old enough that I didn't worry about leaving them. Our daughter was in college, son in high school. I remember wondering whether I should do it or not.

My husband said, "You know, you can think about it, do it if you want to, but you'll not have an opportunity like that again." He said, "You probably will regret it if you don't take it."

And so I said, "Yes." And I went down, again, to be the first woman in an organization in the Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

JE: Was there any prejudice to you there?

NE: I don't know that it was prejudice but I was a curiosity. The Corporation Commission is the chief regulatory authority of our state. And we operate as a court. A lot of attorneys practice before the commission. I would hear them in the hall referring to "that woman," and I knew it was me.

JE: Tell us what you're regulating as a Corporation commissioner.

NE: We regulated the economy of Oklahoma. It was a very, very important and powerful agency. We regulated public utilities. Remember the public utility model? They have a monopoly but they have to serve the entire territory and they have to be regulated by the state.

We regulated oil and gas production. We regulated transportation. And we had a little authority over railroad stations. So it was a vast technical and important commission.

JE: It's almost amazing there were only three Corporation commissioners. Do you think three was enough and still is today?

NE: Well, we had a large staff. We had an Oil and Gas staff, Transportation staff, we had Utilities staff, we had thirty attorneys working for us. We had a field staff, so the staff did the work. The commissioners managed, we had an executive authority over our very large staff, and we had judicial authority when hearing would come before us, either for utility rates, for new plants, for trucking permits. In those days, trucking was regulated. Or for oil and gas issues. So we held court, primarily, and managed our staff.

JE: That would have been in…?

NE: Nineteen seventy-nine.

JE: Okay. Today we have a female, Dana Murphy.

NE: We've had several females on the commission since then.
JE: Oh, there have been since then?
NE: Yes.
JE: All right. And today, it's Bob Anthony and Todd Hyatt and Dana Murphy.
NE: Bob Anthony took my seat when I retired, and he's still there.
JE: Is it true that the commissioners cannot visit with each other?
NE: Well, we were under the Open Meeting law. And any two of us were a quorum. There were only three of us so any two of us were a quorum.
JE: So you had offices on the same floor?
NE: Yes, we did. And we visited, but we just couldn't do business.
JE: Yeah, you could talk about the weather but you couldn't talk about business.
NE: That's right. We had attorneys who advised us and we were pretty scrupulous about that.
JE: You filled out the two-year term of Jan Eric Cartwright.
NE: And then I ran state-wide two times and went—
JE: For full six-year terms.
NE: For full six-year terms. So my tenure on the commission was ten years.
JE: Interesting, one of your races you actually had two challengers, I think, Charles Cleveland and Jim Martin.
NE: There were two of us running at that time and they were running as a pair to challenge two commissioners.
JE: And I believe Mr. Martin attacked your record in approving utility rate hikes.
NE: That's right.
JE: What was going on there?
NE: Well, let me tell you about what happened during my tenure on the commission.

Chapter 17 – 5:11
High Cost of Living

Norma Eagleton: First thing you need to know is that electric utility rates had gone down every single year since 1928, because of the economies of scale and because of technology. In the 1970s, with the Arab oil embargo energy became scarce and expensive. Interest rates rose to about 20 percent, suddenly the time for cheap energy was over. Energy costs and consumer costs increased and people were not used to it. It was very, very much a shock and certainly a burden on many people.

I remember getting a telephone call from a woman who said, "Mrs. Eagleton, or Commissioner," she said, "My light bill is higher than my mortgage bill."

And I said, "Well, let's talk about your light bill for a minute. Do you have a refrigerator?"

"Well, yes."

"Do you have a dishwasher?"

"Yes."

"You have a couple of TVs and radios?"

"Yes, yes. Yes."

"Do you have an air conditioner?"

"Yes I do."

"Do you have some appliances other than that?"

"Yes."

Our problem was, first of all, the unexpected, unpredictable increase in costs. Secondly, the fact that we were using more. Third, we didn't have a good price signal. We just turned on our lights and turn our television and air conditioner and refrigerator and so forth and get a bill at the end of the month, and it would be startling. So it was a very shocking time and a very contentious time. We had lots of problems because of that.

Also we had new plants and it was beginning to be very expensive to build utility plants. You could build a nice little gas-fired plant for, I don't know, maybe fifty million dollars, and a coal plant would cost two hundred million. And coal was not clean. Big coal piles and coal trains coming through our town.

So there were lots of problems. We were in a transition from cheap energy to expensive energy.

John Erling: However, that did not cause you to be defeated. The public must have understood the logic that you just stated.

NE: Well, I campaigned all over the state, I did my best. I'd get in little single-engine planes with people I didn't even know and go to far reaches of this state and try and tell people about regulation. And try and tell people that what we were trying to do was protect the rate-payer, but we also had to protect our source of energy. We didn't want some bankrupt utilities in our state. This would not have served anybody well. So it was a terribly delicate balance, and the public were not terribly aware of the complications of a regulation.

I would go and talk about regulations. Again, I was a curiosity being the first woman, so I went to most Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs and Chambers of Commerce in the state and tried to tell them about what the commission did and tell them about regulation and how it was our job to keep the utility alive, keep the service coming, and keep the rate-payers protected.

JE: And I would imagine that there were many who were actually surprised that a female came with this kind of logic and understanding. Because they had only thought men could do that and maybe not so much a woman. Maybe I'm injecting something here that I

shouldn't. But it was coming from a female that they had not normally understood would be coming from her. Is that true? Or is that—

NE: Sure, I think so.

JE: Right.

NE: I think so. I think they figured that I was just sort of jotting things down on the back of an envelope. But I'd been used to studying, and remember the League of Women Voters, who benefits, who pays, is it legal? You do not have to be able to run a utility in order to be a regulator. You have to know what questions to ask, what to look for, and how to be sort of courageous. The decisions were not all that popular.

We hated to raise rates. People would call us and they would really be suffering. We were trying to deal with people, particularly in older homes that had no insulation, and we would suggest one warm room. We would say, "Just keep one room warm, or one room cool in the summer. Try to plant trees around your houses." We had just not been used to dealing with high cost of energy.

This was the problem, we began to understand about conservation. We began to understand that we could conserve energy and save money. The utilities about that time began to do energy audits and go into homes and tell people what they needed to do with their windows or their insulation or their heating. We began to have some energy-efficient appliances, air conditioners began to be energy-efficient. This was a time of change. It was a time of learning, of coping, of managing the crisis, really.

Chapter 18 – 15:00
Black Fox Nuclear Plant

John Erling: One of the issues was the Black Fox Nuclear Power Plant, which was proposed by the Public Service Company of Oklahoma PSO. This was in May of 1973. And it was to be built approximately three miles southwest of downtown Inola, within city limits, and was to consist of two general electric boiling water reactors. Now that didn't happen. Tell us why.

Norma Eagleton: The history of nuclear power in Oklahoma is an interesting one. First of all, we had a growing need for electricity, lots of new plants, lots of cost, lots of consideration. The federal government began to look at nuclear power and began to be very encouraged by it. And they encouraged nuclear plants all over America.

Do you remember Adams for Peace? Nuclear power was going to be too cheap to meter, so nuclear plants began to be popping up everywhere. In Oklahoma, Public Service Company and Western Farmers Cooperative had a joint venture to build the

Black Fox Plant—two gigantic reactors, 1150 megawatts at a cost, they thought, of about $450 million.

My first exposure to the nuclear issue was when I was on the City Commission and in Tulsa and Public Service Company came to us for approval of a contract for more water than Tulsa was using at the present time for the entire city.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

NE: This contract would be at a fixed rate for fifty years. And it worried me. I didn't know much about pricing water but I knew that water was very important to Tulsa. I knew that it cost when you had to go for new water someplace and find a new source. I knew that rates were going up from time to time. And it seemed like we ought to take a look at it.

At the same time, however, licensing hearings were going on across the street from City Hall at the Tulsa County Courthouse. The Nuclear Regulatory Authority was holding hearing on licensing and it was very much a controversy.

A lady from Claremore, who was very, very important in this story, her name was Carrie Dickerson.

JE: Her name was Carrie Barefoot Dickerson.

NE: Carrie Barefoot Dickerson. She had a farm, she had a nursing home, and she heard that there was going to be some activity near her farm and began to explore and see what was happening. She heard about these giant nuclear plants that were going to be there, so she started trying to learn about nuclear energy. And she learned a lot. She learned enough to make her very nervous about it.

Nuclear energy was in its early stages. Nobody had ever decommissioned a plant. Nobody knew how to leave a plant. Nobody knew how to store the wastes. We still don't know.

Anyway, Carrie became very, very uneasy about it. And about that time Three Mile Island happened.

JE: We should say quickly, Three Mile Island, tell them what that was about.

NE: Three Mile Island was a nuclear plant in New York that had an accident and the plant was shut down. Radiation escaped and it was very, very dangerous, and it was a catastrophe. It slowed down nuclear proliferation in this country and I don't know if any more nuclear plants have been built since then. It stopped the industry.

But PSO was moving forward before Three Mile Island happened. And had gone ahead and planned and had spent. It already had some sink costs. It had contracted for some reactors. It had bought the land. It was on its way to do what it thought was the most practical, useful, necessary thing that it needed for its customers.

But PSO had to come to the commission to get permission to charge the costs to the rate-payers. So we had a hearing, six-weeks hearing before the commission. The issue was, one, is it needed? Now that was an interesting thing, which we hadn't realized. The

need for electricity had increased exponentially for many years, primarily because of the addition of air-conditioning on the load.

Residential air-conditioning was just about saturated at that point. So the expectation of an increasing need was being questioned. But it was a very new idea that maybe we could do something in efficiency or maybe we didn't need as much energy as we thought we had needed. So the need was an issue.

The cost was an issue. The plant, which was to cost $450 million, by the time it got to hearing before the commission was going to cost $2.5 billion. So it was very expensive. Could we afford it? Did we need it?

And what about the safety? Where were we going to store this stuff?

JE: They were concerned about the waste that would lead to birth defects, other health problems, for those who lived nearby.

NE: Sure. It came to be very, very controversial. It was not altogether clear that it was safe. The commission was not involved in the safety issues. That was before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. The commission was involved in the economics of it. Should we approve the plant? Should we allow it, them to charge the cost to the rate-payers?

That was what was before the commission. Did we need the plant? Could we afford it? Should the rate-payers pay? And if not, what would happen to the company?

JE: In June of '79, about five hundred people were arrested for protesting about the construction of Black Fox.

NE: The Sunbelt Alliance was a very, very vigorous protest against Black Fox. Yes.

JE: So they and Carrie, then, where leading maybe the public?

NE: I don't think Carrie was part of the Sunbelt Alliance.

JE: No, but the two—

NE: They were the militant arm of the protest. Carrie was very polite, very thoughtful, and very determined to fight that plant. She mortgaged her farm, she mortgaged her nursing home, she lost both of them. She made a huge commitment to it.

She came down to our six-week hearing, in our courtroom, and I'll never forget seeing her sit in the back of the room knitting. When she was called to the stand she made very kind remarks about the PSO young men. "That young man, he's so nice, I've just tried to persuade him differently."

And I thought to myself, "Oh my, PSO, I think you're in trouble."

Carrie was a remarkable woman, a valuable woman. And really, something of a saint, something of a saint.

JE: She had never done this before?

NE: No.

JE: An ordinary citizen living in our community.

NE: That's right.

JE: And it shows what you can do. But it had to be a combination of her effort, Three Mile Island, all this came together?

NE: Well, all that was happening at the time—

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: ...but the commission was in its rarified position trying to discover, one, did we need the plant? Two, could we afford it? Three, what would happen to the company if it were not built? What would happen to the company if it were built? We had to keep the Public Service Company in business and we had to protect the rate-payers from an unnecessary expense. So it was a terrible problem.

JE: Did any of these issues keep you up at night?

NE: Oh, sure, sure. I went all over the state and bled blood all over the state on Black Fox. Police had to come and take us out of hearings sometimes.

JE: Oh, really?

NE: Sure. It was very, very, uh—

JE: But you were just there as hearing—

NE: ...controversial.

JE: ...you weren't there promoting, you were there just holding hearings.

NE: But people knew that we were involved and people knew that we were a decision-making point.

JE: Even though you hadn't promoted it one way or the other?

NE: No, we were neutral.

JE: Yeah.

NE: We were neutral. We were taking evidence and people came in from all over the country. We had the soft-power people, the environmental people. They were the ones who testified before the commission. "Hey, I don't think you need it. I don't think electric need is going to grow as it has in the past. And two, efficiency is the way to go, it's much cheaper than building new plants. And three, have you examined the cost of the Black Fox? It's no longer $450 million, it's now $2.5 billion. How are you going to pay for it? How are you going to maintain it? What are you going to do about the cost of decommissioning it? What would happen if it would break down? What do you do in the case of a breakdown of a Three Mile Island event?"

JE: So did—

NE: So all of these things were happening in our commission, in the newspapers all over the state.

JE: Officials outside of the Corporation commissioners, were they weighing in on this issue? Governors, senators, representatives?

NE: I think everybody had an opinion, and I think we did hear from some public officials as just witnesses or as people who spoke or sent letters to us.

JE: Nobody as an official could lean on you?

NE: That's right.

JE: It was down to three people to make this decision.

NE: Three people and our staff and our consultants and our witnesses who came in and the utility executives and the attorney general's office was involved in those hearings. The protestants had very fine attorneys, Lewis Bullock, so it was a civil but long and involved technical hearing. As I say, it lasted six weeks in summertime in the heat.

JE: So the day of vote came.

NE: Well, what happened was, PSO had a new president, Martin Fate, succeeded Dick Newman. Dick Newman had been the president of PSO, the chief executive officer, when the plant was conceived. And I must say, it was not an unreasonable plan, at the beginning. The feds were promoting it, it appeared to be inexpensive, it appeared to be doable, there was lots of regulation, lots of oversight. They certainly felt they needed because their projection showed a whole lot more megawatt power was going to be needed in Oklahoma.

So it was not an unreasonable plan. But it became very, very problematic. Richard Newman left and went to the parent company in Dallas, and Martin Fate took the reins of PSO. And Martin Fate was a really fine, fine Tulsan. Fine businessman, fine utility person, and he began to see what we were all seeing, that the thing was not sustainable. It was not doable. But he didn't know what to do—that was the issue. If PSO has to eat all these expenses that it's already expended it'd be bankrupt. We don't want to bankrupt utility in our state. They certainly don't want to be bankrupt. And yet, how much could rate-payers stand? And what would be the fair thing to do?

There were lots of issues, and Martin Fate though began to see that the plant should probably not be built. He began to see if he could sell off some of the equipment, and he did. He sold some reactors to Mexico and other places. And he began to negotiate and to try to come to an agreement that the rate-payers would bear some of the cost and the shareholders would bear most of the costs and the plant would be canceled.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: That was the result.

JE: So he saved PSO?

NE: He did. He saved PSO and the commission, we were involved. There were a lot of people involved.

JE: When at first you thought this was a good idea, how much later did you realize, "This is not a good idea"?

NE: I worried about nuclear but it wasn't my job to worry about the safety issues. That was *not* my job. My job in the city, when the issue of water came before the City Commission, was how do we price water? What do we do when the water costs escalate? What do we do with this contract? How can we review their costs at times when our costs are going up? And what will we do if we have to go to the Illinois River for water? What will be that cost and how shall it be allocated to PSO? That was my issue—

JE: Right.

NE: …at the city. At the Corporation Commission, the issue before us was, "Do we need this plant? Can we afford it? Who should pay? Who benefits? Who pays?"

JE: And so you came to realize yourself that this was not going to work?

NE: Well, as far as what we were doing, we were taking testimony. We were learning about nuclear power, costs, and benefits, and risks. And we were learning about PSO's situation. And we knew about our rate-payers, they were hearing from them all the time. So we were trying to find a resolution. It wasn't, "Does it work?" or "Doesn't it work?" we were trying to find a resolution to protect our company, to protect our rate-payers, to protect our state's economy.

JE: So it was in 1982 then, that they decided the plant would not be built? We should point out that Carrie Barefoot Dickerson is featured in the book, *Women of Spirit: Stories of Courage from the Women Who Lived Them*, by Catherine Martin. And the Carrie Dickerson Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the Oklahoma Sustainability Network is named after her. She died in 2006. She was one big component but it was obvious there were other things going on.

NE: Carrie was the first one to be alarmed, the first one to be concerned. And she was just remarkable in the way she handled it: with dignity, with determination, with consideration, but she was valiant, she never faltered. And she made a huge personal commitment.

JE: There should be a statue in honor of her some place.

Chapter 19 – 10:02
Family Law

John Erling: I should point out that while you were at the commission dealing with all these issues you went to law school, Oklahoma City University, at night.

Norma Eagleton: I did.

JE: I believe you were what, about fifty years old?

NE: Yes.

JE: And you graduated in 1978. How many years did it take to graduate?

NE: Five.

JE: And you graduated first in your class.

NE: Yes.

JE: How difficult was this?

NE: Law school is not easy, it's scary because you don't have tests along the way. You have one big test at the end of the semester. There's a lot of things to learn, but what an education, what a marvelous education law school is. Law deals with everything in our society.

I remember being fascinated to consider and learn how a check makes its way through the banking system. Learned about water, learned about the environment. All the big constitutional cases in modern times happened in my lifetime. The Pentagon Papers, Brown v. Board of Education, Roe versus Wade. Very, very interesting and valuable education. I liked it but it was work and it was scary because you had to take this test at the end of the semester, and kind of cross your fingers and go and look and see what grade you made. They would post the grades by number, not name.

JE: But you did all that at night and graduating first in the class. If I ask you about some of your major accomplishments that's got to be one of them.

And issue that you faced on the commission was about oil field saltwater pollution sites that were allowed to operate. The Corporation Commission seemed to be sympathetic.

NE: The Corporation Commission tried to regulate oil and gas production. We mainly were involved with the oil and gas ordnances, where to place the wells? Could you have increased density? Could you have directional drilling? And the pollution was a big issue. We had field offices throughout the state and tried to protect the state's water. This was before we had fracking and before the issue of disposal wells and so forth arrived in the state. We didn't have earthquakes to deal with.

JE: But we are experiencing earthquakes today. We're disposing of saltwater today. How does that compare back then when you were dealing with it?

NE: Oh, I think it's much more complicated today, although we had our challenges in our day, and there are challenges today. I generally try not to second-guess people who are working in areas I worked in because they know more than I do about it and it is their job. But it's certainly a challenge today.

Water protection has always been a challenge in Oklahoma. The aquifers are not unlimited. We have to protect water in Oklahoma, and we've always known that.

JE: How many years did you serve?

NE: Ten.

JE: Ten years.

NE: Ten years on the commission.

JE: And then you decided not to run?

NE: That's right. And that's the reason I went to law school. I wanted to have another thing to look forward to. I didn't want to stay on the commission forever. I wanted to come home and what would I do? So I decided to go to law school. There've been lawyers in our family. My husband was a lawyer, I had an uncle who was a lawyer, my brother was a lawyer. My son was in law school in Vanderbilt at the same time I was in law school at Oklahoma City University.

I remember I said, "Well, Rick, we'll just hang out our shingle together."

And he said, "I'm not going to work for an outfit called Eagleton and Son."

And I said, "What about calling our outfit Eagleton and Mom?"

JE: No?

NE: But he turned me down and went to work for a big law firm here.

JE: Who did you go to work for?

NE: I hung out my own shingle for a while. And then I finally went to office with my husband's firm. I was "of counsel" to his firm.

JE: And what type of law did you practice?

NE: I practiced domestic law and that was another type of learning experience. Here I go again. Domestic law seemed to be a good place for me because I knew kind of about the dynamics of a family. I'd been a daughter and a wife and a mother and a grandmother and a mother-in-law and I knew a lot about families. And so I sort of hung out my shingle and primarily practiced domestic law, a little bit of probate and guardianship, but mostly families interested me.

And what I discovered, and family law was changing in the time I practiced. I practiced for a little over twenty years, twenty, twenty-five years. And family law was done like every other law, adversarial system. This is the way we do our cases. We have witnesses, we have proponents and opponents and we go in and argue before a judge. And the judge makes a decision and off we go. That doesn't work very well for families. It works all right for automobile accidents to try and decide liability, because these are strangers who might not have to deal with each other again.

It doesn't work very well for families, and particularly families with children. Because you can get a divorce or a separation but you're still connected in a way, you still have to raise your children, you still have to deal with each other at weddings and funerals. And you still have grandchildren in common. And there's something that connects people that can't be severed so easily.

And what happens in the adversarial situation, if there's a contested divorce, everybody hires their lawyer, they hire their witnesses, they go in and try and beat up on

the other side. And they poison the ground. Then the judge makes a decision and says, "Now go home and co-parent your children."

It's almost impossible after so much toxicity. So family law began in our town and elsewhere to realize that we had to find some way to avoid or at least to soften the adversarial system. That we had to solve these problems without fighting. That we had to take it out of the win/lose arena. Because losses will reverberate forever in a family.

So we had to have a win/win or a mediated agreement if we could. Or something that would avoid the controversy and the contest. So domestic law began to move toward mediation. Mediators were trained and hired to try and sit down with the divorcing couple in a custody dispute and to try to resolve the problems. To empower the participants to try and come to a resolution, rather than turning over the lives of themselves and their children to a judge, who doesn't know them. So it just made sense to try and empower people and engage them in trying to resolve the issues, their family issues that were really very personal.

So we've moved much more toward mediation. We've moved in the courts toward parenting conferences, where parents will initially meet together before a settlement judge and see if there's a way that the thing could be settled, or at least figure out a way to proceed without so much combat.

During the time I practiced law we established a seminar, "Helping Children Cope with Divorce," that divorcing parents need to go to, to learn what effect divorce is having on their children. This was a traumatizing time often in people's lives. They don't sometimes realize the effect on the children. There's been a lot of research about that so we're beginning to train and engage parents in understanding how to minimize the harm and concern and stress on themselves and their children.

We have Tulsa Lawyers for Children. I worked in the Tulsa County Bar Association and I established, or help establish, a committee that dealt with children's law and how to protect children not only in divorcing situations but in the juvenile court.

Custody has been through an interesting change in modern times. In a divorce in early days in America custody of children went to the father because he needed them on the farm.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: And then with the industrial revolution, fathers go to work in the factories and the business district, children are left home with the mothers. And the mother gets custody. That was called the "Tender Years Doctrine." And so mother generally had a head start in getting custody.

Now mother's working, father's working, families have different configurations, so the test for custody is best interest of the child, which makes a lot of sense. So custody evaluations in the law has moved a great deal and it was interesting to be a part of that.

JE: Yes, from years you practiced law.

NE: I practiced for about twenty-three years.

JE: It must have been exciting to see this evolving to mediation. You were there to witness all that and certainly to support it.

NE: Yes, it's been an interesting time to practice family law. And I do think we've made some headway and some progress here in Tulsa. I think we've tried to make it a little more humane, a little more rational. We certainly are more alert to protecting children.

Chapter 20 – 4:32
Women's View Point

John Erling: You've shared EMSA, Tulsa Area Council on Aging, you remember the Tulsa Industrial Authority, Tulsa Performing Arts Trust, Tulsa Energy Recourses Recovery Authority, in addition to all these other things.

Norma Eagleton: That was when I was at the city.

JE: Okay.

NE: Those were the delegated responsibilities to the Finance commissioner. The Finance commissioner in those days was sort of the commissioner-at-large.

JE: You've donated time to volunteer organizations serving the Senior Services Board of Directors, Alternate Dispute Resolution, Advisory Board, and Family and Children Services Advisory Board. You've been one busy woman, haven't you?

NE: It's been very, very interesting and rewarding, rewarding in many ways.

JE: Was there one or two people that you would look to as your mentors?

NE: Well, I've always depended on my friends. And as I told you, in the early days of city government, the women who were on boards and commissions all networked and helped each other. And I still think this is an important part of the way women perform and learn and achieve things is by working together and by networking and supporting one another. I think this is very important.

Women bring a particular viewpoint to government. They bring a notion of how neighborhoods work. And a particular sensitivity to safety. Women are very, very important to government, so I've tried to in various things empower and encourage women to participate.

JE: And here we are in 2016. We've just had an election; Hilary Clinton could have been the first female president of the United States. Ultimately, Donald J. Trump became the president. I don't know if you care to share your feelings about that.

NE: Well, I've been very interested always in government, and I've reflected and have been concerned about some of the trends in government. One of the things that distresses me is how politicians are not appreciated. I hear people saying, "Well, I'm not a politician, vote for me. I'm a businessperson." Or "I'm an individual citizen, I'm not a politician." Politics is a noble undertaking. This is the government of, for, and by the people and the people select people to represent them in the difficult and challenging and interesting and important issues facing their life and facing our very survival.

I think it's very courageous to present yourself to the public and say, "I'm running for office. I'm willing to go to Oklahoma City or to City Hall or to Washington to try and represent you." A campaign is a time when citizens gather together and try to sort out their goals and their values. And then they elect someone who goes and tries to deal with them on behalf of the citizens.

I remember when I first got to City Hall, I was in the grocery store one time and I saw a pretty elderly woman pushing her grocery cart through muttering to herself. And she said, "Everything is so expensive, so expensive."

And I thought to myself, "That's the lady I represent. I don't know her but I have to try and do my best for her."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NE: I regret the polarization today. This is terribly dangerous and counterproductive and it's just wrong. The genius of America is compromise. In a big diverse country such as ours, a continental nation, we have to learn to talk together and compromise because we're not going to see eye-to-eye. As I say, that's the genius of America.

And one time when we couldn't compromise we went to a bloody, bloody war, where 650,000 people died. And the results of it we're still experiencing today.

JE: That war was?

NE: The Civil War.

JE: Right.

NE: Yes. The most bloody war in our history because of the inability to solve problems together because of the fragmentation, fracturing, polarization.

So I believe government service is a high calling and it should be respected and protected and admired. I believe, as I said before, the goal of business is profit. The goal of government is keeping our society glued together.

Chapter 21 – 3:20
Norma on Aging

John Erling: Just a moment here about aging. You're a young eighty-two years old, very vibrant. Any thoughts on that from your personal experience?

Norma Eagleton: Well, when I retired I realized that I had time to do some things that I'd not done before. And I've been taking advantage of Tulsa's rich cultural life. I didn't know a whole lot about orchestration or music or opera. But I have season tickets to all those things, the opera, the symphony, the chamber music, the ballet. We have a rich cultural life, and of course, I've tried to learn about all those areas. As I usually do, I bought books and I bought tapes and I bought CDs and I've learned. And what a wonderful privilege it is to be in Tulsa with all this rich culture.

The other thing I do now is I go to the Tulsa Committee on Foreign Relations, trying to keep up with international issues. I'm trying to learn, I'm trying to stay curious, I try to stay involved, I try to stay safe—it's important not to fall.

JE: You don't have to work at your curiosity because you've always had a curious mind, and that's going to serve you well now because they say that those who are curious, unless they have major health issues, they're the ones who live the longest.

NE: I cherish my curiosity. Every once in a while I'm interviewed by a grandchild who has to, for a paper, interview somebody. And they say, "Noni, what would you advise me to do?"

And I'd say, "I'd be very happy if you would always be kind and curious."

JE: Yeah. How would you like to be remembered?

NE: I guess I've always thought I'd like to have said of me, "She bargained in good faith."

JE: Yeah, to bargain is a good thing.

NE: "She did her best."

JE: Yeah.

NE: "She bargained in good faith."

JE: You mentioned the two female mayors we had, did you ever look back and wish you could have been the mayor of Tulsa, Oklahoma?

NE: I try not to look back. I try and stay curious and look forward. That's why I went to law school, I didn't want to regret leaving government, although I enjoy government and respect it. I went to law school so I'd have something to look forward to. That's why I'm going to all the cultural events, so I have something to look forward to.

I still like to read, ah—(sound of pleasure).

JE: So the young generations coming on, some advise based on your experience in life? What would you say to them?

NE: I'm a little bit hesitant to advise because their world is so different from mine. I thought I'd have a life just like my mother's, and I didn't. They won't have a life like mine. I want them to be involved. I want them to commit to things larger than themselves. I hope they will always be, as I said, curious and kind and be contributing, respectful members of society.

JE: Yeah. Well, Norma, I want to thank you for this time and thank you for the service to our state, to our city. You've contributed a lot to the history now of our town and the issues you face. So thank you for sharing your story with us.

NE: Thank you.

Chapter 22 – 0:33
Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.