

An Interview with
Debbie Redmond

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Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Maureen Zegel: ...an interesting time in the United States, mid-century and we think of it as perhaps changing after World War II. What was it like to be a girl, not just a child but a girl growing up in the 1950's? Your recollections probably are around mid '50s but talk about growing up in your family, what was your family like, who influenced you?

Debbie Redmond: My family was specifically my parents and an older brother and so I was the baby of the family. I would say probably the influences were mainly my mother because my mother really had a desire to go to college but could not afford to so she chose to be a homemaker and in the back of her mind, she still wanted to go to college. My parents purchased an insurance policy for me at my birth so that I could go to college and it matured when I turned 18 so I was always told, "If you want to go to college, then it's there for you," and that was a big push.

Maureen Zegel: Where did you grow up? Where was it that you grew up?

Debbie Redmond: I was born in Denver, Colorado and when I was six, we moved to Dallas, Texas and when I was 13, we moved to Oklahoma City so I have been in several different states before we moved here to St. Louis and each place is a little bit different.

Maureen Zegel: So when you were in school, you were in grade school and high school, what was that like? Your friends? What kind of aspirations were you all talking about? You'd sit around and...

Debbie Redmond: Growing up, I think because there were so many boys in my neighborhood, and that was both in Dallas and in Oklahoma City, it was a little bit different in that if you wanted to play, there were times that you had to play with the boys and they didn't want me to play Army with them so I had to be the nurse. So I would have to do the hospital or do something like that. If they would ride bikes, then I could do that with them. But they didn't think I should be in the battle, so to speak. So there was a difference in how females were treated, even at a younger age. We weren't pushed to do math or science or anything like that. We were told you could be a nurse; you could be a teacher; you could be a secretary, and that was about the options that we were given at that time.

Maureen Zegel: Did any of your friends from high school, did they go on to college?

Debbie Redmond: Oh, yes. In fact, I remember, I was in Oklahoma City and 40% went to one university in the state and 40% went to the other university and so quite a few of my friends went on to school, almost all of them.

Maureen Zegel: That wasn't 80% of the graduating class?

Debbie Redmond: It was but not all of them made it very far either because this was during the Vietnam War so some of the boys went into the military fairly quick.

Maureen Zegel: So what about your teachers? Talk about your teachers.

Debbie Redmond: Well, I joined Future Teachers of America when I was in high school and I would say those were the teachers that I looked up to the most but they pushed me a little bit differently than just being a teacher. One of them wanted me to be a stenographer and my mother even said, "We never know when you are going to get married. I want you to have something to fall back on so you will be gainfully employed even if you don't go to college or if you drop out of college." So my mother insisted I take typing and she also insisted I take what was called "note-hand" which was shorthand essentially so that I had something else to fall back on. And I used those skills to get my first couple of jobs too.

Maureen Zegel: Your first couple of jobs out of high school?

Debbie Redmond: During high school, other than busing tables but I was a clerk typist.

Maureen Zegel: And who did you work for?

Debbie Redmond: I worked for an insurance investigating company and essentially I was typing up driver's license numbers and doing a check to see if they could continue with their insurance or not.

Maureen Zegel: What did you learn there?

Debbie Redmond: A couple of things, mainly, just the process and how record keeping was.

Maureen Zegel: So talk a little bit about working in that insurance company and again apply the same kind of...because I don't want it to be just my questioning you and then you giving me the answers because you really can't hear my voice. I'd like it to be a conversation. So talk to me a little bit about working in that office and apply those same kinds of questions. Did somebody influence you? Did you learn something other than how to type and things? I mean, you can talk about that but...

Debbie Redmond: Working in that kind of environment, the women were the typists and the men were the investigators. There was one female that actually did research and she went through the paper each day and she kept a file of names that came up in the paper, good or bad, and when they were doing any investigations, they would go into her file room and it was these little bitty drawers with these index cards and it would have information on that individual so that if they had something later, they would be able to find something. That individual, I think, fascinated me because of the research she was doing. All I was doing was typing. Now, they did send me out when they didn't have one of the men available for a possible homicide investigation but all I did was just interview the police detective and he really didn't want to talk to me because I was a young female. So I wouldn't say that I got too far with the investigation but they did send me one time to do that too. So that was an interesting aspect and I think that really brought some thoughts to history and what kind of news is out there. That was very interesting.

Maureen Zegel: What kind of an insurance company were they?

Debbie Redmond: They were doing investigations for other insurance companies so it could be for car insurance; it could be for death, whether it was a homicide or suicide or something like that, or it could be claims, if somebody said their house caught on fire and "we're turning in a claim for that," they would do investigation on that if the insurance company requested it.

Maureen Zegel: And you were in high school?

Debbie Redmond: I started in high school and I did it one summer when I was in college also. My father was an insurance adjuster for one of the insurance companies and I think that's how I got the job. I don't think it was anything I did, myself, but they knew that I was a typist and they needed a typist in there temporarily.

Maureen Zegel: Talk about your father, what kind of influence he had on you.

Debbie Redmond: He was the dominant one in the family. He was the breadwinner and everything went through him, but if I wanted something, I went through my mother and had her ask him instead of my asking him. He and I had a difficult relationship when I was a teenager. My mother claimed it was because we were too much alike and usually meant that she was going to be left in tears. He and I would be yelling at each other and she would

leave in tears. He did want me to do well and he was very protective of my friends, both my girlfriends as well as any boyfriends that came around and he had certain questions he wanted to ask them and there were certain things that he did just to see what they would do and he always gave me a dime so I could call if I needed to have a ride home anytime I had a date and I never gave him the dime back. He later would say, "You know, I lost a lot of money out of tha.". When we were both older, of course, our relationship changed quite a bit.

Maureen Zegel: What about other men and women? We talked about your teachers. What kind of teachers did you have? Male teachers?

Debbie Redmond: I had some male teachers, not too many. Most of them were female teachers and I really can't remember too much about the male teachers until college and then there were more professors that I had to deal with. In high school, there were just a couple that were male. The rest were female. This was during a time where they were integrating the schools and I can remember one they brought in, the one individual, African American that was going to integrate the school, just one individual and it was a large school. There were close to 4,000 people in that school and they brought one girl in to start the integration and then the next year they had some busing that they did. I can remember the principal who, of course, was male and all of the higher up people were male but the teachers were not. They were mostly female except the coaches: the football coach who taught history and things like that.

Maureen Zegel: Talk about being in high school and the influence of integration. So what year was that? '60 something?

Debbie Redmond: Yeah, it was '66, '67 and I graduated in '69 and by then, they were really pushing the busing and quite a few of the schools were broken up. They'd send a certain number of them to a different school and vice versa. It was not a pleasant environment, from what I understand, after we left. My senior year, we did have one African American teacher come in and she told us about the protests and some of the things they were doing because she was very active in that and I really watched what she was doing and what she was saying. I think she kind of made a difference.

Maureen Zegel: In your life?

Debbie Redmond: In my life, yes.

Maureen Zegel: In what way?

Debbie Redmond: I hadn't been around too many African Americans but my parents had. My father grew up next door to an African American family in a small town and he didn't know anything different and my mother didn't either and they had friends that were African American but not until I was out of high school. So I wasn't around too many of them but I realized that they're people. I mean, that sounds discriminatory right now but everybody's the same.

Maureen Zegel: Especially in 1969.

Debbie Redmond: Yes.

Maureen Zegel: College, will you talk about college? Where did you go to school?

Debbie Redmond: I went to Oklahoma State University. My father told me I could not leave the state and that was as far as I could get that I didn't have to live at home because if I had gone to one of the other universities, I probably would have had to live at home and commute and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to experience living on campus and so I went to Oklahoma State.

Maureen Zegel: What was that like?

Debbie Redmond: Well, it's an ag school, it's a big school. There were more males than females on the campus, not only agriculture but veterinary medicine and some of the sciences too. So there were a lot more males than females on campus. I can remember we protested because we realized...and I think this was my sophomore year...that the females were required to live on campus the first year but the males were not. So we did a protest and we marched to the president's house but I made sure I came back before curfew because we had curfew and I didn't want to get into trouble but I did participate in that too because we wanted equal rights at that point and that would have been 1971.

Maureen Zegel: It was a good time to be a female.

Debbie Redmond: Yeah.

Maureen Zegel: What happened? Did women change the law?

Debbie Redmond: We got our way. The boys had to be on campus too for the first year and then they could live off campus.

Maureen Zegel: Then, talk about, what was your major, again, the influence of the professors?

Debbie Redmond: Special Education and most of the professors were male and that was a field that they didn't have too much at that point. Although they knew about autism, there wasn't much in the way of research or anything then and I got my degree in Mental Retardation. People tease me because I have a Bachelor's in Mental Retardation and that's exactly what it says on my diploma too. I'm sure they don't do that now but that was what we did. We had several professors that we realized...because it was mostly females in the class; there weren't very many males in the class...that we could manipulate them a little bit, one of them, and he actually was the head of the department. We learned to do positive reinforcement in another class and so he would put his hand up on his head to scratch and we would all smile and by the end of the class, he had his hand up the entire time and it wasn't until later he realized what we had done to him. But they told us what we had to take and what we were going to be doing. We didn't really have too many choices. We went into Special Education with a minor in Elementary Education. That was what most of my classmates and I did.

Maureen Zegel: Now, that's the beginning of the feminist movement. What was feminism like in Oklahoma?

Debbie Redmond: There wasn't much. I really didn't see too much of it in Oklahoma. After I was married...I got married when I was 21. I was a senior in college and I really didn't see too much of that because so many of my friends had gone off and gotten married also. There were a few that had gone into the military, a few females that had gone into the military and there were a couple of them that took jobs in Washington, D.C., working specifically for either senators or some of the areas over there that they were working on in feminism. But those were distant friends; they weren't real close friends either.

Maureen Zegel: Did you ever have anybody come to your campus and speak?

Debbie Redmond: Yeah. I wouldn't say that I went to any of those. I was more involved in boys at that time and didn't go to too many speeches or anything like that, just typical female, I guess.

Maureen Zegel: For the 1970's, yeah.

Debbie Redmond: Yeah.

Maureen Zegel: So you got married when you were 21?

Debbie Redmond: Mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: Talk to me about your life after 21.

Debbie Redmond: Well, ironically, my husband is a year younger than I am and in Oklahoma, they had to be 20 or 21, I guess it was, in order to get married, or they had to have parental permission but females could get married at 18 without parental permission. And so when we went to apply for our marriage license, his father had to go with us to sign the paperwork but I didn't have to have anybody go with me. So things have changed quite a bit, I'm sure, since then because they don't have that many regulations. Plus, we had to have a blood test done before we got married too and I can remember that, going in and having our blood taken, just so we could get married.

Maureen Zegel: To prove you didn't have Venereal Disease.

Debbie Redmond: Yeah, and at the time, my husband, being younger, was going to be in school for a while and I understood that I probably was going to be the breadwinner for a while until he completed his degree. I never really stopped earning except when I had three kids and then I did take time off and then I babysat so I wouldn't say I completely stopped being a breadwinner at any point either.

Maureen Zegel: But when you first got married, you talked about, "I was going to be a breadwinner until..." you graduated so the expectation was, you would, what?

Debbie Redmond: I would support the family. He might work part-time but I would be the main support.

Maureen Zegel: And then once he graduated, then what?

Debbie Redmond: Well, we figured we would go wherever his job took him and I was employable because I had my degree and I also had other skills and we would go wherever. As it turned out, he ended up on campus so we stayed there for quite a while until we'd been married 10 years and then we moved. He took a different job but it was still the same thing. He is a bio chemist and there aren't too many opportunities for bio chemists out there. Any teaching jobs that I was getting or offers was in small towns and there's not much that a bio chemist can do. So we had to specifically go wherever he had job offers and then I could find something.

Maureen Zegel: And you taught for how many years?

Debbie Redmond: I didn't, even though I had my degree, I did not teach, as such. I worked for single student housing. I was a desk supervisor while I was at Oklahoma University, I was assistant head resident. We lived in the dorm one year and decided that was a mistake, being married and living in the dorm. As my husband said, there were 500 women above him needing help and he did not like to be the one out there changing everybody's tire because they knew he was in the building. So we didn't last too long doing that but I was a desk supervisor and a convention coordinator in the summer months when they would have 4H and some of the other groups coming on campus. I would handle all of that too. I started sort of teaching, I guess you could say, when I was hired by the YMCA which is where I work now. I am director of day service for individual adults with multiple disabilities and so I am in my field. I'm just not in a classroom, as such.

Maureen Zegel: So, now we're on another stage of your life. So when did you have the three children?

Debbie Redmond: I had four actually. I had two in Oklahoma while I was still working and I had two when we moved here to St. Louis and after my youngest was 10 months old, then I took a job with the YMCA. So he is now about to turn 31.

Maureen Zegel: So talk to me a little bit about what it was like to be a mother. Now you're in the '70s and '80s?

Debbie Redmond: Mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: You have children born in the '70s and some...

Debbie Redmond: Yes, two in '70s and two in the '80s. It was difficult because I was seen as a stay-at-home mom even though I worked part-time in a camera shop and I did some babysitting and I did some other things. Everybody still saw me as a stay-at-home mom. The culture was different then it was for working moms, so to speak. When I went back to work full-time and I couldn't attend meetings and things that went on during the day, I couldn't be the room mother or anything like that and I had to be a support to somebody else that could do some of those things and in a way it was hard because I wanted to be involved in the kids' lives as much as possible but, in a way, I was able to because I worked for the YMCA and I could get them involved in other programs. And so they went to after school care that was run by the YMCA. They went to various classes and went through teen leaders and some other and several of them received scholarship offers as a result of their work with the YMCA.

Maureen Zegel: You talked about the culture at the time. You and I are very close...well, I'm older than you are obviously but the culture of stay-at-home mom versus the working mom and what was it that made you feel bad?

Debbie Redmond: I think probably people would come into the neighborhood. Let's say they were moving into the neighborhood and the wife would come around and start asking questions and ask who works and who doesn't and they might have a friendship with somebody else that worked but they would rely on the ones that didn't work to help them take care of their own kids. And so all of a sudden, I was not exactly willing, but I was a caretaker of other children besides my own, both before and after school and then during. While the older ones were in school, then I had some younger ones that would be there too and I worked nights and it was hard because I had kids during the day and we only had one car. The minute my husband came home, I took off in the car and went to work.

Maureen Zegel: And what were you doing?

Debbie Redmond: I was working in a camera shop as a cashier, just part-time, because we just couldn't make ends meet otherwise, even with babysitting because nobody really wanted to pay me very much. I was just a stay-at-home mom. They didn't see any benefit to paying anything.

Maureen Zegel: Now, a lot has been written about that era and that culture because I was sort of on one side of [inaudible 25:11], and what it did was it pitted two groups of women against one another.

Debbie Redmond: It did.

Maureen Zegel: And at a time when they didn't need to be going at each other...

Debbie Redmond: They didn't, yeah, they didn't support each other. It was either, you were a working person, a working mom, or you were a stay-at-home mom. There was nothing in between and they felt like...the working moms, I'm sure, were kind of like, "We don't have enough hours in the day. We have to get all this stuff done" and the stay-at-home moms just didn't feel like they were being appreciated at all for all the things that they did because they did extra things.

Maureen Zegel: So, when your youngest child was 10 months old, you went to work full-time?

Debbie Redmond: Mm-hmm, had to, although my husband is supposedly the breadwinner, we were not making ends meet. We were not doing too well financially and we both felt like, if we were going to provide for our children, we needed to be doing something else. So I did take a job but I found a job that was flexible enough that I was off when there were holidays, school holidays or snow days or heat days or anything like that and also allowed me the opportunity, if I had to, to take the children with me if I needed something, if one of them couldn't be in school for whatever reason, they could go to work with me...not all four at the same time, but one at a time I could take with me. And that gave me some more flexibility.

Maureen Zegel: And that's your Y job that you still have now at the YMCA.

Debbie Redmond: Yes, mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: That's a huge organization and it's been around for 150 years. Talk to me a little bit about being a woman at the YMCA.

Debbie Redmond: Well, that's an interesting concept.

Maureen Zegel: It's not the "YW."

Debbie Redmond: That's right, and when I say I worked for the "Y," they'll say "YW" and I'll say, "No, it's YMCA." There are actually more females that work for the

YMCA than males right now and more and more females are working their way up the ladder, so to speak, as far as higher levels than they have before. I also am involved with a group called "Y's Men International" and that is part of the YMCA as such. It's a service organization, kind of like Lion's or Mason's and that was started, it was all male, just like the YMCA was all male until 1974 and then they decided that they needed to get with the times and allow women to join and it still is male-dominated in most of the countries. They are in over 70 countries and most of the leadership is male.

Maureen Zegel: For "Y's men" or what?

Debbie Redmond: "Y's Men," mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: What about the YMCA? Are there opportunities for women to...

Debbie Redmond: They're trying. I wouldn't say they always do it but they are trying. You still will see the CEOs of the larger YMCAs are male and the YMCA of the USA is a male but there are some female executive directors out there and they are offering opportunities and they aren't distinguishing between male and female for the opportunities. So they're doing okay.

Maureen Zegel: Talk about your work. You chose a profession, a helping profession. Talk about that.

Debbie Redmond: Well, ironically, I was telling somebody the other day, when I did my student teaching, I went to Cerebral Palsy Center in Normand, Oklahoma and I actually had to stay there because we only had one car so I stayed there during my teaching time and they were young people that were there residentially for a small amount of time, recovering from surgery or going through therapy or something like that. So I was in the elementary level. I had a tendency...there were several of them. One of them had been in foster care most of his life and I really wanted to adopt him and I was young; I was 22. We didn't have jobs. We didn't have anything and here I was, ready to adopt and there was another young lady who was 16 who was part of migrant farm workers and she knew that she would never be able to get out on her own. In fact, she later became pregnant just so she could get out of the system and I was ready to take her too. So I agreed, after I finished my student teaching and they had offered me a job, that I would be better off working with adults because I wouldn't take them all home with me but I enjoyed working in the field. So I have

19 in the program right now. I can have up to 27. They're all over 21. The average age is 44. Most of them were born with a disability and most of them, mentally, are less than two years old and so it's a daily challenge. There are good days and there are bad days but there's so much love there that it's not hard to work with people like that.

Maureen Zegel: Between each other, staff and...what do you call them, clients?

Debbie Redmond: Clients...both. They are very loving and they really, like a child, they look up to you and they rely on you.

Maureen Zegel: Now, do these adults have a living situation, a group home...homes?

Debbie Redmond: Most of them are in group homes or in a residential care facility and I do have one right now...sometimes I have more than that that come from the natural home, that the family is caring for them, but what we see, of course, is, as this child is getting older, we've got one that's turning 40, how old is her mother then and how long is she going to be able to care for her in her own home? For those individuals, it's easier for us because we can take them during the day and the family can have a more normal life during the day. They can go do their shopping and can do other things and still be able to care for their individual. For those that are in residential care, we're more consistent and I think they go through staff so much in their facility that they're so delighted to see us when they get to the program because my staff and I have been there a long time. I've been there 30 years. I've got two staff that have been with me almost 27 and another one has been with me 12.

Maureen Zegel: And what's the make-up of your staff?

Debbie Redmond: Well, we're all older and we're all suffering physically right now too, unfortunately. I think the youngest of my staff is probably 36 or 38 and most of them are in their 50's.

Maureen Zegel: Female? Male?

Debbie Redmond: Female. I have had male staff before but they don't do too well changing diapers so they don't last too long. Right now all I have is female.

Maureen Zegel: That's okay... When did you join Zonta?

Debbie Redmond: I joined Zonta about four years ago or five years ago. An individual that is involved in Y's Men had asked me if I would consider...and I waited until my youngest was out of the house before I considered doing anything or getting involved in anything else. It's an interesting group of women. They're all professional business women. They're all involved in a variety of things. They try to have different fields. Some of them are nurses. We do have a couple that are doctors. We've had professors and we've had other individuals that are in social work of some type and then are teachers too and the age range is between probably 30 and 80-something right now. Like most groups, they have trouble finding younger women that would like to consider joining and I think part of that is, there's just so much out there and people...I hate to say it...are a little more self-centered. They have other things that they want to do besides sit through a meeting.

Maureen Zegel: Talk to me about...it's a service organization, correct?

Debbie Redmond: Mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: So what kinds of services are you involved with?

Debbie Redmond: We raise money, and I'm involved in what we call "Women's Another Chance" and that is for women that are 24 and older that would like to go back to school or to get some additional education, somehow, some way, and single moms, they have several children usually that they are caring for and they come in and we give them a certain amount of money for up to two years and assist them in whatever way they need in order to get that education, whether it's to pay childcare; it may be to pay rent; it may be to assist in getting them a car to get to and from. It's just a certain amount that's set aside and I feel like we are helping so many different people. They have up to 10 people a year that they provide scholarships to. UMSL has a dedicated scholarship from Zonta as well as Wash U has a dedicated scholarship and I believe Fontbonne and one of the other universities also has a dedicated scholarship and they are also encouraging, for example, they have...one is called, it's "Jane Clausman" which is a business award, those that are working towards an advanced degree in business. We support women in that and we also do aviation because Zonta was always involved with...one of the people that belong to Zonta was Amelia Earhart and they do have an Amelia Earhart scholarship that they award on a yearly basis for aviation of some type.

Maureen Zegel: Aviation education?

Debbie Redmond: Uh-huh.

Maureen Zegel: Well, that's exciting. That's an old organization.

Debbie Redmond: Yes, I think they were started in 1922 or something like that. They drill the history into our heads.

Maureen Zegel: What are those women like?

Debbie Redmond: Most of them are very outgoing, very bubbly. They've been together for such a long time, it's like a very strong friendship. I'm the quiet one of the group. I don't normally jump up and say much or do anything but they're eager to help in whatever way they can, whether it's wrap Christmas presents, donate to the Wyman Center or decorate rooms at Matthews-Dickey or get involved in literacy. If there's something that needs to be done, then they will do it. We have additional funding grants that we give for, whether it's trade schools or women that want to become welders or something like that. We will help that way too. But they're a very strong group of people.

Maureen Zegel: Let's talk a little bit about your four children.

Debbie Redmond: I have four sons.

Maureen Zegel: Four sons? Well, I have one of each, but mothers have a significant influence over them. If we were to do this interview with your sons, one at a time, not all of them together and we asked them "Who influenced you in your young life and your teenage years and your college?" what would they say?

Debbie Redmond: They would probably say their father in some areas because three of them are Eagle Scouts and we're all involved in Boy Scouts as was my husband. However, if they talk about getting to and from and some of their other additional activities, that would be me. I was the one that made sure that they got involved and stayed active, so to speak, in whatever area they wanted to. Several of them were into music and so I handled the music and my husband handled the Scouts most of the time.

Maureen Zegel: What did you teach them about women?

Debbie Redmond: I taught them that women are equal and that a job at home can be anybody's job and I have watched my oldest son, who has two daughters and he's pretty good in the kitchen, cleaning and the other day I talked to him and he was doing the laundry and he's very involved. I think the other boys are too, as far as what they will or will not do in the house. And so I think, in a way, I have influenced them. When we prepared, like, Thanksgiving dinner, each of them had a job to do. Each of them had to do some part of the dinner themselves, whether it was make the pie crust or whether it was make the homemade bread or to help with the turkey or do something like that. It was their meal too and that they should be involved in everything.

Maureen Zegel: And they took that with them when they left home?

Debbie Redmond: They did. In fact, when my two youngest were still in high school and my two older ones had an apartment together, they volunteered to have Thanksgiving dinner because the two were marching in a Thanksgiving Day Parade and they knew I wouldn't have time to cook and so they volunteered. Of course, I had to pay for everything but they volunteered to provide the meal.

Maureen Zegel: Do you have other ways that you think, as a woman, you have...obviously if you've been with the Y for 30 years, you've obviously had influence over probably a lot of people, not only the people who were your clients but the people you supervise, the people you went to church with, the people who were your children's friends. Talk about your influence.

Debbie Redmond: Well, it's kind of...I don't know, something I hadn't really thought too much about. Working for the Y, I've been involved in the YMCA book fair which is a big event. I'm on the planning committee. I'm not the decision maker by any means but I am the volunteer coordinator and I work with up to 500 volunteers and over 5,000 volunteer hours a year to get it done. And so that, in itself, I guess I do influence a few things. I try my best to work with the younger staff, to show them some of the things that I've been doing for years and years because I'm not always going to be the one there and I try to make sure that I'm open to their ideas because sometimes they come up with some really unique ideas that were a heck of a lot better than what we've been doing for years and years. So I would say working with the younger staff has been really nice. Of course, some of them call me "Mom" but I hope, in a way, that I've

influenced them in some manner. As far as church, I taught Sunday School for 25 years before I finally had to walk away and mainly because they couldn't find any other volunteers and I had to have some time, one way or another, to do with something else besides teach. But I have some very close friends that were in church with us for many, many years and I think we have quite a bond together, male and female. I sang in the choir as did my husband.

Maureen Zegel: Where do you live?

Debbie Redmond: I live in South County.

Maureen Zegel: What kinds of things would you like to talk about?

Debbie Redmond: Well, I think history is very important and one of the projects I'm doing right now and my husband, his eyes kind of roll back in his head when I talk about it, but my mother wrote letters and letters are not written anymore. People will send notes e-mail but they don't do letters. My mother wanted to be a writer, a published author and she did have a couple of things published, poems, published in the newspaper. She never got anything else published but her letters were very long and very detailed to her mother and my grandmother kept them and when my mother became ill, she decided she's never going to do anything with those letters because that was going to be the basis for her book. But I decided to sit down and go through the letters and instead of just keeping them to myself, I am logging them onto the computer and eventually I will turn them over to the archives for other people because it does have a lot of information about what was going on in whatever era. She started writing letters in the 1940's, all the way up until her death in 1991 and it's been a little overwhelming at times, to go through all of these letters. My husband will say, "Okay, what are you laughing about now?" because I will find something that's really humorous in the letters too and things that I had completely forgotten about that I might have been involved in doing or I was a part of it in some way.

Maureen Zegel: What archives?

Debbie Redmond: I don't know. I mean, I haven't really figured that out. I know that my mother-in-law had some letters too and those will go to Kansas archives because they're letters written in Topeka by my father-in-law's father, I guess you could say, in the 1900's...1913, I think, was when he started

writing to his future wife and then he went to Harvard and continued writing. He refers to several famous people from the Topeka area and I know they've got some letters that are there, at the Kansas Historical Society so I think those should go to them. I don't know with my mothers who would ever really...

Maureen Zegel: Oklahoma?

Debbie Redmond: Possibly. She lived in Iowa; she lived in Colorado; she lived in Texas and she lived in Oklahoma so it's a little hard to tell. One of the things that came out of it was, I set up two Facebook pages for my cousins on either side of the family and we have reconnected and, in the process, I have found some letters that my Uncle Dave had written when he was going to school in the 1930's and the family is asking if they can have those. I will make sure that they get all of that information and all of that back.

Maureen Zegel: Talk to us a little bit about your mother's experiences as a woman from the 1940's. She was married at the time?

Debbie Redmond: Yeah, she got married in 1940. She wanted to go to college. She really, really wanted to go to college. Her parents were farmers and when she graduated in 1938, there were several calves that they were raising. They were going to sell the calves and that would be her money for college and somehow, some way, the calves got out and were destroyed and she didn't get the money. So she did not get to go to school. So she was devastated. She went to Colorado and worked as a cook on a ranch, I guess you could say, for a while and then she went back to Iowa and, within about four months, she married my father who also wanted to go to college because he wanted to be a sports writer and he was very good in high school, writing the sports column for the local paper and that was what he had wanted to do but his father was very ill and there was no money available either. So my mother, she wanted to teach English and write a book and writing was very, very definitely a part of her life and I can remember different times that she'd get a typewriter and she would type various little stories and whatever and send them off and she even said, "Well, you know, they tell me that you have to get at least 20 rejections before you get anything back." She got more than 20 rejections, I think, and it got to be really hard for her. She didn't want to leave the house because she wanted to be at home for us and available for us, my brother and I. So she sewed and she started making clothes for

other people in the neighborhood and doing alterations. She became a professional seamstress and when we moved to Oklahoma City, she had a shop behind the house and people came. She even sewed for go-go dancers, which, the go-go fringe and everything, two-piece outfits and she kept talking about, the skimpier they became, the more she charged as far as the costumes but she made costumes and she also made costumes for some of the stages, some of the plays that went on at the same time. But she did just normal alterations and everything because she wanted to be there, even after my brother left for college and my brother didn't have to stay in the state. He went to another state to go to school. As soon as I went to college, I guess my sophomore year, she took a job in the alterations department in a department store so she no longer worked at home because she didn't have to be there and she and I didn't have to share a car either at that point.

Maureen Zegel: And so, those letters are recalling all of those times?

Debbie Redmond: Yes, very definitely.

Maureen Zegel: The '40s, the '50s?

Debbie Redmond: Uh-huh.

Maureen Zegel: The '60s. You said you graduated from high school...

Debbie Redmond: ...'69.

Maureen Zegel: Is there anything else you think we should be asking you?

Debbie Redmond: Not really. I will tell you about the insurance policy that my parents had on me. My father made sure I understood all the way growing up that there was money there, if I made it to 18, there was money there. On my 18th birthday, the insurance man came with a check and handed me the check and my father took it and I never saw the money again because my brother was in college at the time and he needed to pay some debt on my brother's school. So I was devastated at the time and I didn't understand. My mother explained that my father would take money out for each semester for my brother and the next semester, he would take a little more out and pay off the first loan and go that way and by the time I was a senior in high school, my brother was a senior in college and the debt was a little bit higher than he wanted it to be. So he had to pay that

off because he knew the next year I would be in school and he would have to assist me. But he didn't assist in the same manner because he didn't want me going out of state, didn't want out of state tuition at all and he didn't want me to go too far. So he wasn't too happy when I went to OSU because I had to stay on campus. There was a difference between how my brother was raised and how I was raised in many ways. I had a curfew. He never had a curfew and I really got grounded several times because I missed my curfew and he, there were a couple times that the girlfriend's parents called because their daughter hadn't come home and he never really seemed to be in trouble over that.

Maureen Zegel: What about other people that you knew at that time? Was it that unequal that the boys, especially the older boys, would have a lot more leeway and freedom than you and your friends did?

Debbie Redmond: Yeah. I lived in a neighborhood that was mostly male. I was one of the few females in the neighborhood. There were a lot of teenagers but they were all male and they all thought it was pretty funny that I had a curfew when none of them had any curfew at all and my girlfriends had curfews but they were a lot later than mine and mine was dependent on if it was a school day, I could only stay out until 10:00, I think it was, and on the weekend, maybe midnight. It depended on what we were doing. I wasn't allowed to do any car dating until I was 15, I think it was, or 16. There were a lot more rules as far as I was concerned anyway, and I think that was why my father and I often argued over things too, because I could see what they were doing with my brother and then what I was able to do, was completely different.

Maureen Zegel: Did your sons have curfews?

Debbie Redmond: Sometimes. If it was a school night, yes, and if it was my car, yes, because they normally took my car instead of my husband's car and when one of them was the driver for a senior prank and they got in trouble, it was my car that was identified. So, yes, they got in trouble and they were grounded a few times, not curfew type things but other things too.

Maureen Zegel: Okay, I got the tap on the shoulder. We've talked about a lot of stuff.

Debbie Redmond: No kidding. I hope I made sense.

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Maureen Zegel: I'm afraid we jumped around a lot. We were not keeping it linear. We tried.

Debbie Redmond: Thank you. That was fun.