A TEI Project

Interview of Betty Brooks

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (August 4, 2011)

McKIBBEN
This is Susan McKibben and I'm here with Dr. Betty Brooks. Today is Wednesday, August 4, 2011. We're at Dr. Brooks' home in San Clemente, California. Thanks for agreeing to do this with me.
BROOKS
Okay.
McKIBBEN
Let's start at the beginning. So why don't you tell me when and where you were born.
BROOKS
I was born in Monroe, Louisiana, and grew up in Coushatta, Louisiana, which is just below Shreveport, Louisiana, which is a large city. I went to college at Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport, Louisiana, then got married, which we were doing in those days because we were fifties-generation women. You just got married after you got out of college. We came out here because my husband [Robert Brooks] was in the Marine Corps, and that's how we got to California.
McKIBBEN
Oh, okay, so you made a cross-country trek there at some point.
BROOKS
Right. They were so desperate for teachers, I got a job with a telephone call. They just called and said, "Can you take this job?" So I did.

McKIBBEN
So just to back up a little bit, what year was it that you were born?
BROOKS
I was born in 1934.
McKIBBEN
We're going to get to your teaching and your move to California and all the different things that you've done, but I want to kind of start out with a sense of how you grew up and what your life was like when you were younger. So can you tell me a little bit about your family?
BROOKS
Yes, my father had his own business. He was a small-business owner, worked for Standard Oil. He was the middleman for Standard Oil products. That was a farming region where I grew up, so he sold a lot of tractor fuel and oils and gasoline and things like that. We were twenty miles from my grandfather, who was very prominent in our lives because we went to have dinner with him every Sunday. So we always had a family gathering every Sunday. I had cousins galore and we had a wonderful time growing up, playing on those Sundays. It was a small-town existence, but it was southern small town. It wasn't midwestern; it was southern.
McKIBBEN
And what do you mean when you say a southern small town?
BROOKS
Well, it's just different in the South. People are very family oriented. Like women are addressed Miss So-and-So, Miss Beth, Miss Betty, Miss So-and-So. You don't get that in the Midwest. There's a lot of deference to older people, I think.
McKIBBEN
And was that part of how you were raised?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Did you have siblings when you were growing up?
BROOKS
Yes, I have a brother who's five years younger than me and then I have a sister who's another five years, or she's ten years younger than me.
McKIBBEN

So you're the oldest.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
And who lived in your household?
BROOKS
All of us, the family. It was just all the siblings and my mother and father.
McKIBBEN
And you said your grandparents lived nearby.
BROOKS
My grandparents were in Ringgold, Louisiana, which is about twenty-five miles north of where we grew up.
McKIBBEN
Can you tell me a little bit about your neighborhood or the people that lived around you?
BROOKS
Well, it was just a small town. We would be what would be called sort of middle class, because these were people that lived on that street that had some outside means of support. The neighbor next door had his own business with—I forget what exactly it was. It was some kind of propane or something like that. And my father was in business working for Standard Oil. He was the middleman. And then I guess you'd say that was mainly—the person across the street worked in a store downtown, and then there was a lawyer that was further down. It was a mixed bag.
McKIBBEN
But mainly professionals and—
BROOKS
Right, right, right.
McKIBBEN
—business owners. Was the area integrated or segregated?
BROOKS
Oh, no, there wasn't any such thing as integration at that point. My hometown school didn't integrate till 1972, and I was long gone from there. There were people in that community that fought that and they fought it on the basis of, "How dare the federal government come down here and tell us what to do. We take care of our own and we done a good job, and leave us alone."

McKIBBEN
Did you have an awareness of those politics when you were a child?
BROOKS
Not when I was a child. When I became a teenager I became very aware. I went to a conference and I had a black roommate, and that just ground it in even more.
McKIBBEN
What was the conference?
BROOKS
It was in Kansas City. It was through the Methodist Church. I did a lot of church youth work.
McKIBBEN
So did you grow up attending church regularly?
BROOKS
Oh, yes. I mean Sunday, that was the day you did that. You did nothing else.
McKIBBEN
And was that an important part of your own thinking or is it something kind of—
BROOKS
Well, I think so. I think it set my ethics. Methodist Church did a good job with all of that. I won a speaking contest on evil, but they focus it on sins like drinking and that sort of thing. I won a state contest from that speech that I made at church and then I won a national contest.
McKIBBEN
What was the speech about?
BROOKS
The evils of alcohol and drug addiction.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember what you said?
BROOKS
Vaguely, but it's long gone. But I remember that I was trying to, as we would say later in the Women's Movement, I was raising consciousness about what liquor does. It was a little rigid, now that I'm older. I mean you just didn't drink. You weren't supposed to do that because it was evil. It was bad.
McKIBBEN
And the Methodist is a dry denomination still, I think.

BROOKS
Yes, right. Well, I think they're clear about some of it, and as I've gotten older, I admire them for taking a stand, because a lot of lives are ruined, but they never took a stand on integration or any of that kind of thing, and that's where the real evil in the South is. It's where—
McKIBBEN
[unclear].
BROOKS
Oh, yes, but, boy, you're messing with people who keep the church going, and some people will start dropping out and you won't have any money to take care of things. So I'm sure that's why they never messed with it, because they had one minister who tried to deal with the integration thing and they got rid of him real fast.
McKIBBEN
Oh, when was that? Do you remember?
BROOKS
Oh, it was early. It was in the forties. He tried to tackle it, and they said, "Goodbye to you, son."
McKIBBEN
Do you remember what he did?
BROOKS
No, I just was told about it.
McKIBBEN
And he wasn't allowed to stay around.
BROOKS
Oh, no. They didn't want anybody that would mess with the racial problems. Now, you could talk about liquor. You could talk about bad behavior and all of that, but don't you get into this black-and-white thing, because the basis was that they do stuff and we do stuff, and how dare you tell us we've got to take a stand when they're not taking any stands.
McKIBBEN
Was that something people talked about around you?
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
Just a silence?
BROOKS

No, it was almost like it was a taboo to do that. Now, my colleagues out here don't understand that, and especially if you're a Women's Studies person or you're a feminist or whatever, you don't understand it. But when you're in that culture, it's just not done. It's a class issue as much as a racial issue.

McKIBBEN

What do you mean by that?

BROOKS

Well, most of the people who are people of color don't have money, so, therefore, the whites can look down on them as low class. So it becomes a class issue. So why do you want to go to school with those low-class people?

McKIBBEN

When you were younger, was that something you just accepted or did you question it?

BROOKS

Well, I didn't question it at all to my parents because I'd have been slammed up the wall and whatever. It was not an issue for me, but I questioned it inside of myself. I knew it was wrong.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember where that doubt may have come from?

BROOKS

No, I just knew it was wrong.

McKIBBEN

You talked about class as a part of the racial dynamic. Do you recall interacting with any white people of a lower socioeconomic class than you?

BROOKS

No, I don't, but I know that we had friends who didn't have as much economic power as we did.

McKIBBEN

Do you recall how those kinds of class differences were seen?

BROOKS

No, because nobody would discuss any of that.

McKIBBEN

It was all kind of—

BROOKS

It’s just life is the way it is, and the integration problem was only because the North came down here and tried to shove it down our throats.
McKIBBEN
And that’s how it was viewed.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and their relationship as you were growing up? What were your parents like?
BROOKS
My father was a—I guess you could call him a passive man, but he really wasn’t. He just was a very quiet man. He had been an outstanding football player. He came from Texas and he was working class, so he was really striving to make sure that we had what we needed. My mother came from a semi-wealthy family. As I told you, it was twenty miles above us. My grandfather was a banker, so she inherited money from him.
McKIBBEN
Did that ever cause any tension between them?
BROOKS
Oh, I’m sure it did, but I knew nothing of that.
McKIBBEN
What kinds of chores did your parents do in the home? Did they each have a sphere or did they work on things together?
BROOKS
Well, my father was always working at, as he called it, his plant, at the plant. No, he never did any housework at all. It was all her. That was her domain.
McKIBBEN
And that’s what she did, she worked at home?
BROOKS
Yes, she was in the home and she also did other things because she was very talented woman. She substitute-taught until we all got old enough, and then she went back and started teaching in school, and then she went back to school and got a library degree. She was smart woman.
McKIBBEN
How old were you when she did that?

BROOKS
I was in high school.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember, did she talk to you about any of those goals, or were those things that she came to you later on?
BROOKS
No, she never spoke to me about it.
McKIBBEN
Did you help your mom around the house?
BROOKS
God, yes, I helped them because they made me do it. I didn't like to dust, and that was my chore on Saturday morning, dusting, and I hated it with a passion. I was not a housework girl, but my mother said, "You've got to do something now. We need you and you've got to do something, so choose it."
McKIBBEN
What about your brother and sister?
BROOKS
Well, they were young. Remember, he was five years younger than me and she was another five years, so that's ten years. So we didn't have much of a relationship.
McKIBBEN
Did you help care for them?
BROOKS
No, that was not at a time where they were doing a lot of babysitting. I don't remember any of that.
McKIBBEN
So it was mainly your mom.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember what your parents taught you in terms of what they expected you to do in your life?
BROOKS
Well, I was expected to grow up, go to college and have a—my mother wanted me to be a teacher so I'd have a teaching career, and have a family and be a strong woman like her. I knew that real clearly, but she was not—she never said this, but she was not

interested in me being any kind of a radical or doing anything that stepped outside much of society's definition of what women were.
McKIBBEN
And your father, did he talk about his expectations for you?
BROOKS
No, no.
McKIBBEN
It was mainly your mom's thing?
BROOKS
Yes, she ran the family, and he did his part by bringing in the bread, so to speak. We had cows, we had chickens. It was a small town and it was almost like we were on a farm because we had a garden. He did a lot of that work, and she did some of it too. We had cows, and there were some people that took milk from us. We delivered some milk and that sort of thing.
McKIBBEN
Did you ever milk the cows or work in the garden?
BROOKS
No, no, they never seemed to care if I did or not, and I didn't particularly care to get up in the morning and get out in that cold and do that, so it was not for me.
McKIBBEN
Was that something you enjoy? Did you like animals or being outdoors?
BROOKS
Not necessarily.
McKIBBEN
What did you do for fun when you were young?
BROOKS
Oh, I played with my cousins, and I've lived in the world of books and playing drama like that. The only dolls I ever had were paper dolls because I thought the other baby dolls were really sissy and stuff that I—it was just beneath me. So the kind of dolls I played with were paper dolls who had adolescents and grownups that you could identify with.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember what books you liked to read?
BROOKS

I don’t remember much. I remember that there was Nancy Drew and I remember Buddy Boys books, and we had a My Book House series that my mother had gotten for us, and I read those.
McKIBBEN
When you went to school, when you went to, like, elementary school, was there just one school in your community where everybody went?
BROOKS
Believe it or not, as small a community as that was, there were two schools. There was the elementary school down Highway 71 and then there was the one up a ways, and I went to both of them. I went to the one that was sort of north and toward the river when I was younger, the first grade on up to about the fifth grade, and then a teacher that my mother really thought was a good teacher was at the other school, so I went to the other school from the fifth grade on up.
McKIBBEN
Was it, like, through eighth grade, or how was that set up?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
And then you went on to high school?
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember how you felt about school? Was it something you enjoyed?
BROOKS
Yes, I thoroughly enjoyed school. I was hurt because they wouldn’t let us play basketball, and I was a very talented athlete. Finally, after they got rid of the one principal we had, I was on a group that went to see the principal about us having a girls’ basketball team. So when I was a sophomore in high school, he said, “Yes, you may,” and so we got a teacher that didn’t know tiddle ‘em toot about basketball, but she would chaperone us and we got to play basketball. We also had the “Ag” teacher, or the Agriculture teacher, who helped us. He coached and she chaperoned.
McKIBBEN

And was that why you couldn't play, was because you were girls and you didn't have a girls' team?
BROOKS
Absolutely.
McKIBBEN
What did people say about that?
BROOKS
Nothing. That was the way it was. Girls didn't play, like, play basketball.
McKIBBEN
Were there other sports available for girls?
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
No, none at all?
BROOKS
Volleyball is the only other thing.
McKIBBEN
So how did you kind of get yourselves together and make that stand?
BROOKS
I don't remember, except that I remember we got a new principal and I remember thinking, "We've got a chance." So I was kind of the leader of the pack with that and went in to see him. And he said, "Well, Miss Betty, we'll try to do what we can do with that."
McKIBBEN
And I guess he did.
BROOKS
And what's interesting about that little parish, you see, the other schools in the parish had girls' basketball teams, but we didn't. So that was a good argument, "How can you let them play and we can't play?"
McKIBBEN
Did you get to travel around the parish with your team?
BROOKS
Well, it wasn't anything like you see them doing now. I mean, if we had three games outside the school, it was amazing.
McKIBBEN
But did you get to go anywhere you hadn't been before?

BROOKS
No. I knew that country like I knew the back of my hand. But I did get in trouble. We got in trouble one time. We went over to a school that was about seventy miles away from us, and they had a mirror in their dressing room, and we took that mirror and brought it home with us, so we literally stole a mirror. Of course, the coach found out about it and she got us all sitting up in the bleachers, and we were just—oh, we were horrified. I said, "Oh, my god, I'm going to get kicked out of school." I was so worried. I thought I was going to die. Finally when we confessed and said, "Well, Miss Tracy, we'll take it back if you'll let us do that," she said, "You certainly will. We'll get that mirror back over there immediately." And we were mortified at what we'd done.
McKIBBEN
What did they say when you brought it back?
BROOKS
Well, they didn't till they'd found out we'd stolen it.
McKIBBEN
So they hadn't noticed yet?
BROOKS
No. No, they just thought it was a mirror that we probably picked up around and about, you know.
McKIBBEN
So what position did you play?
BROOKS
I played anything they'd let me play. I played forward, guard, anything, because I used to play with the boys, so I knew how to play every position.
McKIBBEN
How long did you do that, throughout high school?
BROOKS
Yes, but remember it didn't start till we were sophomores, so only had two years of play. One game, I made the most points that had ever been made in a girls' game. I made forty points that night, and they just about had a fit with me. But I just was so pent up because I never could play and, boy, once I got on that court, honey, you didn't stop me.
McKIBBEN

Wow. That's great. Do you remember who your friends were? Were they mostly other girls on the basketball team?
BROOKS
No. Now, you're thinking, like, schools that are big and whatever. Remember, this is a small-town school, so I had all kinds of friends, friends that couldn't even catch a ball hardly. So all my friends were the friends from childhood growing up.
McKIBBEN
You all pretty much went to school together.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
When you had to switch schools, was that difficult?
BROOKS
I didn't switch. They just integrated the schools.
McKIBBEN
Oh, they put them together?
BROOKS
Yes, they brought the blacks in.
McKIBBEN
Oh, I see. I was thinking of when you went to the new elementary school in fifth grade.
BROOKS
There wasn't a new elementary school. You got that confused. It was just an elementary school that was at the south part of town and the other toward the river.
McKIBBEN
And you started at one, but then you went to the other.
BROOKS
Went to the other one because it was going to help me go right on up through high school. High school was in that building. And the other school, it only went up to, I think, eighth grade maybe.
McKIBBEN
And were those different groups of people, like one part of town versus the other, or was it sort of mixed?
BROOKS
No, no, no. Remember, this is before integration. There were no blacks in our schools, so it was all white kids.
McKIBBEN

And then you said later they integrated it, but you weren't there at that point.
BROOKS
No, I wasn't.
McKIBBEN
Were you aware of where the black students were going to school?
BROOKS
Oh, yes, they had their own school. It was called Springville. So the black students had their own school, and we had ours, and we thought it was perfectly fine. One of the good things about having segregated, and you don't hear any good things about it, was that the people who were in those schools got more chance to be in leadership positions. Now, the theory, of course, is that it's all bad. Well, it wasn't all bad. It was bad in terms of class position, and in terms of integration it was terrible, but other than that, no. I guess they got the same amount of monies that the white kids got.
BROOKS
I don't know.
McKIBBEN
So I don't know about that.
McKIBBEN
But like you said, that wasn't really talked about at the time.
BROOKS
No, no, nobody wanted that to come up. Not me, I'm saying. I'm saying adults didn't want to hear about that because they didn't want to have any kind of riots or—there wouldn't be riots, but people being upset over the way things were.
McKIBBEN
Did you and your friends ever talk about any of these issues?
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
Outside of basketball, what kinds of things did you enjoy in school?
BROOKS
Well, we didn't have anything. I mean, you had P.E. [physical education], and they finally let us play basketball as a result of that, but then it was your regular curriculum.
McKIBBEN
Did you have a favorite subject?

BROOKS
Well, I've always liked the social studies aspect of high school. I was very good at speaking and I had my opinions about everything, so social studies would have been for me. I did not care for biology and math, so the social studies angle of it I liked.
McKIBBEN
Did your teachers encourage you?
BROOKS
Yes, I was chosen. If there were leadership things, I was always chosen. I don't know if you know what Girls State is.
McKIBBEN
Vaguely, but tell me about it.
BROOKS
Well, it's an honorary summer program that you get to go to if you're outstanding, and they teach you all about government and everything else. You have elections there, and I was lieutenant governor of Girls State, so that gave me some prominence there.
McKIBBEN
Part of that is going to the Capitol, right?
BROOKS
Yes, we were in Baton Rouge at the university. We stayed there.
McKIBBEN
So what was that like?
BROOKS
That was fun.
McKIBBEN
And you went with girls around the state, right?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Then how does that work? Do you, like, get elected?
BROOKS
Well, you go and then you have your own elections. You run for different offices there, and I got high enough to run for—oh, god, what did I just say?
McKIBBEN
Lieutenant governor.
BROOKS
Lieutenant governor. And our party got it, so that was fun.

McKIBBEN
Were you interested in government?
BROOKS
Yes, but my mother made it very clear I had to have some kind of teaching credential when I got out of school, so I didn't have much of a chance to major in anything.
McKIBBEN
Was that because she admired the profession, or did she feel like it was unrealistic for you to—
BROOKS
I think she felt like it was unrealistic, and she had seen women's position and you didn't get jobs. The only kind of jobs that a woman could get that paid halfway decent were the teaching jobs at that point in history.
McKIBBEN
And did you like the idea of becoming a teacher?
BROOKS
No, I did not. I wanted to fool around and do liberal arts, and then decide what I wanted to do after that and go to graduate school, but I didn't even have much of a sense of what graduate school was either. It was vague in my mind. She was very grounded in practical things. I'm glad she made me get a teaching credential, because I've always been able to back myself up on that.
McKIBBEN
Did your teachers have that similar vision for you or did they try to encourage other things?
BROOKS
No, no, teachers didn't say a word.
McKIBBEN
One way or the other?
BROOKS
One way or the other.
McKIBBEN
What about the boys in class? What was the plan for them, do you know?
BROOKS
No plan that I know of. I mean, I don't think we were at that time where they were thinking about any of this. You came to school, you did your stuff. Your family took care of those kinds of things.

The boys had athletics and they were all interested in athletics, and I was resentful in my heart because they got to do all the athletics. There was a time in which girls couldn't even go in the gymnasium unless they were cheerleaders or unless there was a ball game going on.

McKIBBEN

Were high school sports a big part of life for the town?

BROOKS

Oh, yes, sure.

McKIBBEN

Something all people went to?

BROOKS

Sure.

McKIBBEN

Did your family go?

BROOKS

Absolutely. Everybody did.

McKIBBEN

Did you enjoy that?

BROOKS

Well, yes, it was fun. We didn't have any football at that point. It was only after my brother got in school that they got a football team, so it was only basketball that we had.

McKIBBEN

So, no baseball?

BROOKS

What?

McKIBBEN

So no baseball? Mainly basketball?

BROOKS

So nobody what?

McKIBBEN

There was no baseball team? It was mainly basketball?

BROOKS

No, I think if they had one, they just would get it together and go to a tournament, and the baseball was for the boys. We got to play softball a little bit, but that was it. Wasn't any competition.

McKIBBEN

Sounds like you enjoyed doing competitive types of things.

BROOKS
Yes, I do. I like sports a whole lot.
McKIBBEN
I lost my train of thought again. Well, anyhow. What did people teach you—well, not people. What did your parents teach you about boys and relationships?
BROOKS
Well, I just knew what boys were about. My mother tried to sit me down and give me my sex education lecture, and I just said, "Mother, I know all about that. Please don't do that."
McKIBBEN
How old were you then?
BROOKS
Sixth grade. So she let it go. She knew that I had a certain time I had to be in at night, and certain things were acceptable and not acceptable. That was the generation where you didn't go very far. I mean, later on, of course, that kids started sleeping together and everything else, but that was just a taboo. About as close as you'd get was in the car when you were with each other. That was it.
McKIBBEN
Since you already kind of knew everything before your mom sat you down to talk to you, do you remember where you found these things out?
BROOKS
No, come to think of it, I don't. I just knew.
McKIBBEN
Did you ever later discover that what you thought you had known was wrong?
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
You had it down.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Did you date anybody when you were younger?
BROOKS

Oh, you always had boyfriends. You had boyfriends whether you liked it or not. Everybody just kind of paired you up with somebody and that was it.

McKIBBEN

How did that happen?

BROOKS

Easy. I mean, you know, he was your boyfriend in the sixth grade, so in the seventh grade he's the same boyfriend, or another boyfriend that came in. But there was not much—that was it.

McKIBBEN

Like your friends kind of put you together?

BROOKS

No friends at all. Well, yes, they did talk to me about, "So-and-so likes you, Betty, and you ought to go out with him." So that was the way it worked.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember your first boyfriend?

BROOKS

Oh, my goodness.

McKIBBEN

Or an early boyfriend?

BROOKS

I remember the crushes I had that didn't work out worse than my boyfriends. My boyfriend was Clint, and Clint played basketball and he was a real nice fellow. So I was stuck with him throughout high school, but there was one guy that I really had a crush on. I remember driving the car—he worked at a filling station, and I drove my car around, gassed up that car every time I'd turn around, and, oh, it was so—when I think about that crush that I had. I finally went out with him, and he was not anything at all like I had in my head. So, poor guy. He was really dull and boring and everything else, and I was thinking to myself, "My god, Betty."

McKIBBEN

Clint looked better after that? [laughs]

BROOKS

After you built this thing up so big, you know, and now you're falling on your face.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember being concerned about your reputation?

BROOKS
Oh, yes, you're darn tootin'. In those days, you didn't dare do—that was a big deal, but I wasn't concerned about it because I hadn't done anything to be concerned about it. And I had a good reputation, so it was not, like, a heavy thing on my back.
McKIBBEN
Did you know of any girls that got either falsely or accurately accused?
BROOKS
There was always one girl. There was always one girl in town that the boys used, so I heard stories, stories about her. But I don't remember any pregnancies. I worked with pregnant teens later in life, but—
McKIBBEN
But not at that time you don't know of anybody.
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
Did people have to take special care not to be seen being alone with a boy?
BROOKS
No, it wasn't that rigid. You had your boyfriend and girlfriends, and girls went with boys, and that sort of thing.
McKIBBEN
Was there pressure to have a boyfriend? Like, was it strange if you didn't have one?
BROOKS
I never thought about that, but I'm sure it must have been.
McKIBBEN
Was there any awareness of same-sex relationships at that point?
BROOKS
No, none.
McKIBBEN
No? It wasn't talked about.
BROOKS
We had one prominent teacher who later I found out that he was probably homosexual, but—
McKIBBEN

There wasn't any, like, rumors at that time, okay. So you expected to get married. You said your mom expected you to get married.
BROOKS
Absolutely, especially to go to college and then get married afterwards.
McKIBBEN
That was part of your aspiration as well?
BROOKS
I guess. I mean, it was just an expectation that was just there and you did it.
McKIBBEN
And kids, too, that part?
BROOKS
Huh?
McKIBBEN
And becoming a parent, was that part of that expectation as well?
BROOKS
Not at all. I didn't care about having any kids because I saw how it tied people down. But I did. I have one son [David Brooks]and that's fine.
McKIBBEN
When you say you saw that it tied people down, what did you see that bothered you?
BROOKS
Well, you can't live your life. As a woman, the number-one responsibility is going to be your child, so you can't run off and do jobs and go places that you might like to go because you want to do it. So I was very aware of that. Now, what you have to remember is there was no encouragement for women to do anything other than get married and have a family. That was the current motif of that time, so it wasn't like when women started coming out with Women's Liberation and all that stuff, and people started saying, well, why so-and-so and so-and so and so-and so, none of that existed.
McKIBBEN
But it sounds like in your family there was a little bit of a difference, then, to encourage you to get your teaching credentials.
BROOKS

My mother was very clear that if I didn't have some kind of a profession to fall back on, as she would say, it could be a problem, and if I wanted my own money, if I was a teacher I could have that money. She never ever encouraged me to put my money with my husband's money. You have your own money, he has his own, and then you put together a pot, the two of you, for the family.

McKIBBEN

Do you know why she had that view, which sounds like it would have been kind of unusual?

BROOKS

Well, she might have been unusual, but she was very clear. I think it came out of the fact that she married a man that was working-class and she was a little bit higher than that.

McKIBBEN

So she had that awareness of the finances.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And did she take care of the finances in your home, or did your father do that?

BROOKS

No, he did, but she knew where every penny went.

McKIBBEN

Do you know if she had her own stash of money?

BROOKS

Well, I remember she had—they called it the egg money, and she had a purse that had all the egg money in it, and the milk money and the egg money she got.

McKIBBEN

So you went to college. Tell me a little bit about going to college. How did you choose your college?

BROOKS

Oh, I just loved it. I couldn't believe that I was finally going to have somewhere where I could learn what kind of things I wanted to know about, so I was very enamored with college. Also I was a part of this worldwide choir. We went all over the world singing, and that was really, really fun.

McKIBBEN

Was that part of the college or was that from church?

BROOKS
Well, they're a famous choir that comes out of that college, and I got selected to be in it. We had quite a rigorous schedule and we had to go to college two weeks ahead of time to get ourselves ready. We had a complete what they call secular concert and then we had a complete sacred concert. It was church music, or religious music was one, and the other was all different kinds of music. They were two hours each, so it was quite an undertaking to memorize all that stuff.
McKIBBEN
How did you get into that?
BROOKS
Well, I knew about it. That was the reason I chose the school, because I wanted to do that. I wanted to have that outing.
McKIBBEN
Then you auditioned?
BROOKS
Yes, you auditioned, and they choose you or not.
McKIBBEN
Had you sung growing up?
BROOKS
Oh, yes. The church choir was very, very good when I grew up, and we had a minister there that was really good in music, and he taught me a lot of stuff, so—
McKIBBEN
So you were ready to go.
BROOKS
I was ready to go.
McKIBBEN
What kind of places did you get to go with that choir?
BROOKS
Well, we went all over. We went to Chicago, went to New York City, and then every year you had a tour all around Louisiana in the different churches in Louisiana. We would get to go and sing there. Then we had what they called the Far East tour. We went to Japan, Okinawa, and—where was the other? I forget. Korea, Japan, and Okinawa.
McKIBBEN
How old were you?

BROOKS
College.
McKIBBEN
So, like, eighteen, twenty years old?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
So this would have been the early fifties.
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
Wow. What was it like being in East Asia at that time?
BROOKS
Well, I was terrified of it. I remember just shaking when I got over there, and there wasn't any reason, because we were surrounded with our own people and they took good care of us.
McKIBBEN
What were you afraid of?
BROOKS
I have no idea. Well, I think I was afraid—we went up by the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. You know what the DMZ is? We were right up on that DMZ, and I was scared. I could just see them sending airplanes over and bombing us, and it was silly, because they had a settlement and everything else. That was the only thing.
McKIBBEN
The Demilitarized Zone with a bunch of college students.
BROOKS
I was afraid they'd attack us, but we had plenty of chaperones and plenty of people that took care of us. It wasn't anything like running around as college students and doing your own thing. We were highly controlled.
McKIBBEN
Were you able to see much of the country or the people beyond just going and performing?
BROOKS
No. We did some, but you didn't have much time not to do anything but perform. We sang in bombed-out churches and bombed-out buildings. We were on a very rigorous schedule. We had at least three concerts a day to do.

McKIBBEN
Wow.
BROOKS
So we were busy. We did one in the morning, the mid-afternoon, and night.
McKIBBEN
Were you aware at the time of why that particular itinerary was chosen?
BROOKS
Well, I just knew we were a part of USO [United Service Organizations] shows.
McKIBBEN
Oh, you were part of the USO?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Interesting. I didn't know they brought—
BROOKS
College students.
McKIBBEN
—whole choirs of college students.
BROOKS
We were a part of that program.
McKIBBEN
So you were also performing for military, then?
BROOKS
Well, that was the primary reason we went.
McKIBBEN
Mainly for military, the USO.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
That's kind of neat. What did your parents think of that?
BROOKS
They thought it was great. It was wonderful. The thing for me in my high school days was my Girls State experience. That was the big experience for me, because I loved going down there every summer and I got to go back, and that opened up a world to me that I didn't

really much know about, and that's government stuff and that kind of thing. So I enjoyed that immensely.
McKIBBEN
Remind me which university you were attending.
BROOKS
I went to Centenary College of Louisiana.
McKIBBEN
Was that a Christian school?
BROOKS
Yes, it's a Methodist school. It's really billed as a liberal arts college and that's what it is. It's strictly liberal arts. Methodists founded it, but they didn't do anything like these folks that are the Fundamentalists interfering with people's lives. We only had to take one course in religion. I think it was New Testament or Old Testament. We had to take New and Old Testament.
McKIBBEN
Were you still religious in college personally?
BROOKS
Well, I've always been religious. I wouldn't say religious, but I've always been a deep thinker about everything, and I don't think that you can know anything about the universe if you don't question certain things or ask why is there evil, why is there this, why that. I've always thought about those things.
McKIBBEN
So it wasn't just when you were with your family?
BROOKS
Oh, no.
McKIBBEN
What kinds of things did you like to study in college?
BROOKS
Well, I was afraid that I wasn't smart enough to do what I really wanted to do, and she wanted me to have a teaching credential, so I majored in physical education so I could do the things I liked to do and I satisfied her thing for me.
McKIBBEN
Your mom?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN

What did you think you weren't smart enough to do that you wanted to do?

BROOKS

I just never felt like I was academic, and I never could pass tests, standardized tests, very well, and that scared me to death. And I never could face that with somebody and say, "Look, I can't pass these things. Why can't I pass them?" I just didn't have any good preparation. That's what it was. As I got older, I figured it all out. They didn't school me at all. They didn't give me any classes or anything else to help me pass these things. No wonder. But that made me feel bad about myself.

McKIBBEN

So you studied physical education.

BROOKS

So I studied physical education and I took every course. They had a Great something, Great Issues course that I took and loved, things like that.

McKIBBEN

Like social issues.

BROOKS

Right, right.

McKIBBEN

And so P.E. [physical education] was a major that you could focus on?

BROOKS

Well, yes. I mean, I could get away from having to think about what all she wanted me to do.

McKIBBEN

And were you involved in athletics in college?

BROOKS

Yes, but we didn't have any athletics then. Remember, women didn't get anything. We didn't get any money or anything else. We barely had intramurals to play. They had tournaments in different sports. I won every tournament they had in whatever the sports were from badminton to tennis to—they called it paddleball in those days. It was like handball. So I won all those things and I was always out there playing.

McKIBBEN

All the intramurals?

BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Did that ever take away time from your schoolwork or did that end up enhancing it?
BROOKS
No, it just enhanced it because it got all that energy out of me.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember who you spent time with in your college days, friends or—
BROOKS
Well, there was a group that would always go to the SUB, as they called it, the Student Union Building, and drink and smoke and play cards, but that was not me, so I didn't do any of that. The choir kept me busy and sports kept me busy, so I was not sitting around with students.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember any professors who especially encouraged you or maybe discouraged you?
BROOKS
There wasn't much interaction at all with professors or anything at that point. I don't remember any of it. I just remember there were certain ones that I admired greatly and I took courses when I could without being judged. I took some—what do you call it when you take the course and you're not getting credit for it?
McKIBBEN
When you audit it?
BROOKS
I audited some courses because I was too afraid of getting in there and not making a good grade, because I wanted to keep my grades up for my position in school.
McKIBBEN
Which professors did you admire?
BROOKS
Well, I liked philosophy and the guys who do the questions. It would be in, I guess, the social sciences and religion.
McKIBBEN
Did you have any boyfriends or anything in college?
BROOKS

Yes. In the South you always have a boyfriend, and I met the man [Robert Brooks] that I eventually married. He transferred there. I was in my sophomore or junior—yes, it was sophomore year.

McKIBBEN

So tell me about him.

BROOKS

A really fine fellow, and what was so interesting about him is that he had gone to SMU [Southern Methodist University] and just couldn't make it at SMU. I think part of it—I'm very critical about the way they handled him.

McKIBBEN

What's SMU?

BROOKS

Southern Methodist University. That's where his family all went. So he flunked out there, and the family told him, "You've got to find someplace to go or you're going in the army or something." The Methodist minister there, who liked the family, said, "We've got a place for you because you sing. I'll get you in the college choir at Centenary, and you'll just do fine over there." And sure enough, he came over and he did. He was a wonderful baritone, so that was nice.

McKIBBEN

You met him in choir?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So did you guys go out?

BROOKS

Oh, yes, you do the typical college stuff, but that's different from your college experience, I'm sure.

McKIBBEN

Probably.

BROOKS

But we were so busy with that choir and so busy with things on the campus that it wasn't like we had any time to do anything. I mean, when you're memorizing four hours of music, when you're memorizing a sacred concert and a secular concert, you're practicing an awful lot.

McKIBBEN

Yes, I think so. It sounds pretty intense.
BROOKS
It was.
McKIBBEN
So when did you two get married?
BROOKS
1958.
McKIBBEN
Were you out of school?
BROOKS
Yes, I was out of school in ’56.
McKIBBEN
When you were thinking about getting married, what did you envision about that? What did you think your life would be like?
BROOKS
Probably like I had thought about it always. I was going to have to fight to get in the things I wanted to do.
McKIBBEN
Did you feel like your husband would be supportive of that?
BROOKS
Oh, he’s always been. I wouldn’t have married him if he wasn’t. In fact, he used to encourage me. I’ll tell you a story. When we were in college, I used to sneak out and play basketball in an adult league. Nobody knew where I went on Wednesday nights, and I thought, “Well, I’m going with Bob and it’s getting serious. I’ve got to tell him.” I said, “Bob, I go out and play with this group of women on Wednesday night. Would you like to take me down there and see what we do?” He said, “Sure, let’s go.” So off we went, and I remember after thinking, oh, god, he’s going to think I’m awful. He said, “Why didn’t you get over in the,” blah, blah, blah, “and pick up the pass, Betty? You missed it.” So I knew I was okay.
McKIBBEN
He was the one.
BROOKS
Yes, because he really encouraged me and he saw what it was. But men are not going to fight our battles for us. We had to fight our own battles.
McKIBBEN
Did you talk with him about your roles or what you wanted to do?

BROOKS
Not at that point in life.
McKIBBEN
It kind of wasn't part of that?
BROOKS
Just didn't discuss it. But I knew that I was going to work, and he encouraged me, and so that was enough.
McKIBBEN
And did you want to have children at that point?
BROOKS
I didn't think about that, but of course. But I didn't think about two and three kids and all that stuff. I figured if I got one I'd be lucky, and that's true.
McKIBBEN
When you got married, was there anything that surprised you about marriage?
BROOKS
No, except that it's like having a baby; you're stuck with it. I mean, it's not like something you can say, "Well, that was fun. I'll go do so-and so." I remember that awareness. It was like when I had David, I had a baby. I thought oh, my god, I'll never be the same, and you aren't, because it's an added something that's not going to go away.
McKIBBEN
Was it hard to learn to live with somebody?
BROOKS
No, because I'd had roommates, and he was a very amicable fellow. Men are just different from women, and so you just make that adjustment.
McKIBBEN
And what did he do for a living after school?
BROOKS
You mean what did he do—well, he was a physical education teacher just like me, and we both had jobs and so that was our life. He coached and I did some coaching, but they wouldn't let us coach very much.
McKIBBEN
Were there girls' teams for you to coach by then?
BROOKS

I can't remember, but, you see, what happens in schools is the men have tied up the funding so much that the women don't get much, and women are not as rabid about athletics. It's not a sex-role determiner like it is for boys.

McKIBBEN

And there certainly wasn't any Title IX yet.

BROOKS

No. It's changed a lot now. I mean, god, boy, if we had then what girls have now, it would be phenomenal.

McKIBBEN

Where did you guys end up settling down when you got married?

BROOKS

Well, he was in the Marine Corps, so he came immediately out here, and I said, well, I was going to come, too, if I could get a job. A friend of mine had a job in Norwalk, California, and she said, "Betty, they're looking for teachers, and I think you'll get one if I let them know who you are." So she put my name in, and they called me on the telephone and I got a job over the telephone.

McKIBBEN

Oh, wow.

BROOKS

So that was fun.

McKIBBEN

So you had it all there when you were—

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And where was he stationed out here?

BROOKS

Camp Pendleton.

McKIBBEN

Did you end up having to move around a lot or did you just stay here?

BROOKS

No, he was in one of these programs. So it was a summer program, and they would go for so many weeks in the summer and then he was off the rest of the time.

McKIBBEN

How long did he stay in the Marine Corps?

BROOKS
Oh, I don't remember. I guess it was about three or four years he had to do that in the summer.
McKIBBEN
So mainly in the beginning of—
BROOKS
Well, it was not like a regular program. I mean, they did all their stuff. [interruption]
McKIBBEN
So you guys had moved out to California?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
He was at—
BROOKS
He was at Camp Pendleton, and I got a job teaching. He got out shortly after that, so he had to just go in the summers after that first initial whatever, so he then became a—well, it was almost like National Guard. They went the summers and that was it.
McKIBBEN
And so you got this job in Norwalk. Was that at a high school?
BROOKS
Not in Norwalk. We lived in Norwalk, I did, with those women, but they called me from there. It was in the Downey Unified School District.
McKIBBEN
Just to back up on what you just said, you were living with roommates while your husband was on the base.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
So you actually weren't living together for part of that time.
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
So did you see each other much?
BROOKS

Well, you couldn't because he was in the Marine Corps, but once he got out and through that, we had a house in Downey and we lived in the house in Downey.
McKIBBEN
So how did you meet the women that you moved with? Were they friends from prior—
BROOKS
Well, that was way before. It was one woman from Texas that I had gone to work in Texas, my first work experience. [End of August 4, 2011 interview]

1.2. Session 2 (August 11, 2011)

McKIBBEN
This is Susan
McKIBBEN
and it's August 11th [2011]. I'm down here in San Clemente [California] once again with Dr. Betty
BROOKS
, continuing our interview. So thanks for doing this again with me. Let's see. When we left off, you had just gotten married and you said you got married in 1958, and then you guys came west.
BROOKS
We came to the West because my husband [Robert Brooks] was in the Marine Corps and he had to serve one of these special programs where you went in the summer. He didn't have to go continually. He'd just spend certain times in the fall and the spring on weekends with them. So he was in the Marine Corps and in this special program. We came out here, and he still could not get off the base when I came out here, so I was living with a group of teachers that I had met in Texas. One had a job out here and she helped me get a job. I got it over the telephone. They were so desperate for teachers at that point in 1958, that they hired me immediately. So off I came— [telephone interruption]
McKIBBEN
Okay. So you were saying that you were living in Norwalk with some teacher friends.
BROOKS
Right, and I had this good job at Downey High School. Let's see. What else? That was the beginning of my journey out here. We

bought a house, and he started teaching in the same district that I was after he got out, so the two of us were teachers at that point. Of course, California is a place that you can't ever get enough education, so we had to complete our teachers' certificates for out here. Now, I had them for Louisiana and everywhere else, but I had to get in that program. so I was going to school and I was working on a master's at the same time.

McKIBBEN

Along with your California credential?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Oh, wow.

BROOKS

So I was at Cal State L.A. [California State University, Los Angeles], and so that occupied my life at that particular point.

McKIBBEN

I'll bet. So what were you teaching? You were teaching P.E. [physical education]?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

For girls?

BROOKS

Yes. Well, it got to be coed later, but it was for women at that point.

McKIBBEN

While you were there?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Tell me about your master's program.

BROOKS

Well, it was just a typical physical education master's program, and I had to do writing and take tests and do all kinds of things. It wasn't very exciting, and I was never really particularly excited by physical education, but I had so many hours in it, I couldn't go any other way. So that was my direction and it was fine because mainly I wanted to go up on the salary scale. You've got to have a

master's, and I wanted to meet all the requirements that they had for teachers.
McKIBBEN
What was your husband teaching at this point?
BROOKS
He was teaching physical education. They got him working with special students and he got a certification with Special Ed[ucation] kids, or whatever, because he's a very, very good teacher.
McKIBBEN
You talked in our first session about the limitations of P.E. for girls when you were growing up. Had things changed at all in the late fifties, early sixties when you were teaching?
BROOKS
Not a whole lot. I mean, the problem was money and the problem was getting us into a competitive state rather than what they call play days, and that took some doing to change over from there. Of course, as you know, women just aren't as enthusiastic about sports as men are, and they could use that argument. They'd say, "Why should we put money on these girls when they're not that interested?" So I saw all that change and was a part of it.
McKIBBEN
How did you get involved in that?
BROOKS
Well, I was already a P.E. teacher, so it was my place to go to these meetings where they were discussing this, so that's how. And of course, I've always been interested in seeing us go up, because I was so embittered that we never had the kind of programs for us when I was a girl that the boys got.
McKIBBEN
What kind of arguments did you use with the administrator?
BROOKS
Oh, golly, I don't remember. I mean, the administrators knew they had to do it, because by that time you had Title IX and they had to have programs that were as close to being equal, whatever that means, as they could be.
McKIBBEN
So this was '72.
BROOKS

So we didn't have much argument with them. The question was setting up these programs and setting these leagues so we could play. Now, we were in leagues before, but they weren't as competitive as they later got.

McKIBBEN

In the earlier days, what did you do in physical education with girls? What did that look like, those leagues?

BROOKS

Well, California had the best curriculum for physical education of anybody around. So I did all the sports, individual and team, and then coached the highest girls in the competitive sports.

McKIBBEN

Even in the sixties, that was the case?

BROOKS

Oh, yes, that was there. It was in place. We just didn't have any money behind us and we didn't have the push that we needed to have.

McKIBBEN

Did you feel that physical education offered anything to girls beyond the actual sports, the physical side of it?

BROOKS

Oh, yes. I think if you cut out P.E., you cut out half of your fitness for the country. Where else are they going to get this kind of thing? They're not. So you need good teachers that put them through the wringer. If you look at television, you see how many programs are out there with some kind of activity involved. We're becoming more of a sedentary society because of computers and all that stuff, and unless you push kids to have to take it, they don't like it.

McKIBBEN

And it seems like P.E. is kind of going away a little bit in schools now.

BROOKS

Oh, it was going away, and I don't know if it came back. And then, as you're telling me now, you say it's going away. They're really focusing too much on the head, as far as I'm concerned. You've got to push people out into activities. And besides, that sets you up for better learning in other things. Did you know that?

McKIBBEN

I've heard that.

BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
What were some of the other benefits, or did you see other benefits to P.E. beyond the fitness aspect?
BROOKS
Well, I think girls learn a lot of leadership, because the way it was set up with us, you had to be a leader, in that you had to get your kids in line, the girls had to be in line, you had to talk to kids, you had to be a captain of a sport. So it's really a very good leadership training activity.
McKIBBEN
Once that changeover started to happen with Title IX, were you following the discussion around Title IX as it was being passed?
BROOKS
Well, sure I was, because we were the kids on the ground, so to speak. We were the teachers out there and so we had input to all of this, what they did at the national level.
McKIBBEN
How did that happen?
BROOKS
Well, I don't remember exactly, except that there were meetings and we would pass on our opinions to those people who had the power to get it done.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember organizing with some other teachers, or was it more individual?
BROOKS
Well, I didn't do any organizing. It was already there. I just kind of fitted in to it, so it wasn't that. But I do remember that there was a lot of talk and that sort of thing, but they couldn't question that we needed to do this because it was in the law, and so they had to. It was a matter of equal opportunity for girls.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember if they were sort of grudging about it or did people really get on board?
BROOKS
Well, all of us were always on board. The problem basically has to do with money and how much money you're going to get for your

programs. Of course, the men never want to give up a penny, so there you go. But out here, the programs in Downey, where I taught, were excellent. We had all the equipment we needed, so we were fine.

McKIBBEN

Did your husband get involved in any of that sort of advocacy?

BROOKS

No, because he was teaching P.E. and going to school, so it wasn't his bailiwick to do that.

McKIBBEN

Oh, I lost my train of thought. [laughs] As things were starting to shift and get into more competitive tournaments and stuff for girls, can you tell me a little bit about what changed, and how did that look for you as a teacher?

BROOKS

Well, it was not an impression on me because I've always been for competitive sports, and the more competitive it is, the better, because I think that's the nature of sports. So the question for me in those programs was do we have enough money to help our girls get the equipment and do what they need to do.

McKIBBEN

And did you see that changing after Title IX?

BROOKS

Oh, yes, yes. The other thing that was a problem that nobody talked much about is women just have not had the experience to be good coaches. So it took a long time for us to get that experience and really be good at that.

McKIBBEN

So part of it was that the teachers also needed to develop.

BROOKS

Yes, they needed to develop, and, of course, school districts are not going to put any money on that because they don't see that as the number-one issue for schools anyway.

McKIBBEN

Was that a challenge for you to develop as a coach?

BROOKS

Not necessarily, no. No, it was never, because I just was. I mean, I knew what needed to be done and I had played enough and had enough experience that I knew what you had to do.

McKIBBEN
Did that ever change while you were teaching in Downey as far as developing the coaches and the teachers?
BROOKS
Well, I think we all sort of came along. I left Downey and went to the San Fernando—first of all, I was teaching in what they called junior high at that point. Then I went to high school and then I went out to the San Fernando Valley. I was teaching in the college out there, San Fernando Valley State, that changed to Cal State Northridge [California State University at Northridge] later, and I was coaching there then. I coached the basketball team and some of the badminton, some of the individual sports and swimming, plus activity classes and methodology of how you do it, what we called methodology classes.
McKIBBEN
For students who were training to be physical education teachers?
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
What did you notice that was different or maybe that struck you as surprisingly similar about teaching at the college level versus lower levels?
BROOKS
Well, at the college level you don't have any discipline problems. They're there because if it's required, they still know how they have to act, and so there's not a question of discipline, whereas in high school, kids are just rowdy. Some of them are rowdy. I enjoyed it because the potential of the girls was just better.
McKIBBEN
That they were older or that they had had more experience?
BROOKS
Yes, I think it's they were older.
McKIBBEN
Was the environment for women's sports different there?
BROOKS
Oh, yes. By that time, Title IX had broken through, and the colleges all had some semblance of teams that would compete. So you had a little more money and you had more girls that were interested in all of this.

McKIBBEN
And how did that change your experience coaching them?
BROOKS
I don't think it changed it. It just gave me more opportunity. It's like going from teaching children to adolescents to on up. I mean, there's more ability with those kids that you're dealing with as you get higher.
McKIBBEN
Did you ever take any teams to a statewide or a national tournament?
BROOKS
No, in California we didn't do that. I would have loved that if we had, but it hadn't gotten to that point. I think they do today. We did have intercollegiate games between other schools and us, and they would come to us.
McKIBBEN
When you were teaching your methodology classes, what did you tell students that were training to be P.E. teachers about how they needed to be prepared?
BROOKS
Well, I just taught sports and taught them how to analyze what they were doing so they could then make corrections if they needed to. Then I had them do the teaching so I could see what they're doing, because you don't know what you're doing when you're doing it. So somebody's got to stand there and say, "Look, you need to do this, this, this," or, "This didn't work out." Of course, they were involved in it. I'd ask them what they wanted to know.
McKIBBEN
Were you teaching just women students or was it both men and women?
BROOKS
No, they were men. Because there weren't a lot of people doing the elementary P.E., I got stuck—I say "stuck"—I got stuck with it because when I was brought in, the teacher was teaching that, whom I replaced, and she was also teaching social dance and that sort of thing, which it was okay with me to do that. I just was not real good. I was not highly skilled in teaching it. I could do it, but I remember, for me, I had to take over for this woman who was this fabulous square-dance teacher. She was really good in folk dance,

and I'm telling you, the kids were not very happy with me because I just didn't have the background.
McKIBBEN
Was that a more popular set of classes than the sports?
BROOKS
Well, I guess. I mean, all kids like taking dance.
McKIBBEN
Sure, I liked taking square dance.
BROOKS
Yes, it was fun. Folk dance and square dance was very popular, but I just didn't have the background for that, and they made me do it to have the job. So, of course, I wanted the job and I did it. That's one of the problems in teaching in schools where you have to get out of your talent or your preference and have to take on these things. Of course, they tell you, "Oh, you're good. You can do it. You can pick it up in two days." Well, you don't. I was working all the time. In fact, I had to go out and take some classes and do some square dancing on my own that I would have never done.
McKIBBEN
Where did you do that?
BROOKS
Oh, they're all over. Square-dance folks are all over. They love their thing, so you can go in any community, and they've usually got square dancers that come out and—
McKIBBEN
Did you ever get your husband to go with you?
BROOKS
Oh, yes, well, Bob went with me with all of these.
McKIBBEN
How did he like it?
BROOKS
He loves it. He's quite a dancer himself, so we had a good time.
McKIBBEN
That sounds like fun. It's a good version of teacher training, professional development.
BROOKS
Right, right, right, right.
McKIBBEN

When you were teaching the future P.E. teachers, did you notice any differences in teaching the male students and the female students?

BROOKS

No, because I had good students. Those guys that were there were there because they were trying to get credentials and stuff, and so they didn't give me a hard time at all. Now, if you're talking about skill level, I mean, that's always problematic, but you get highly skilled people who are going into teaching, usually, not everybody, so there's no competition in terms of the men or the women.

McKIBBEN

So they weren't really competing with each other.

BROOKS

No.

McKIBBEN

Did anybody hassle you as a female instructor?

BROOKS

No.

McKIBBEN

That was good.

BROOKS

No, that was gone by that time. I mean, you just didn't have that kind of resentment. It was there and it was going to be that way and that's the way it was, so there wasn't a lot of conflict around that.

McKIBBEN

What about earlier in your career?

BROOKS

But I wasn't teaching. I was in high school teaching.

McKIBBEN

At the high school level.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Did you notice any of those conflicts there?

BROOKS

No. The only thing I noticed was the fact that the boys always got more money than us, and that created tensions.

McKIBBEN

Were you ever subjected to teasing or stereotyping as a female P.E. teacher?

BROOKS

No. Man, I could put somebody down so fast, it was incredible, but I think that you have a kind of a complex or a kind of—I don't know what you'd call it. Your subject matter is not as important as anything else. As you get older, you see how terribly important it really is.

McKIBBEN

Now, this was a time, the sixties into the early seventies, where, even in California, there were the Watts Riots and different racial tensions. Did you see manifestations of that in your school?

BROOKS

No, because, I mean, you can kind of look at California and you can see the communities that are set apart on the basis of class, and the race comes in, but if you've got money, you can get a house in Downey. I mean, it was an upper-middle-class community. So the people of color were still segregated to the inner city, although more and more were moving in, but that was not a big issue.

McKIBBEN

Were there any tensions with the white students as more students of color came in?

BROOKS

No. We were so predominantly white that it was not an issue.

McKIBBEN

There weren't very many students of color in—

BROOKS

No.

McKIBBEN

What about when you went to San Fernando Valley State?

BROOKS

Well, that was college, and there still weren't large numbers of students of color in the physical education department.

McKIBBEN

So during this time you're teaching high school, you're teaching college, you're getting your master's. When did you finish your master's?

BROOKS

I guess it was the end of '62.

McKIBBEN
And then how long did you stay at San Fernando Valley?
BROOKS
I was there, I think, three or four years. I can't remember exactly, three or four years, and then I decided I had to make a decision about my doctorate. So I chose to have a baby instead, because David [
BROOKS
] came in '67, so I left there really in—I guess it was '66.
McKIBBEN
And did you feel like you really had to make a choice between having the child and continuing with your teaching?
BROOKS
Well, I was looking for a direction. It wasn't the child and it wasn't the teaching, but it was that I was confused about whether or not I wanted—I had to do a Ph.D. if I was going to stay in college, and I liked college because you didn't have some of the hassles that you had at the secondary level. So that was kind of a tension there. Then, of course, you have to do academic work again.
McKIBBEN
Right, which wasn't your favorite, as I recall from last time.
BROOKS
Well, no. I'll just say no to that. I wanted to study what I wanted to study and not the curriculum that they wanted me to study.
McKIBBEN
Did you feel like it was prescriptive?
BROOKS
Oh, yes. Well, by the time you get to that level, it is to a certain extent. You've got lots of room in the middle of all this, but you have to meet certain standards.
McKIBBEN
And what had you been thinking about getting your Ph.D. in?
BROOKS
I hadn't.
McKIBBEN
You just knew you would need one.
BROOKS
I knew I had to have it if I was going to stay in physical education because that's where all my experience and all my classes were and

everything else, and that mounts up. They're not going to hire somebody outside of the field by the time you get into the college teaching.

McKIBBEN

Right. You can't suddenly go into philosophy.

BROOKS

No.

McKIBBEN

So tell me a little bit about when you had your son.

BROOKS

David came along in 1967, and that made a tremendous change in my life. I remember thinking, my god, I didn't realize what it means to have a baby. Now, younger women are all up for all of this because they just know that's going to be there, but, boy, does it take your time, and unless you've got some help and you're trying to do all this other stuff, you're just exhausted. Of course, mothers are exhausted anyway. He was a lot of fun, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

McKIBBEN

Were you staying home with him at that point? You weren't continuing—

BROOKS

Yes. I took a leave of absence and then I decided I just didn't want to go back, so what I did was I became a substitute teacher and had gobs of opportunity to get out and teach anytime I wanted to. You just don't make the same amount of money and you're not connected with developing a program. That was when I taught in the—oh, I can't say the name right—the schools for kids who are juvenile delinquents. I was substituting a lot because they had a big facility in Downey.

McKIBBEN

So what was that like when you first started out with that?

BROOKS

Oh, that was interesting because those kids were looking for anything to make sure that they were going to be the boss, you know, but then you'd meet a kid that got stuck in there for some reason that wasn't really an aggressive problem; she just got caught in that system. I learned a lot from those girls. I remember

one funny story is I had two very [unclear] black kids who showed me how they'd fight, and they said, "Ms.
BROOKS
, you don't know anything about fighting, do you?" And I said, "No, I don't." They said, "This is the way you do it. One gets on in the front and one's in the back, and they start ripping off her blouse and bra. That girl will try to cover herself up, and then we can do what we want to with her." That was interesting to me. I didn't know anything about that kind of stuff.
McKIBBEN
Do you recall how you responded?
BROOKS
Yes, I said, "Boy, you taught me something."
McKIBBEN
It must have been quite a change from what you were used to.
BROOKS
Yes and no. I mean, teaching is teaching, and you have a smattering of kids that'll act out in class and you have to learn to do that. I remember the teacher who left told me, she said, "You keep this big bucket of water behind the place where you stood, so if you got anybody that's coming after, you can just use the bucket of water, cool 'em off."
McKIBBEN
Did you ever have to do that?
BROOKS
Never had to. No, I don't find girls as combative as boys, but they can be. But I think by that time they knew the consequences of those kinds of actions are so bad, they're not going to do them.
McKIBBEN
Did you ever try to steer a girl in a different direction?
BROOKS
No. I had enough to try to teach them what I needed to teach them. They just were so behind in school and everything else, that you don't have time to do all these other things. I mean, they didn't have fundamentals. They didn't have anything.
McKIBBEN
So what were you mainly working with them—
BROOKS

Well, I was teaching all the social studies, but they were grades behind in reading. Reading was the big issue. They just cannot read. They just could not read.

McKIBBEN

And how long did you do that?

BROOKS

Oh, golly, I guess maybe two years.

McKIBBEN

And then, so this period your son was little and you were substitute teaching in Downey. Then what did you do after that?

BROOKS

Well, after that I was still doing a lot of part-time work. I did part-time work at universities, Cal State Long Beach [California State University at Long Beach] and some of the community colleges. I was teaching. That's better because you've got your subject matter and you can go in and teach it. You're not being called every day and told what to teach, so I enjoyed that. I taught at Cerritos [College]. I taught at Long Beach City College. Let's see. Where else? Cerritos and Long Beach City College mainly.

McKIBBEN

Were you mainly coaching or doing—

BROOKS

Oh, no.

McKIBBEN

Methods teaching or—

BROOKS

No, you were teaching activity classes.

McKIBBEN

Like what?

BROOKS

Oh, god, there was dance, there was basketball, there was volleyball, there was whatever—have you had any of those courses?

McKIBBEN

Some, but not for some years now. How did you get involved with prevention of violence against women? Was that happening yet at this point?

BROOKS

No, it really wasn't. It wasn't until after David came. That was in the seventies, in which we became very aware of that because of the

Women's Movement. So that's when I got very involved in the anti-rape movement. That was developing at that point. So because I was a physical education teacher and had those physical skills, I could develop new techniques. Of course, we took our base from karate and all the martial arts, but it's a modification of that because you don't want to do all that training all those years for this particular art that in some instances doesn't do a bit of good when you're in a street fight. So we had to adapt according to the situation and teach them what to do if this happens to you.

McKIBBEN

Now, because all of this was connected with the beginning of the Women's Movement in that time, how did you get involved in that stream of thought or in that development?

BROOKS

That's good. I had almost forgotten this. I was a member of a task force on women through the United Church of Christ. That was the old Congregational Church, our church, and we were a women's task force and that started me off. So we were trying to decide what are we going to do with this institution we're in, with the obvious sexism that is there. One thing that we tackled was church bulletins, because all of the church bulletins, the front pictures were usually very sexist, or the statements that were made. So we tried to tackle that and clean it up.

McKIBBEN

Like what?

BROOKS

Well, "he" was used for "she" and all the language stuff that you have with all of that was simple, but it made a lot of difference. So that's how I got involved with that.

McKIBBEN

What other kinds of issues did you address in that?

BROOKS

Well, we were trying to get more women to be taken in as ministers, to get jobs, so we were supporting those kinds of things.

McKIBBEN

Is that at the denominational level?

BROOKS

Yes, yes, at the denominational level.

McKIBBEN

What kinds of things did you have to do to lobby for that?
BROOKS
I don't even remember that. I just remember that we were there, and they knew we were there and so they tried to adjust because they knew they had to. So I don't remember a whole lot of activity on our part. I think it was just the fact that we met with them, and they said, "Yes, you're right, and we'll do what we can," and that was about it.
McKIBBEN
Was your local pastor a man or a woman?
BROOKS
We had a man and then we got a woman when he left, so that was interesting.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember that change?
BROOKS
Yes, I was part of the committee that helped get her, so it wasn't any different than trying to hire anybody, but I specifically knew I wanted us to have a woman because we needed to see that in the pulpit, and the congregation seemed to be okay with it. This congregation would be called liberal, although they thought of themselves more as conservatives.
McKIBBEN
When she came on, did things kind of go smoothly after that?
BROOKS
Oh, yes. I mean, you go through such a process in these churches that everybody's ready for this to happen and they're on their best behavior.
McKIBBEN
Did you notice a difference in her leadership or in her preaching?
BROOKS
Well, there is a difference in the way women do things, but you're still caught in a male system, and the techniques and everything have been set up by men. So if you fit into that real easy, you're very good. It's like sports. If you try to play it a certain way, you're not going to make it, but if you're aware of what you need to do—
McKIBBEN
Do you think it would make sense or be an improvement to have a different structure?

BROOKS
I thought the structure with the Congregationalists was fine. It's just attitudes that you've got to really work on and make sure that people are open to—simply because a person is a woman doesn't necessarily mean she's a bad minister or anything else.
McKIBBEN
I guess also I'm thinking about the debates that feminists have had for so many years over does positive change for women mean knowing how to navigate systems that have been set up by men, or does it mean exploding those systems and—
BROOKS
Well, both of those were going on. I mean I was very much involved in a thing called Califia, and we were trying to develop new forums so that women—it's a form of separatism. It's separating yourself by only working with your own kind, which is, in a way, it's easy, but it's not easy. It's easy that you don't have to deal with the male element, so you go in and do your own thing, but then you get into another set of problems. And if you're really going to change society, you can't stay in that situation because you've got to branch out and send people out to do things and that sort of thing.
McKIBBEN
When was that that you were doing Califia?
BROOKS
Let's see. Califia started in 1975, but it was 1976 we had our first Califia, and that was really a form of women's liberation, and it was definitely separatism because we didn't have any men involved in it at all. It was really summer camps. First summer, we had three different ones. We had that many women who were interested. The format was very interesting, because we did not do all of it ourselves, although we said we have to have part of this curriculum that we do because we want women to come out of here with something. So we worked on sexism, racism, and class, and then the women who came there, who were obviously talented, could put on workshops of their own. We got a lot of women who came who wanted to do that.
McKIBBEN
Interesting.
BROOKS

So it was good. I taught self-defense early. Every morning I was out there in the square teaching self-defense, and so if you wanted to do that, well, I was there.

McKIBBEN

I definitely want to hear more about that, but before we get there, I want to back you up just a little bit to the beginnings of your involvement in self-defense. Can you talk a little bit about how you got into the Women's Movement and that whole category?

BROOKS

Well, that was my talent. I mean, I was physical. I had the physical education training. And rape was a tremendous issue. We organized a Rape Crisis Hotline in Downey and that's when that got me into it because we had to have something for women to get. After you've done the hotline stuff, after you've confessed or done whatever you're going to do over the hotline, then you want to get out there and make some change. So one of the ways to do that is teach you how to take care of yourself and then, of course, get you involved in groups.

McKIBBEN

Who were you founding this with?

BROOKS

These were mainly middle-class women.

McKIBBEN

Just people that you knew from the neighborhood, or how did you meet them?

BROOKS

Oh, no, these were women I met through the church, and we moved out of that into this kind of stuff.

McKIBBEN

Interesting. Was that work supported also by the church or was it separate?

BROOKS

Church would have if we'd asked them, but we didn't. They were doing enough with trying to tackle the system that they were in.

McKIBBEN

When you were setting up the Rape Crisis Hotline, what kinds of procedures did you have to go through? Did you have to get permits from the city?

BROOKS

We didn't. We just did it. We put an ad in the paper, and people showed up at my house and we started organizing. The thing that I was afraid of was I was not a counselor. I had never been trained, and that scared me because we were going outside the system and using counseling techniques on the telephone. That worried me, but everybody said, "Look, Betty, this is brand new. We do the best we can do."
The main thing that we did was that we were a support system for those women who'd been raped. They could talk to us, and we would support them as they went through the system. There was a lot of court cases that we went with the woman to support her there.
McKIBBEN
What other kinds of activities did you do through that?
BROOKS
Not much of anything. That was it, mainly, and then, of course, my self-defense started and that really kicked up.
McKIBBEN
When you were doing the counseling, did you try to educate each other about that process?
BROOKS
I don't remember that.
McKIBBEN
How did you advertise the hotline?
BROOKS
We just put ads in the paper.
McKIBBEN
Were there any Women's Centers or other groups around?
BROOKS
No, not at that point. That starts a little later and it starts primarily through the colleges. I don't know that I even know one that was outside the college.
McKIBBEN
So you guys were really out there on your own.
BROOKS
Yes, we were, which is fine. I've always been out there on my own, so it didn't bother me one bit.
McKIBBEN

Did you know of others? Because I know there were some things going on with women's health in L.A., but it might have been a little bit later than this.

BROOKS

It was about the same time, and I knew those women. Of course, the women who had really started all of that were over in Santa Monica. They had me over, I remember, one time to teach a self-defense class for them. The next thing that I knew, what we really needed was to train teachers to go out and do that.

Another underlying thing was how are we going to get paid. Are we going to pay these people or is this going to be volunteer? We had all stressed you don't do volunteer things, but on the other hand, if you get into the money thing, then you're teaching for how much money you're going to make and you've blown yourself out of the water, so to speak. I was always conflicted about charging, so I made sure that whatever I did, it was so minimum that it wasn't a whole lot of money that women had to pay.

McKIBBEN

Just sort of a nominal thing?

BROOKS

By the way, I was getting called by a lot of typical women's organizations like AAUW.

McKIBBEN

The American Association of University Women.

BROOKS

Yes. What else? All of these middle-class organizations that women are in.

McKIBBEN

NOW [National Organization for Women] and stuff like that?

BROOKS

Yes, well, they would have me come make a speech and show a few things, so I was usually one of the speakers.

McKIBBEN

About self-defense?

BROOKS

Yes, about the rape the problem, and then I would show them some self-defense, and then if they wanted to organize a class, I would come and teach it.

McKIBBEN

How did you find out about the crisis in rape?
BROOKS
Well, if you did any reading at all, it was big, big headlines, I mean, and it's the one thing that just happened to women. I can't even remember how I first found out about it. I know that I read a lot of material. I was reading Ms. Magazine. Ms. Magazine came up about that time, and we had a radical paper called Off Our Backs. So the subject was there, and you had women writing about their experiences.
McKIBBEN
So after you started the Rape Crisis Hotline, you got started teaching self-defense, and how did you learn about that? You said you had to adapt martial arts.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Did you develop it on your own?
BROOKS
Yes, absolutely. It was a trial-and-error thing. What do you do if somebody grabs you here? What do you do if you get grabbed here? You're in this. Do you have the right to even defend yourself? All those questions came up, and we tried to answer them.
McKIBBEN
Did you talk to other organizers about it or how did that unfold? You're sort of putting your head together?
BROOKS
Well, yes. The Rape Crisis Hotlines were organized and we'd have meetings with all the people that were organizing. They'd bring up issues and we'd talk about them.
McKIBBEN
Kind of a need by need, as it were.
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
Where else did you teach the classes?
BROOKS
Well, I taught them all over. Sometimes a group would ask me to come out and teach. They'd say, "We need to do something about this, Betty. Can you come and teach us a class? What would it cost

and how long would it be?" and blah, blah, blah, so that's how I got into that.

McKIBBEN

And you said you were teaching at the colleges. Organizations too? Was that through the Women's Centers?

BROOKS

Well, yes, that, but I was teaching part-time P.E. at Cerritas and also Long Beach City College. I did some stuff with Cal State Long Beach in the—oh, god, I can't remember what they called that, but it was classes that I could teach outside the curriculum, but you could get units for it.

McKIBBEN

Was that the Experimental College, I think?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So you were doing that as well. What was it like for the students in your classes? Do you remember how people responded to learning to do this?

BROOKS

They were wonderful. They wanted to do it and they did it, and I'm a pretty good teacher, so we were just fine. We had a grand time.

McKIBBEN

Were they well attended? Was there a lot of demand?

BROOKS

Well, I'd have thirty and forty people in those classes.

McKIBBEN

Wow. Do you remember the age range?

BROOKS

Well, college students, and sometimes you'd have older people who were back in college.

McKIBBEN

But I mean in the Community Centers.

BROOKS

What do you mean, Community Centers?

McKIBBEN

Like if a women's group in Santa Monica, say, called you and said—

BROOKS

It was usually older women, not many younger women. Younger women are so involved with taking care of their academic needs. It was usually a mother who brought her daughter and made sure that she got some techniques.

McKIBBEN

Did people ever talk to you about why they came for the self-defense class?

BROOKS

Well, you could spend your whole time on that. I mean, you could make it sort of a rap group where you talked about why are you here and what are we doing and why this happened, blah, blah, blah. I never wanted to do that, because I wasn't giving them any skills and I, frankly, didn't particularly care why they were there; I just cared that they got the skills. I didn't say that to them. But we could have gone through that for weeks and weeks and weeks, and that's kind of a consciousness-raising thing. I got women that were in consciousness-raising groups. I got women who'd hear about me and take the classes. The first class I ever taught was over in Santa Monica area and it was a group of women who were very, very aware, and they knew they had to have some kind of techniques and training because they were out on the streets or going out. And that's how I got involved in it. It just kind of snowballed.

McKIBBEN

Did you ever participate in any Take Back the Night kind of stuff?

BROOKS

That came along much later. I participated in a lot of them. That was in the middle seventies and all, so that was a later development. It was the one thing that women thought, well, we can do this, so a lot of college Women's Centers and a lot of college groups set up those Take Back the Night—

McKIBBEN

I remember they were still going on when I was in college.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

They've had a long life. Was Bob involved in any of these things?

BROOKS

No.

McKIBBEN

What did he think about it?
BROOKS
He thought it was good because he knew how men were.
McKIBBEN
And he was still teaching Special Ed P.E. at this point?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Now, you were at Cal State Long Beach in ’72, ’73, is that right?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
And you were teaching women’s P.E. You’ve talked about this in the past. There was some controversy with your teaching there. Can you talk a little bit about that?
BROOKS
I buried that. I was just too radical. That was really the essence of it. They didn’t want to give me any support, I mean the powers that be. They wanted me out of there.
McKIBBEN
What was so radical that they were objecting to?
BROOKS
Well, it wouldn’t even seem radical to you. I mean, the very fact that women were standing up and talking about all these issues was radical to them.
McKIBBEN
Was this about your self-defense classes?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
They didn’t want you to continue with that?
BROOKS
I guess not. I mean, I never knew exactly. They just didn’t want me on the staff.
McKIBBEN
And then once you were like—students were rallying for you.
BROOKS
Yes, they liked me, so they didn’t want to see me fired or ignored.
McKIBBEN

Do you recall, how did you cope with that?
BROOKS
I don't remember that. I just remember that I was doing whatever I could to help women, and that was the goal, and I hated it if I didn't get a job. But I had good friends who were trying to get me teaching in the physical education department, and so that was a big issue. But nobody was getting hired full-time anyway. You were all part-time.
McKIBBEN
Was that mainly a problem for P.E. or for women or just in general?
BROOKS
I think it was a problem all over. I don't think it was just P.E. The funding was not there, and if you managed to get a college job, it was really something. It's even worse now, but it was really bad then, I thought.
McKIBBEN
And then you were rehired by Women's Studies in, as I recall, '74, I think. Right? Is that correct?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Can you tell me a little bit about how the program functioned at Long Beach? Because from what I understand, it was quite innovative, even for Women's Studies at that time.
BROOKS
Well, those things fade with me, and I can't say, because I was so involved in fighting issues and that sort of thing. It was innovative in that we used consciousness-raising techniques. A lot of professors don't do that. They just come in and lecture, push it out on the students, and the students regurgitate it back to you. We didn't do that. We did a lot of what is common stuff now. I mean, we used a lot of small-group activity and women talking about their experiences, because that's what consciousness-raising is.
McKIBBEN
Can you talk a little bit about the philosophy that you guys had behind that? Because it seems to be predicated on a very different idea than the normal university.
BROOKS

Students have knowledge. That's the big thing. And the old idea was the professor is the authority, and he or she comes in and pushes it all out on the students and then students regurgitate it back. That's the classic idea, that students don't know anything and they come there to hear the authority, who is the professor. And that's not what we thought. We thought students brought an awful lot of knowledge to these classes, and experience, so we were pulling from them as well as sharing our own stuff. Now, people can say, "Well, you're not really teaching. You're just using your students to keep you in a job." That was one of the criticisms of it, and that wasn't true. We were trying to integrate it into their lives, what we did.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember some things that you learned from your students or with your students?

BROOKS

No, I just know that, for me, we were trying to tackle the whole idea of violence, and I heard a lot of horrific stories and that sort of thing, which I would not repeat, and women who just put up with terrible situations.

McKIBBEN

Do you recall any instances in which a student was able to take what she learned in your class and improve her life?

BROOKS

Well, I always think that that happens automatically. If you've heard it, you start making some changes, and there were women that came out of there that organized. For example, Alyce LaViolette was the first woman to really organize around the battered-women's issue and created a—I don't think it was a hotline. It was like a center, Crisis Center for battered women. So a lot of organizing occurred.

McKIBBEN

Out of those classes.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And the program was, also, from what I understand, very unusual in the way that the faculty related to one another and how that was set up. Can you talk a little bit about that?

BROOKS
Well, you'd have to find somebody's opinion. I just thought it was normal that we talked to one another and we had meetings in which we tried to say everybody's opinion is equal, that you don't have one person that's deciding all of it. So everything was decided on the basis of the group that we had. Now it doesn't even seem like it's radical, but it was radical then.
McKIBBEN
I think it's becoming radical again at this point in higher education. That remains to be seen. So were you still working part-time at this point at Long Beach?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Was everybody working part-time at that point, or were there some faculty that were full-time?
BROOKS
The head of the department had a position, and I think there was one other, but other than that, she had all these part-time people.
McKIBBEN
How did that affect your teaching and your planning?
BROOKS
Didn't affect me at all. I taught a class like I'd teach it if I had a full-time position, so it didn't affect that at all. You teach what you know and you teach to the best of your ability, and you also are presenting that subject matter in the best way that you can. Now, I think where it really makes a difference is you're not involved in the campus activities in the same way that people who are full-time are.
McKIBBEN
How did that affect you, or did it?
BROOKS
Well, I mean, it just didn't. I mean, I don't know what you want when you ask me that.
McKIBBEN
You don't feel that you missed anything in particular?
BROOKS
No, other than status. I mean, you have more status if you're full-time. [interruption]
McKIBBEN

Okay, we just had to pause for a moment there with the phone. Now, during this period in the early and mid seventies when you were working at Cal State Long Beach, you were also involved in some other community activities in your church. We talked about Califia, so tell me a little bit more about Califia now that we're there chronologically.

BROOKS

Well, it's natural that if you can't get your ideas through the institutions that are there, you've going to go out, or even if you can, you know that it's half-baked. You're not getting what you want. So we were trying to figure out what to do, and that's how Califia came about, was a group of women that got together and said, "We've got to do something outside of the systems." When the name came up, Califia, we were patterning ourselves after the goddess of California and we chose that name. It was very exciting because you felt like you were creating something new, and it turned out to really be camps in the summer where women would come and we'd work on sexism, racism, classism. So that's what happened there, and that went on till 1982.

McKIBBEN

What kind of activities did you do in the camps?

BROOKS

Well, lectures were set up on sexism, racism, classism, and then the women could come and present their own workshops. There were a lot of women who were doing a lot of things and they wanted a place to be able to come together. You could go and choose whatever you wanted to learn.

McKIBBEN

How did you recruit the speakers and teachers?

BROOKS

I don't know. It's like working in any organization. You just know who's doing what.

McKIBBEN

Do you remember any specific people?

BROOKS

I don't remember a soul. It's really funny. The thing I remember about Califia is a game that was based on class, and we called it the Class game. That was a shocking thing to most women who didn't realize that they were in a certain social class, and that game really

helped you understand that and it was very shocking for a lot of people.
McKIBBEN
Yes, it seems in a lot of ways class is very invisible.
BROOKS
It is, and it still is. We don't think about it.
McKIBBEN
Yes, I think you're right. Where were the camps held?
BROOKS
Camp [de] Bienneville [Pines], I believe. It's—
McKIBBEN
San Bernardino Mountains?
BROOKS
Yes, we did most of them there.
McKIBBEN
That's the Unitarian [Universalist Church] camp, isn't it?
BROOKS
Yes, Unitarian camps we used, and then we went up to Santa Barbara to—I guess it was Unitarian. I can't even remember the name of that place. It was beautiful. We had two places. The women who worked on that got us—I didn't work on it, so I just accepted wherever they said we were going to go this year. But it was beautiful.
McKIBBEN
Did you draw on support from any of the liberal churches, the UCC [United Church of Christ] or the Unitarians?
BROOKS
Well, women out of those churches came to us. Remember, we're not with the denomination. I mean, we're the radicals. We're out there and so we're going to have a scattered group of people who find out about us and like what we do and come to us.
McKIBBEN
That's interesting. Do you remember anything in particular that you did at the camps that was eye-opening or moving to you?
BROOKS
I just think I did my thing. I was always reading, reading Off Our Backs and reading Ms. Magazine and reading all these things and coming up with different ideas, that sort of thing. And I was helping run the camps with everybody else, so it was tiring.

McKIBBEN
And teaching self-defense, right?
BROOKS
Yes. We had a woman who was really on the edge of sanity one summer, who came to the camp, and there was a group of people that said, "We don't agree with current psychological patterns. We don't agree with what they say and what they do to people, and we've got to take it over." So we spent three days trying to figure out what to do with this young woman who was every night in the woods screaming. That was really an education. That was when I realized how conservative I really was. I didn't want to spend my life taking care of somebody who is nuts. And that's when you throw everything in the pot and you build a community out of everything in the pot, and there's nobody you can rely on who's got special talents or whatever. That's what you get into.
McKIBBEN
Inventing all that.
BROOKS
Yes, and it's exhausting. Anytime people create alternative communities, they have done a hell of a lot of work.
McKIBBEN
Did that change the way you went forward with your activism? Were you more strongly committed to alternatives, or did it make you want to use the system—
BROOKS
I didn't focus on that. I just did my self-defense thing, and if it could fit in somewhere, I knew it was not going to be totally for me, although I wanted it to be. I wanted it to be. But I'm much more conventional than I seem and I had to find that out. I mean, I don't like loose ends, and when you get into these outside communities, a lot of loose ends aren't tied up, and I didn't like that. We'd have incredible arguments at Califia about whether or not we were going to eat meat or whether or not we weren't. I mean, the vegetarians were just insistent that we should have a pure camp and not kill animals and do all these things, and so we had that argument all the time. And that was the big thing; it was how are you living your life.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember other things that came up?

BROOKS
Oh, plenty of issues that came up. I mean, money was a big issue. How do you share this money you have? I mean what right do you have to have a lot—you have a big pile of money, and I don't have a big pile of money. What right do you have to that? And if you're going to build the ideal community, how are we going to break that down so that everybody's equal in that? So those were theoretical things we talked about.
McKIBBEN
Do you remember any practices that came out of that?
BROOKS
No. That's really radical. I mean, unless you have very tight-knit organizations, how could you do anything with that?
McKIBBEN
Did you guys share resources at the camp?
BROOKS
Share what?
McKIBBEN
Like share resources or funding at the camp.
BROOKS
Yes, we did.
McKIBBEN
Were people talking at all about sexuality or lesbianism at this point?
BROOKS
Oh, it's always an underlying issue. Yes, of course. You had your small groups, and that always goes on when it's camps, so that was just a given.
McKIBBEN
Did people talk about, like, lesbian separatism?
BROOKS
Yes, and in a sense we were doing some separatism as we did this camp. But separatism is interesting because where are you going to get your money to be separate and how do you fit into the society that you're separating yourself from?
McKIBBEN
Right, because they're not going to give you money to do that.
BROOKS

Right. So it was interesting to hear people talk about it. Well, you had separatism on different levels, where we're separate in our groups and we don't have to deal with them, but then when we've got to earn our keep, we have to go out and get our hands dirty, so to speak.

McKIBBEN

Was there a range of opinions on that?

BROOKS

For the most part, yes.

McKIBBEN

Do you recall what some of the conversations were?

BROOKS

All I know is that separatists didn't like anything that anybody else was doing. They wanted to separate off and be in their own groups, and I thought that they really didn't have a big picture, as far as I'm concerned, because they were separating on the basis that they hated what men did. Well, then you've got to create a whole new society. Have you thought this thing through? And of course they hadn't. They just were reacting.

McKIBBEN

Was there a part of you that wanted to create that new society?

BROOKS

Oh, sure, but that's a dream and that's kind of a pipe dream. That's the hardest thing. We had a hard enough time deciding what menus we were going to have at camp and fights over whether or not we should have Coca-Cola or any kind of drinks on the campus because they were connected with these terrible organizations—not organizations. What do you call them? These terrible folks who were manufacturing all this poison to put in our bodies and making money off of it. So it got complicated as you talked about it.

McKIBBEN

It sounds like, even though you were doing the same thing, in a sense, teaching self-defense and so on in these two very different environments, was that kind of a culture shock for you or was it sort of nice to have a balance?

BROOKS

No, I never felt anything was a culture shock. That stuff didn't bother me. The other women, it did, because they were so

immersed in their culture. I never was. I've always been kind of outside it, so I expected a certain amount of that.
McKIBBEN
Did you ever feel lonely because you were sort of looking in on this culture?
BROOKS
Well, yes and no. I had lots of friends who were just like me, so we could talk about it and it was not an issue. Of course, you're lonely in that you're a person who analyzes. Most people don't. They just fit in.
McKIBBEN
It seems like that's often the case in the women academics that I'm talking to, is that loneliness.
BROOKS
Oh, they're split. They're split down the middle because they're trying to embrace a subject matter or their discipline, and that's different from the way life is and what they're living.
McKIBBEN
And just always being the analyst.
BROOKS
That's right.
McKIBBEN
You're excited about something, but then you've got to stand back and analyze it. It can be a little tiring.
BROOKS
It's true.
McKIBBEN
Thank you very much for doing this, and next time I'll come back and we'll push into the next decade.
BROOKS
Okay. Very good. [End of August 11, 2011 interview]

1.3. Session 3 (August 18, 2011)

McKIBBEN
All right. Good morning.
BROOKS
Good morning.
McKIBBEN
I'm here again with Dr. Betty

BROOKS
, and it is August—what is it? August 18th [2011], I guess, continuing our interview.
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
You had asked me last time, after we finished talking on tape, to ask you about the phrase, "The personal is political," which was such a big part of feminism, especially in those years.
BROOKS
Right, and the reason that I wanted to ask you is because at that point—history has many aspects, but that the social aspect of history, the domestic, the everyday affairs of history have never been recorded as being significant, and that's what women do most of the time. We are in the domestic scene. So when feminists say the person was political, what you do every day has a historical significance, and that's what we were trying to get across, that your life is terribly important and what you do every day. You're not "just" a housewife. You've been placed in that category, and it's very difficult to get out of it unless you make a real effort to do that, and yet the things that you do in that housewifery or whatever it is you do every day, that's important. That's part of history.
McKIBBEN
What were some of the ways that you tried to get that message to women?
BROOKS
I never thought about it, because I didn't do that. My stuff was in the area of violence against women, and that was kind of an assumption that I made. If it would come up, it would come up in discussions.
McKIBBEN
But of course, violence against women is often very much in the intimate sphere.
BROOKS
Right. That's right, so I was working in that area. Women are very much aware of the violence against them, although they don't know what to do with it, but they're aware of it because there are just subtle ways it's going to hit you, either by holding you back from what you want to do in your profession, or the relationship that you

have with you and the person who's intimate with you, if it's a man. It could be with a woman, because there are women who oppress other women, as you well know, but that's not the big overall picture.

McKIBBEN

Right. Did you ever, in talking with women who were experiencing violence, did you get pushback or reluctance from some women in relationships with women to believe that they could be abused?

BROOKS

Oh, no. I think they knew, and I would just put them in—we worked with a very personal style. I never did much lecture anymore after I found out that that's not the way to go. So we did circles. I'd put out a proposal or put out something, and then the women all would respond to it. The other thing that I tried to do was to equalize all the women there, because when you get in a group, there's always the one who's got the most get-up-and-go or leadership ability or whatever that emerges, and the rest of the women sort of sit back and listen. I wouldn't allow that. I wanted everybody to speak.

McKIBBEN

How did you do that?

BROOKS

Well, just the physical arrangement of how—and you've done this in college. When you get in a circle, then everybody's got a chance. If the person who's leading is at all aware, they know to make sure that everybody speaks, so you just go around in that circle. It's very simple.

McKIBBEN

And what kind of changes in the dynamic did you see when that happened?

BROOKS

Well, women begin to get their voices out and they begin to say, "Hey, yay, man, maybe I do have something to say."

McKIBBEN

Do you remember—because from what understand, at that time that would have been so revolutionary.

BROOKS

We didn't think of it as being revolutionary. We just thought this is what we've got to do. At least I did. This is what we do. Because I taught self-defense, and that was seen as revolutionary. Well, it

was just something that we had never done, so we had to do it to get women up to par.

McKIBBEN

Was that part of getting women to find their voice?

BROOKS

Well, yes. I think anytime you introduce an element of the physical and teach her a skill, because I've had women reaffirm this over and over, "Oh, boy, I feel so-and-so and so-and-so," that's because you've allowed that energy to come through your body. You're not just sitting there verbalizing it.

McKIBBEN

You've done a lot of work with the body, teaching about anatomy and women's bodies, sexuality, sports, and so on. Did you sort of carry that idea through?

BROOKS

Oh, I'm a blabbermouth. Yes, of course. I mean, you need to, so to speak, strut your stuff and you need to be fully who you are. I used to say, "Well, men don't have any more muscles than we do. We just don't get it developed because there are not activities for us to go out and do that." Now that's changed. Women are doing all kinds of strength activities. They're just doing the same thing that the men do, and we weren't allowed to do that before. You can't develop unless you have an arena to develop.

McKIBBEN

So you were kind of providing that arena?

BROOKS

Yes. Now, I wasn't fighting it because it had been opened up. What we had to do at that point is to try to get masses of women into those places where they could develop. It was not that these ideas were so new. It was how do you make them stick in a society that's always—it's like—a good example is swimming in waves. It's always something going to hit you. Can you stand it and keep going? The wave's going to hit you. Somebody's going to try to push you back, and it depends on what you want.

McKIBBEN

Did some waves ever hit you in doing that work?

BROOKS

Well, I was at the height of when we were exciting and people wanted us, but, of course, I'm a woman and I was not ever allowed

to develop athletically like I wanted to. So all through my life I have felt that, and it comes from funding in schools not being what it ought to be or just the general attitude of the public that women can't do so-and-so. Think about how many women you've seen that are running and doing track and field and stuff. That was beginning, then after my time. I mean, now you wouldn't put on a track meet without the women doing all kinds of stuff.

McKIBBEN

So you were saying in the seventies that was changing, women's ability to be in athletics and that kind of stuff.

BROOKS

Yes. Well, that started earlier, but we didn't get the push with the money and everything until the seventies. Then it just blossomed out then.

McKIBBEN

With Title IX and that sort of thing.

BROOKS

Yes. It was that more women in leadership positions realized we had to institutionalize these ideas or they weren't going to stick, because there have always been pockets of women that have done things throughout history, but it never sticks because you don't have any funding with it. And society hadn't changed enough to say if you have it for boys, you've got to have it for girls.

McKIBBEN

Right. So what kinds of things did you do or your colleagues do to institutionalize some of these kinds of classes like you were teaching and athletics and so on?

BROOKS

Well, the very fact that a Women's Studies Department was created, that's going to help a lot of that because in those classes you begin to raise the issues and the young women begin to say, "Yeah, why didn't we get so-and-so? And why didn't so-and-so?" And blah, blah, blah. Some of those young women are leaders and they run for school positions, offices, and they raise those issues.

McKIBBEN

For getting women into leadership through that.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

Is that partly why you went back for your—was it an Ed.D.?
BROOKS
Yes. I went back for an Ed.D. because it's like a driver's license. If you're in academia, you've got to have something behind your name that gives you legitimacy. Most of higher education for me was so dull and boring that I had to go outside, and so I went to alternative graduate schools because I never learned anything in the other. The other systems want you to conform to their idea of what you're supposed to have, and I was bored with that.
McKIBBEN
So you went to—
BROOKS
I went to San Francisco and went to the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, because at that time I figured out—I tried to do some stuff in psychology before that, but it was not going to work for me. Now, what it was going to do was qualify me to be a therapist, and I never wanted to be a therapist. I wanted to be a teacher. And all those programs through psychology that were outside the system were helping those women in what vocations they had to introduce new ideas, and that was not me. To tell you about that, to find out I took a course called Bioenergetics, and it's based on Reichian ideas, Wilhelm Reich's ideas of the body. You learn certain kinds of positions and ways to open the body up. It was very interesting.
McKIBBEN
And you took that out at the Institute?
BROOKS
No, that was outside.
McKIBBEN
And so why did you end up going on in sexuality specifically?
BROOKS
Well, partly because I've always been interested in the whole idea of human sexuality, and, of course, we women are going to deal with that. You're going to deal with the gender issues and you're going to deal with women who are saying, "Oh, dear, I don't think my sex role is who I am," and explorations with that. I found that the Institute in San Francisco had the most favorable courses for women. They had some real outstanding feminists that were there who were standing up if there was a problem, and there wasn't

really because this came—that was the other thing I was going to tell you. Most of the stuff that I have ever been successful in comes out of a religious base. It's always been the church that I followed the path and went into, and it helped me move on up.

McKIBBEN

How so in this area?

BROOKS

Well, the church, surprisingly enough, had the best sex education courses in the state at that point.

McKIBBEN

Okay, I am surprised. Tell me about that.

BROOKS

Well, are you Catholic?

McKIBBEN

No.

BROOKS

Oh, okay. Well, there were people outside, especially the Presbyterians, some Methodists got together in task forces and tried to help people in the local churches introduce these ideas. And if you're working with teenagers, you're going to run up against the whole sexuality thing immediately. So that's how that happened. I mean, it was just natural.

McKIBBEN

Were you part of organizing that or did you take one of those classes?

BROOKS

No, it wasn't like it was all organized to take—we were outside and we were pushing the institution to introduce this, whether we taught it or somebody else or whatever.

McKIBBEN

So you were part of that effort.

BROOKS

I was part of the effort.

McKIBBEN

So what kind of changes did you try to make in that sexuality education?

BROOKS

Well, the biggest change, of course, that you want is to open up the whole idea that women can be ministers or priests or whatever, and

so we were trying to get women in those positions in churches. Now, it's one thing to say it's open; it's another thing to find a position for that woman who's trying to pursue that. So I was part of a task force through the United Church of Christ, and the United Church of Christ was—I think they were united with the Brethren and they came out. I can't remember the exact historical connection, but they were a part of the old Congregational ideas. We had groups outside our church area and, like, we organized a task force on women that was in the whole L.A. [Los Angeles] District to help women in those churches.

McKIBBEN

This was in the seventies?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

So what were some of the changes in the sexuality education that you wanted to make?

BROOKS

Well, we wanted to open it up so people understood that there was more than just heterosexuality, and that was one of the big things. We wanted the gay community included. We wanted our young people to understand that they had a right to ask certain questions about that, and they were on a journey. We considered the whole sexual idea not something that's just set and done. So that was part of it. The other course, if you were interested in helping kids make connections with one another and what's ethical and what's not ethical, and are you going to have sex. Is it ethical to have sex without protection or not, and blah, blah, blah, those kind of very basic questions.

McKIBBEN

How did people respond to that?

BROOKS

Well, we had the permission of the church to do that, so it was okay. And remember, I was never a part of a very conservative church. The church that I was a member of would be considered liberal at that time. I don't think it is anymore, but it was. It was open to everybody.

McKIBBEN

And the denomination now is quite progressive, from what I understand.
BROOKS
That's right. Yes, they've done a lot of progressive stuff and they were ordaining ministers, people who were gay as ministers, back at that time, and that was very radical.
McKIBBEN
This idea of sexuality, was it very fluid at this time?
BROOKS
When you say that, what do you mean?
McKIBBEN
Well, like, you're talking about that people were on a journey and that it wasn't just about heterosexuality and so forth.
BROOKS
There was no mass movement in that way. It's only if one of us would bring that up. It was not like it was this big surge, although I think you could find a surge, in that women were looking for stuff, and that's how Califia came about. We were trying to make a place so that the women could learn about all these ideas in a very safe, protected way, and that's what we did in the summers.
McKIBBEN
And was that a very woman-identified—
BROOKS
Oh, yes, totally.
McKIBBEN
Really?
BROOKS
And that was part of its greatness and its damnation, so to speak, because we never could get beyond that, and if you don't get beyond that, you're going to—it's like playing a ball game and you got your runner on base, but you can't get him around the bases because eventually, if you're really going to make social change, you've got to pull the men in. But you've got to understand and it's got to be very clear, and most of us never get beyond that.
McKIBBEN
How did that play out in your own life? Because you're in these very woman-identified spaces in this period, but then you're married to a man. So did people know that?
BROOKS

Yes, they knew it, but again, you just don't start somewhere and that's it. I mean, my life is a journey, and so I've been on this journey for a long time. Bob was doing his thing, I was doing my thing, and it was just the way it was.

McKIBBEN

Yes, because I know in looking through sort of historical documentation and preparing for the interviews, you had a very—or at least documented as a very public identity as a lesbian. So how did that work in those spaces and then in your relationship?

BROOKS

Well, Bob and I just worked it out. He said, "Well, you've got to do what you've got to do." We didn't talk a whole lot about it. We just lived our lives. I had different people in my life, and he did, too, so we really had come to the whole idea of an open marriage, and so it wasn't like it was this couple thing.

McKIBBEN

Did you know other people who were in open relationships?

BROOKS

Oh, I knew a lot of them, but that didn't necessarily mean that they were my type of people, because a lot of them weren't politically active. I was interested in people who were interested in making deep social change, but you've only got so much time in a day. And remember I had a son and I had to do some things with him, and then we had all this rape crisis stuff going on. So I was a part of that, so I had plenty to do, and the church stuff.

McKIBBEN

And did you make connections between your own personal journey in relationships and the politics that you were doing outside that?

BROOKS

Yes, of course. I don't know exactly what you mean. I knew that I was not going to be able to be a leader because of the so-called weirdness of my position, or how absolute opposite I was to most people, so I didn't do a whole lot in the church, outside of our little church and its environs and the organization in that. But I had so much going at that particular point, I didn't need anything else.

McKIBBEN

So it kind of worked for you in these safer spaces, because one of the things—I know Sondra [Hale] was mentioning, with the Women's Studies Program at Long Beach, that it was very difficult

not to be either gay or straight and very clearly in one camp or the other. Did you get any flak because of your relationship?
BROOKS
Oh, I lost a lot of position—or I could have gone in certain areas and really been a bombshell, so to speak, but I wasn't going to do that because I was not going to let go of the tension of my own life. So I was going to try at all times to tell the truth as much as possible. And she's right about that. Women's Studies became identified as a sort of lesbian-only discipline, and that's not true. It went through its phases. Same thing happened in Califia. Califia got labeled as a lesbian summer camp and it really didn't start out to be that way, but that's what happens. The general public is very threatened by these new ideas, and especially women getting together.
McKIBBEN
Well, it seems like anytime you're living in this tension, like you said, it's very hard to get that out to the general public. They kind of want everything to be this way or this way. They know how to deal with it.
BROOKS
Sure. Yes, it's clean that way. But I had plenty of support. Like, for example, where I got my Ed.D. they were used to folks like me, and so I was very comfortable there.
McKIBBEN
It wasn't threatening.
BROOKS
How many academic settings do you find that are comfortable with all the tensions that we present with our lives and trying to struggle with?
McKIBBEN
Tell me a little bit more about the classes that you took there, how they were different from other schools.
BROOKS
Well, the Institute was absolutely dedicated to sexual ideas and sex roles and that sort of thing, and they were different in that they used a lot of media, and you didn't go in and just have a pencil and bunch of straight chairs and sit down. There was this huge room that was covered with pillows, and so you just relaxed into the pillows.
McKIBBEN

Nice.
BROOKS
The reason they did that, I found out later, was because they started out trying to get people relaxed, and that was the way to do it. And they showed a lot of media that they developed.
McKIBBEN
Were there people there who were uncomfortable or shy at first?
BROOKS
No.
McKIBBEN
No?
BROOKS
Because most of the time, by the time you get to this, you had your therapists who were coming there to try to get ideas for their clients. So I didn't find that to be true, although there were people that were there that were very new, that their therapist had sent. But the atmosphere was very relaxed.
McKIBBEN
What kinds of things did you learn that were new for you?
BROOKS
Well, just what I said. I mean, the whole idea of not having a certain way that you teach stuff. I mean, those things were very revealing for me. The ideas weren't anything new; you could find that in books. But it was the kind of people who stood before you and revealed themselves.
McKIBBEN
Were people very disclosing as teachers?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
So that must have been different.
BROOKS
Well, we ranged all the way from just gay-straight stuff all the way to transgender and all sorts of things, and so we had those. We went way off here. And they had speakers that came. I remember Doris that turned into Dan, and I remember very clearly her struggle, and that's sort of revolutionary to a lot of people who hadn't heard of that stuff before.
McKIBBEN

Yes, it sounds like that was not very much on the radar of the Women's Movement at the time.

BROOKS

No, I think it wasn't, and there was a reason for that. The women were interested in trying to deal with regular folks and not to get into all of these areas that are tangential to that, because it's not the mainstream. And we had enough on our plate to deal with the mainstream, so that was one of the reasons that that was true.

McKIBBEN

Meaning it was easier to reach the public?

BROOKS

Yes, and there were women in the Women's Movement who were rather homophobic themselves.

McKIBBEN

Sure.

BROOKS

So because, I mean, come on, lesbians are certainly not going to pull back once you understand, and that scares the hell out of people. You see, that opens up a world where it's okay to be with somebody of your same sex, and so the next thing you know, if you're new to all this, somebody may be asking you out, and that's shocking.

McKIBBEN

Were there any instances where you encountered people's discomfort or shock in these environments?

BROOKS

Oh, yes. Califia, we had that all the time.

McKIBBEN

Really?

BROOKS

But they knew they were going to come and that was going to happen, so it was a lot easier because they could make the change, because you were all in a group, and you were in the mountains, and it was in the summer, so it was not like you were—that took part of the shock away.

McKIBBEN

Yes, kind of a nice environment.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN
You got your Ed.D. in ’78, I think. Right?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
So then did you start teaching sexuality classes at that point?
BROOKS
Oh, I’d been teaching them all along.
McKIBBEN
You had. Okay.
BROOKS
That just gave me legitimacy. It’s like somebody who gets a driver’s license, but you’ve been driving all along.
McKIBBEN
Right. So there you were in the pickup truck all by yourself.
BROOKS
Well, universities and social structures require legitimacy. And what is legitimacy? It’s having these little cards that say that you are so-and-so, you graduated from so-and-so and you have a degree in so-and-so. And that’s okay, but if you ain’t got that degree, so to speak, then they don’t want you.
McKIBBEN
When you were teaching—because you were quite a pioneer in teaching in the Women’s Studies in Long Beach, right?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Can you tell me about how you taught some of those courses?
BROOKS
Well, I think all through I’ve sort of talked to you a little bit about that. Yes, I have developed a lot of those, but especially around violence and around the body. So we were trying to go into those areas that women were not getting this information in their regular anatomy courses or whatever. That’s how they were taught. As I said, we used circles in the classroom. We tried to draw from our students as well as present the subject. It was not just that I was presenting it all the time. The women were learning from one another. That’s the essence of the Women’s Movement.
McKIBBEN

Yes, definitely. How did you deal with students coming in who were a little bit shy or—

BROOKS

Well, I just pulled them right in. You just go ahead and go over that. You don't focus on it too much. You just keep going around with your technique, and they'll eventually come out.

McKIBBEN

So you just kind of accustom them to the whole thing.

BROOKS

Yes. If you just focused on that, then you're doing therapy, and I was not interested in doing therapy. I was interested in enabling women to get a hold of their own talents and feel free enough to stand up and do whatever they needed to do in the society, and to me, it's not done by just doing therapy, and I was not a therapist to begin with.

McKIBBEN

Were your colleagues in the Women's Studies Department supportive of your teaching?

BROOKS

Oh, women, yes, we try to support one another right and left.

McKIBBEN

Did you compile your syllabi or your curricula with others, or did you just sort of develop it?

BROOKS

Well, when you get a position in academia, if you need some help, they'll give you all kinds of syllabi from everywhere else, and then you develop your own stuff.

McKIBBEN

Okay, because I know in—or at least from what I've heard, in the Long Beach program in particular, it was a fairly collaborative atmosphere.

BROOKS

Yes, well, it was when we all got together.

McKIBBEN

Yes, okay. That sounds good. So what happened—in that program in the eighties, you had been teaching Women and Their Bodies. And did you teach the course on lesbians as well, or just—

BROOKS

I started that off and then I handed it to Denise Wheeler because I felt like I didn't fit exactly to the pristine model. And that side continued.

McKIBBEN

Okay.

BROOKS

I wanted to see a Women's Studies Department that had courses that were relevant to where women's status in the world, and so whatever I could help develop, I did.

McKIBBEN

What kind of other courses did you feel like addressed that need?

BROOKS

Well, it was mainly the violence courses. We had a course called Women and Violence, and the sexuality courses I taught. So I just stayed right within what my strengths were.

McKIBBEN

What did you see—did you have an idea about how Women's Studies as a discipline should develop?

BROOKS

Well, I was in on the first national meeting in 1978. Sherna [Berger] Gluck and a group of us went. So remember, all this is very fluid at that time. And usually Women's Studies Departments or programs came out of the academic courses in those universities or colleges, so that you had the women over here trying to develop a new idea. That's how it started. I mean, everybody's got their little place, and so now I've got to teach in my regular department and then I want to go over here and teach a course like Women and the Law, Women and so-and-so, blah, blah, blah. We wanted to go further than "Women and—." We wanted to have courses where we could show that women had done that all along and it was not something that just was sort of a fluke.

McKIBBEN

There was the center of what you were doing. Can you tell me a little bit about the process of kind of creating that?

BROOKS

Well, I just think it was just normal. We all got together. We had our faculty meetings together, and you're influenced by what your colleagues are doing.

McKIBBEN

All right. So I lost my train of thought. Well, anyway, Long Beach was known as a radical program even in the early days.
BROOKS
Right.
McKIBBEN
Did you think it was radical enough? Should it have been more or less?
BROOKS
Well, it's very difficult to exist in academia and try to make changes. I mean, remember, those are institutions, and there are ways to do that that facilitate what the establishment thinks knowledge is. So when you start going in there and messing with that—also it's much easier to stand up and lecture in classes, in terms of methodology, than it is to really try to interact with people. About the only place you'll find that really happening is in the psychology departments, although now any good teacher's going to use the best techniques at all for her students to bring about what it is that she wants to do. But you had to be aware of that. So that's what Women's Studies was doing. It was trying to raise the whole idea that what women do in life is historically and ethically and everything else significant. You don't have to fit yourself into a male system.
McKIBBEN
And how was it to operate such a thing in a male system, though?
BROOKS
It was all right. We just did it. Academia can be very freeing because they leave you alone.
McKIBBEN
That's true.
BROOKS
So if you're sneaky or if you're—I hate to use that term—if you're cunning, you can get that through.
McKIBBEN
If you're operating under the radar.
BROOKS
Yes, and even if you operate within the radar, if you're a good teacher and your students are with you, you're okay.
McKIBBEN

Because it sounds like your courses were pretty popular and that you were going along for a while.
BROOKS
We had to open—I remember I taught one course, we had 150 students in it.
McKIBBEN
Wow.
BROOKS
So I couldn't do all of this individual circle stuff. I ended up being in the big lecture hall at Cal State. And so it would vary depending on what we had.
McKIBBEN
Did you have men in your classes as well?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
How did they handle it?
BROOKS
Men that usually come to those classes really want to know, so they're not a problem. I would talk to them, and that's what a lot of women will do. If you go into a class and listen to how the professor relates, who does she relate to the most? That's what you've got to figure out, and I just never noticed them.
McKIBBEN
They were just along for the ride?
BROOKS
Well, I don't know. They wanted to learn stuff, but I wasn't going to give them special status, and that's what women do. "Oh, we're so glad to have John here. Aren't we lucky to have so-and-so" and Samuel and Bill and whatever.
McKIBBEN
"Isn't it great that he's interested?"
BROOKS
That's right, "Isn't it great that he—?" And I just didn't do that.
McKIBBEN
Did any of the men ever have to adjust to that, did you know?
BROOKS
Oh, I'm sure they did, but they never talked to me about it.
McKIBBEN

Okay. So it basically worked.
BROOKS
Yes. I've never had a problem with men in my classes or men in general. I just don't have that problem because they respect what I do. They see what I'm trying to do, and so I don't have any problems with that.
McKIBBEN
Okay, so there was a point at Long Beach at which you were no longer under the radar. You were sort of in the line of fire. Can you talk a little bit about what happened there?
BROOKS
I was trying to think the other night why was I attacked. That's because outside forces came in and they were angry that conservative women were not being given courses at Cal State Long Beach, and so they came in and they feel like that they approached us and said, "Well, where are our ideas?"
And of course the one thing we weren't going to do is to give them a stage. We said, "Your ideas are everywhere. What we're trying to do is go against it." So they started organizing against us.
McKIBBEN
Yes, through the [unclear].
BROOKS
They were furious, and, of course, me with my big mouth, I'm one of the first ones you're going to go after.
McKIBBEN
Right, and you were teaching all that scary stuff about the body and sexuality.
BROOKS
Right. That's right.
McKIBBEN
Yes, absolutely.
BROOKS
This was an abomination. They went everywhere they could. They went to the highest officials in the university, and, of course, university officials are not going to block out—not going to go against what their departments have set up as good curriculum, and that's what these people didn't know. They didn't realize that you can't do that. You can have forums where you get the community together and the professors and whatever, but you're not going to

go in there and change those professors, because that's what a university is. It's to give them a status or a platform for their—even the ideas are crazy.

McKIBBEN

Right. They have academic freedom.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

But it seemed like the president of the university did ultimately—he was calling for course reviews and program—

BROOKS

Yes, that's how they get you, because these people weighed in on him and they had some position in community, and so that was his way of trying to accommodate to them and force us to have to look at that.

McKIBBEN

So they went over that process of academic freedom.

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

And the inciting, the proximal cause or the "inciting incident," in quotes, had to do with your teaching of vaginal self-health exams?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

I guess yours and Gail Goldstein's, not just you, I guess.

BROOKS

Well, there was one other person that was doing that, but, you see, you don't mess around with those kinds of things, because that's getting—I mean as long as you're looking in a book and reading about it, but when you give up a place where you let people actually look at what is real, it's like showing real anatomy, that's scary as all get-out. We did the self-help. We did that at the end of the course, and if women wanted to see live women's genitals or women's bodies, we had one day. And we even had to use the Health Department. We had to go down and put us in little rooms there because they were so worried about it.

McKIBBEN

So you didn't actually do that on campus.

BROOKS
Yes, I did.
McKIBBEN
Oh, you did, okay.
BROOKS
It was not ever off campus. I wouldn't do that.
McKIBBEN
Oh, I see. You went to the Health Center on campus.
BROOKS
Yes, and then it got where it was acceptable, so we could do it in the classroom. I always did an invitation to those that wanted to stay, and those that didn't want to stay, you didn't have to stay. I asked the men to leave because women are nervous about all this, and so I didn't really encourage men to stay and watch this. Now, there could have been a lot of stuff with that. "Well, how dare you, Betty? If you're going to open all this stuff up, you've got to let us be with one another." But I didn't try to do that. I had enough on my plate.
McKIBBEN
Yes, it sounded like they used that against you at some point.
BROOKS
Oh, yes, of course. I mean, what would you do if you were going after Betty
BROOKS
? You were going to go after these insane things she was doing.
McKIBBEN
Why was it important to you to do these things with real pictures and real bodies and—
BROOKS
Because you're teaching women and their bodies, and, therefore, if you're going to talk about anatomy, you've got to talk about it and you've got to talk about it in a social context where people are, what's happening.
McKIBBEN
Yes, in the actual world.
BROOKS
Sex education in this country's terrible anyway. I don't know, because I've been out for a while, I don't know if they've done any better, but I doubt it because there's too many forces that you

come up against when you try to open that area up. People will say to you, "Well, you talk about dating and talk about love. Don't go any further."
McKIBBEN
And sort of do a veneer [unclear].
BROOKS
Yes. And the way you cover yourself with that is to have outside speakers come in and say what you can't say, and I did a lot of that.
McKIBBEN
What kind of speakers did you have in?
BROOKS
Well, they were just people who were—you had gay community people. I had people who were doing work. In whatever area they were doing work, they would speak. Women's health community. Feminist Women's Health Centers I always had in. So anything that was outside the walls of the university that was trying to organize work, that's who I would ask, if they were in the area of women and their bodies. For example, I always had the women who were promoting breastfeeding. I always had—I think it was La Leche League or something. I always had them come in, and sometimes they nursed a baby in front of the whole—that's supposed to be shocking to a lot of people who are very offended by that.
McKIBBEN
It's still supposed to be shocking.
BROOKS
I know.
McKIBBEN
There's still all this stuff going on about that.
BROOKS
I know. It's never been settled. So it was not just one aspect of sexuality; it was the whole kit and caboodle.
McKIBBEN
I mean, at that time there weren't a lot of resources, from what I understand.
BROOKS
That's why I went to the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. They were the only graduate program that I could find that really set itself up to do that sort of thing. The average

academic course, human sexuality class, well, what are you going to get in there? I mean, that's what's in the academic world, and I don't know how much that's changed. I don't think it has, because they never hire people who have any background to understand all of this, and they don't know that they're not hiring them. They just know they have a Ph.D. or they had an Ed.D. or they have a degree that enables them to come and do that work. So you have to be willing to go look outside and see who's doing what, and that's how I stumbled on the Institute for the Advance Study of Human Sexuality. I heard about them. They had a sex forum in the summers, and a lot of therapists would go there, so I said, "I'm going up there and see what they're doing." So that's how I got up there.

McKIBBEN

That's how you started to learn about it. And so you're kind of pulling people in from the community for your classes. You're going to this outside source, and then a lot of the documentation on the controversy at Long Beach is talking about how you were trying to find slides of women's genitals, and you couldn't find any of those.

BROOKS

That's right. That's a very interesting story because there wasn't any—I mean, you just couldn't find anybody who was willing to take those pictures and put them anywhere, so we got our own little group together, and that got me in big trouble. That was the real big trouble, because we all took pictures of our own genitals, and that was very shocking.

McKIBBEN

Was that the Women's Studies faculty or just—

BROOKS

No, just people who were working in the area. It wasn't the Women's Studies faculty. It wasn't those people working there. It could be from another university or whatever.

McKIBBEN

On sexuality.

BROOKS

And my problem, how I got in trouble, and I'm sort of a little bit embarrassed about this, is that one day I pointed out my genitals that were on those slides. I will say I regret that I did. I should have never done that.

McKIBBEN
Because they wouldn't have known otherwise whose—
BROOKS
No, it's just a group of women's vulvas and that's it. Well, I had to blab, blab, blab, blabbermouth me. I pointed out mine, and I should have never done that because then they could say, "Well, you were trying to seduce your students and you were doing—." They made up—you never heard such stories, made up everything. It was crazy. All I was trying to do was make the course relevant and show the variety of the human body.
McKIBBEN
So people could compare and—
BROOKS
Well, if they wanted to. I was not going to wade into that because I knew that would get me in trouble too. You're treading dangerous ground when you get into these areas.
McKIBBEN
Did it ever make you nervous when you were teaching?
BROOKS
No, because I just think I had the boldness of somebody who didn't realize what was going to happen to her.
McKIBBEN
The boldness of the innocent.
BROOKS
That's right, because I figured my stuff was pure. I didn't even think that way. I just did what I thought they needed to know.
McKIBBEN
And then all hell broke loose.
BROOKS
Well, that's because we had the radical right from the outside to come in because they were trying to figure out—they were mad because Women's Studies would not develop courses around the conservative woman, and Women's Studies would not do that. We'd say, "You get that in every discipline on this campus. We're not doing that." And that made them mad. So how do you get these people if you're mad at them? You go after the most outrageous professors they have. I was one of them at that point.
McKIBBEN
Yes, that's what I hear.

BROOKS
Yes, I was. Well, they made the assumption, underneath, that all my radical ideas I was engaging in all these things with students and everything else. That was the assumption they made and they thought they could get me.
McKIBBEN
Oh, okay.
BROOKS
And they never did, because I wasn't.
McKIBBEN
Right, it was just these ideas that you were teaching.
BROOKS
Yes, absolutely. That's what a professor's supposed to do.
McKIBBEN
How did your students respond when all this started happening?
BROOKS
Oh, they backed me all the way. Never had any problem with that.
McKIBBEN
That's good. Did you ever get support from the church during this controversy? Because on the right, the church was involved, Grace Brethren [Church].
BROOKS
Right. The conservative churches. Well, I came out of the Task Force on Women through the United Church of Christ, and so I had people on that task force that were supporting me. In fact, I used to have Grace Moore come in and talk to my classes, because there were so many women that were just furious at religion, and I wanted them to see a woman who was a feminist and who understood all this and was working in the church to change it. I would always have Reverend Grace Moore come and talk, so I was trying to include what they weren't going to see and trying to get rid of some of the ideas that, okay, if you're religious, you can't be a feminist, or if you're so-and-so, you're just—logic. How can a woman be a feminist and have a religious belief?
McKIBBEN
Right, which is still controversial.
BROOKS
That's right. It really is.
McKIBBEN

How did you think about that, being both religious and a feminist?
BROOKS
It just was. It was the is of the is. I mean, I am very clear and confident in my own sexuality and my own spirituality, so it wasn't an issue. What I wanted to do is get out there and change it all.
McKIBBEN
Change the institution.
BROOKS
Yes, and help women have some comfort at who they were. If they were outrageous, they were okay. And then what were the pitfalls and all that.
McKIBBEN
What were the pitfalls and all that?
BROOKS
Well, you go into an institution, they're going to tear you up. You're not going to be popular. You're just going to be attacked all the time. So that's the big thing, is the fact that suddenly they'll start thinking all kinds of things about you that are just not true.
McKIBBEN
What were some things that were comforting or sustaining for you? Because you're shaking up one institution after another. That has to be tiring.
BROOKS
Well, I had all these women. I was with these women. Once you get in those groups and they're for you and you're for them, just tremendous energy comes out of that and that's how I was sustained. And remember, I was working in the institution and outside the institution because we were trying to develop Califia at that time, which was an educational summer camp, so to speak, for women. We didn't want to say "summer camp." That was a little bit beneath us, but it was a place where average women could come and didn't have to be in the university in order to learn about feminism. That's one of the problems with feminism today. It's gotten too institutionalized, see. You've got to have a mass movement outside the walls of your institutions to try to help women. That's why consciousness-raising was so absolutely revolutionary because it was small groups of women getting together and saying, "Wait a minute. What about this? What about that?"

McKIBBEN
Did you have a C.R. [consciousness-raising] group that you were part of?
BROOKS
Oh, I can't remember. The church group was the one that I—that church task force was like a C.R. group.
McKIBBEN
Okay. Did you guys ever talk theology, like feminist theology?
BROOKS
Oh, god, yes. There wasn't any such thing as feminist theology at that point. We were making it, so that's what you have to realize. Sure.
McKIBBEN
At the personal level, feminist theology is, like, my favorite thing. So can you tell me a little bit about what kinds of discussions you had?
BROOKS
Well, we were always attacking the image of "God the Father." You go in a church and you can't hear anything but male ideas of what is divine, and we were trying to put the Sacred—now we call it the sacred female. We were trying to get that image in there, and there's enormous resistance in this society, and still is, to that kind of idea.
McKIBBEN
What were some of the traditions that you drew on to do that?
BROOKS
Well, I don't think I was drawing on any tradition. What do you mean by that question?
McKIBBEN
Well, for example, did you go to biblical female characters? Did you look outside Christianity for trends?
BROOKS
Oh, yes, right, right. We tried to raise up the women of the Bible who were never—those of us who were in Protestantism as in Christianity. I wrote a little book, which I don't know if I've got it around here, Bible Stories as You've Never Heard Them Before, and I went at it in a feminine way, feminist way, not feminine, but feminist way. I had plans to make that a big, big thing, but, you know, organizers and writers are two different ballgames. I mean,

you've only got so much time in the day and so I was just all over the place. I couldn't do it.

McKIBBEN

What were some of the other kind of ideas or traditions or sources that you guys used?

BROOKS

Well, it wasn't "you guys." It was me.

McKIBBEN

Oh, okay.

BROOKS

So you know Women's Studies. You know what people do in their own disciplines, and they go outside it. Like Sondra [Hale], I'm sure, is pulling on all kinds of things that she knows and people that she knows that are in her profession. For me, I was doing all this stuff. I was also making a lot of speeches outside the university in these women's groups that would call me or whatever. I'm known for my speechmaking, so I'm a good speaker, and so that was weighing on my time too. So I was running around between L.A. and Ventura and all roustabouts and all the way down to San Diego, so I was doing a lot of running around, plus teaching my courses.

McKIBBEN

Was that on women and violence that you were speaking or different topics?

BROOKS

Yes, mainly that area.

McKIBBEN

Okay, that sounds good. And speaking as you were a minute ago about trying to write a book, one of the things that Sondra mentioned was that you had tried to write a book about Long Beach and about the Women's Studies program at Long Beach.

BROOKS

Right, and I interviewed her. I just couldn't get it off the ground.

McKIBBEN

It was too much to do?

BROOKS

I don't know if it's that. I really needed a group to sustain me, because that's the way you write. I had all these wonderful ideas, but I couldn't sustain them and do them. Sondra was one of the first people that I interviewed.

McKIBBEN
What did you want to communicate with that book?
BROOKS
Well, I wanted the world to know what revolutionary kinds of things we did, and we did do that. I mean, it was exciting times, and people were trying to do something very new. It wasn't just a group of women that got together from all their different academic disciplines that said, "Okay, now we're going to raise women up." That's okay, but we were trying to not only raise women up, but we wanted something new in the society.
McKIBBEN
Do you think that you were able to make that contribution as a group?
BROOKS
Well, I do. I mean, that's why the Women's Studies Department is still in existence and that's why you find small groups of women that are still out there fighting. I mean, the whole secular, so to speak, movement out there with NOW and all these women's organizations that pick up those feminist ideas are still there. The lights may not be burning real brightly and it may not be in the majority, but it's there.
McKIBBEN
Do you think that things have gotten less radical? I mean, not just radical with a capital R, but really going to the root.
BROOKS
Well, I think that there have been lots of changes. If you went to the roots of the thing, you'd have to throw everything out and get a whole new garden, so to speak, and we don't have that kind of time to do that unless you are in a radical community that spends all your time trying to figure it out. So women do the best they can do with what we have. There's certain organizations that are out there that can sustain you in doing what it is that you're trying to do. I mean, just think about a group of women who are trying to end sexism in their office. Think about how hard that is.
McKIBBEN
Yes, just in one little office. Well, and even now it seems like Women's Studies is still kind of fighting for—I mean, it has the sense of legitimacy, but you still get comments from academics outside of that discipline sometimes, these little dismissive—

BROOKS
Oh, yes.
McKIBBEN
I mean I still get them, and it's, what, 2011.
BROOKS
Well, they just don't think women are a good topic for a discipline. I mean, come on, you're looking for knowledge, so to speak. Well, I don't know why you wouldn't think that, but—okay, we get far away from what you wanted to—
McKIBBEN
No, no, this is all good. [laughs] I'm interested, actually, just to follow up on how you think Women's Studies has changed. We've talked a little about that, but—
BROOKS
Well, it's accepted in the university, as you have said and I've said, and if you are interested in doing research on women, it's okay. You just go right ahead and you're not put down for that at all, so I think that's a big thing in the university. And I do think that it's helped around women and violence. I mean, I think it's helped young women who take these classes to understand they can fight back, and that's a tremendous revelation. You don't have to take it. In many of the disciplines, women are now becoming very prominent in the leadership. For example, the women in all the different Protestant or Catholic churches are given positions of power that they weren't. Now, we haven't completely won the battle, but you'll find more women ministers than there have ever been, and you find men don't object and say, "Well, we've got to have a man leading this committee," or blah, blah. You don't find that anymore. That's gone.
McKIBBEN
So you made that change. What about in the realm of—you mentioned this a little bit—in violence prevention and rape crisis, where you've done so much of your work, how have you seen that shifting?
BROOKS
Well, you need to talk to somebody who's now involved with trying to get the money from the state to sustain the Rape Crisis Centers or whatever because you've got to have money to run that. And then you've got to have a volunteer program for women to get

involved in that, and it's exhausting. When you hear those stories over and over and over, I mean, it's not something you go and hear and turn it off. I mean, it gets to you. So it's out there, but it's still very much locally in small groups of women that are doing this.

McKIBBEN

And now the issue seems to be the funding and—

BROOKS

Yes, well, it is the funding, and I think that the original impetus for all of that was the Rape Crisis Centers, the violence against women personally. Out of the Rape Crisis Centers came the domestic—to me, this is my opinion—the domestic-violence emphasis on women who are being attacked personally in their own homes and whatever. And then we started digging, really, and you got into the whole incest stuff and that sort of thing.

McKIBBEN

And sexual abuse.

BROOKS

Yes. And out of that, then, it was sexual harassment.

McKIBBEN

Right.

BROOKS

That came about in the eighties.

McKIBBEN

And you had done some work—because I read that you had either founded or co-founded the Women Against Sexual Abuse. Is that right?

BROOKS

That's the Rape Crisis Center that I was in. That's what we called ourselves. And then I got outside of that because I was trying to do this organizing to get women to organize and do it everywhere. I was like a general with a map and I wanted to see a women's group in every community out there trying to raise these issues and fight and blah, blah, blah.

McKIBBEN

Take some territory, yes.

BROOKS

But women have too many—it's just too much pulling on women's time. You can't get all these people together.

McKIBBEN

And you think that's because of our roles as women?
BROOKS
Yes, I think it's very difficult. I mean, look at it now. She's got a job; she's got children; she's got a lover or a husband. All that, it's just a tremendous pull on her energy, and if she's going to school to try to get herself up to snuff, that's a fourth thing she's got.
McKIBBEN
I've heard this even from some people in my generation, that they see, as a failure of feminism, the fact that now we have more equality in the workplace, but now we got the double shift. Personally, I'm not so sure we can lay that at the feet of feminism, but what do you think about that?
BROOKS
Well, I think it's very difficult to be a woman in society because, after all, she's the one that's supposed to take care of the home, and that's never left us, even though men and women now share a lot of this stuff. The home still is her primary domain, and his is the business and outside. But we have gotten into that business outside. So the minute you get into that sort of thing, you're going to be doing a double duty. You're going to work and then you're coming home with a lot of stuff, and if he's not really a feminist, he's not going to help you with it.
McKIBBEN
How do you see that possibly changing, or what would change that?
BROOKS
The only thing that will change that is women who are aware and force the issue. For example, if I was one of those women and I said, "I am not going to just come home and take care of children and take care of dinner. We're going to have this all divvied up so that maybe three nights a week you're here or three nights I'm there, or whatever." There has to be a consciousness of that and some sort of way of dealing with that. Otherwise, you won't deal with it at all, and she just gets it all stuck on her.
McKIBBEN
Do you feel like analyzing masculinity and male roles is an important part of feminism or Women's Studies?
BROOKS
I'm torn with that, but I do think it has to be done because you can't just talk about your stuff all the time. So you've got to do a

certain amount of that sort of thing. And what are women reacting against? It's the roles, the traditional roles that men have placed women in, and then, of course, the violence to keep us there.
McKIBBEN
So that's the aspect that you see as important to look at?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
Why are you torn about it?
BROOKS
Oh, golly, you asked me something that was more relevant to that, and it went out of my head. Say that again. I'm getting tired here. That's what's going on.
McKIBBEN
Is it important to look at masculinity and male roles?
BROOKS
Yes.
McKIBBEN
And if so, why are you torn about it?
BROOKS
But I don't think you have to go into the depth. There have been a lot of good books written on all of this, and women in these classes, but you could have a course on masculinity, what is that. I've had some very good lectures by—and I can't think of the professor's name. At Cal State I used to go and listen to him. He's retired now. But to talk about the role of men in society, I think it's important to understand why John Wayne became the epitome of male masculinity and whatever attributes they gave him. He was larger than life. And so, to be a man, I have to be a person who's sort of, in a sense, larger than life. That's why I don't cave into my emotions. I don't do so-and-so. So it's just a good place to learn to understand why these systems are set up.
McKIBBEN
We've been doing this for a while, and you're getting a little tired. I don't want to keep you too much longer, but I did want to ask you about the hosting that you've done on the "Feminist Magazine" at KPFK.
BROOKS

Yes, Josy Catoggio, who's never gotten the support that she needs, she was with our group at the radio station, she kept bugging me about, "Come and be a part of our collective and do radio." I didn't think it was that important, but it turned out to be very important for me because I thoroughly enjoy talking and being with the other women and doing shows with them. So that's how I got into that. She said, "Betty, come. You've got to be a part of this." I think I just went to meetings for about a year before I ever got on the air.

McKIBBEN

This was in the mid, late nineties, right?

BROOKS

Yes.

McKIBBEN

What was important about that medium or was there something that that medium brought to it?

BROOKS

Well, it's the only place where you've got feminist ideas that are just absolutely—it's "Feminist Magazine." I mean, you use the term. You don't try to cover it up. It's there. I think it's all gotten so watered down now that it's not at all radical, and that's just because of the times that we live in. You've got to have women who have some kind of theoretical base for what they do. There's not the anger at men that there was in the beginning. I mean, by god, we were mad and we were going to do something about all this stuff.

McKIBBEN

Do you think that's good or bad that that anger has dissipated?

BROOKS

Well, I think some of it was outrageous. I mean, I do think you get that. It's good that it pushes women along to do something, but it also tore up a lot of relationships and made men and women unhappy. I had a friend when I was on the Task Force for Women through the United Church of Christ. Her poor husband. She just beat him up all the time. I don't mean physically, but I mean that man couldn't do anything. She was a little unreasonable. So that's what you risk when you get into that, is a woman who's so mad that she's going to take every issue and beat up her own family or whatever.

McKIBBEN

What do you think we've lost, then, without that?

BROOKS
Well, you've got to have small groups of women who keep raising these issues. We don't have any of that anymore. So how are young women going to know about this?
McKIBBEN
It seems like now we have the bigger organizations, but I don't know if they're reaching people now.
BROOKS
Well, when you say the bigger organizations, who do you mean? Are you talking about NOW?
McKIBBEN
Like NOW, those kinds of things.
BROOKS
NOW and groups like that fight to change issues in the society, and so they're not doing a lot of this "personal is political" stuff, this raising of what's going on in your daily life. They're fighting issues.
McKIBBEN
I mean they're doing the legal part of it—
BROOKS
Right. That's right.
McKIBBEN
—which seems like you need that structure, I guess, but it's a limit to what actually people talk about in their lives and stuff.
BROOKS
And I think it takes a lot of something in a person to handle all this. I mean, you've got a young woman, let's say her lover is male. Boy, when you get into the dynamics of personal relationships, all this gets complicated. It has to do with surrender and it has to do with aggression. It has to do with everything. And you have to be sharp enough inside yourself, if you're the woman, to understand that.
McKIBBEN
And then teach everybody else. Is there anything else you want to share or get on the record?
BROOKS
No, I guess all I would want to say is that I have learned an enormous amount from the Women's Movement, and they've recognized me and tried to help me with what I was doing. I've had a lot of status and I've had a lot of fun, because to go and be with these people is really just a great gift to me.

McKIBBEN
Well, and talking to these people, which includes you, has been quite the pleasure for me, so thanks for doing that.
BROOKS
I bet you learned a lot from Sondra.
McKIBBEN
From both of you, yes.
BROOKS
Sondra came in in a different sort of way. She came in through, I think, academia and she's quite a respected anthropologist. I was too outrageous. I had to step outside of it in comparison to her.
McKIBBEN
You come from a different side of it. Well, and that's what's so interesting to me about feminist activism, is you have people coming from all these different areas, and there's work to do and then—
BROOKS
Yes, and we try to cooperate with one another, too. We're not trying to kill each other.
McKIBBEN
It's better not to kill each other, I suppose.
BROOKS
It's better not. There are too few of us.
McKIBBEN
Exactly. Can't deplete the ranks.
BROOKS
That's right.
McKIBBEN
Okay, well, thank you very much.
BROOKS
You're welcome. [End of August 18, 2011 interview]

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