

Carol Moseley Braun United States Senator, 1993-1999

PREFACE

Carol Moseley Braun served in the United States Senate from 1993 to 1999 as a Democrat from Illinois. Born in Chicago in 1947, she was the oldest child of Joseph J. Moseley, a policeman, and Edna A. Davie, a medical technician. While still a teenager, Moseley Braun staged her first protest, a sit-in at a segregated restaurant. At age sixteen, she marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., to protest housing conditions in Chicago. Moseley Braun earned a BA in political science from the University of Illinois in 1969, graduated from the University of Chicago School of Law in 1972, and joined the Illinois State Bar in 1973. She soon joined the staff of the Assistant U.S. Attorney of northern Illinois, serving until 1977.

In the 1970s Moseley Braun's role as an environmental activist in Chicago prompted her to run for the state legislature. She became an Illinois state representative in 1977 and served until 1988. Following an unsuccessful bid for lieutenant governor in 1986, she served as Recorder of Deeds for Cook County, Illinois, from 1988 to 1992, the first African American elected to a Cook County executive position.

Motivated, in part, by the spectacle of the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings in 1991, Moseley Braun became convinced that the predominantly white, male U.S. Senate needed to change. In 1992 she sensed an anti-incumbent force underway and challenged Senator Alan Dixon for the Democratic nomination. She won the primary election on March 17, 1992, and in November she defeated Republican candidate Richard Williamson with 53 percent of the votes. On January 3, 1993, Moseley Braun became the first female U.S. senator from Illinois and the first African American woman to serve in the United States Senate.

Moseley Braun entered the U.S. Senate in January of 1993 under intense public scrutiny. As one reporter noted, when "expectations are enormous, missteps [are] magnified." Every misstep, real or perceived, dogged the senator for the next six years. Criticism included an accusation of misuse of campaign funds (a charge that was eventually cleared by a Federal Election Commission investigation), use of income from a sale of family land, and a controversial trip to Nigeria. Senator Moseley Braun discussed each of these issues in her oral history interviews.

As one of only seven women senators and the only African American in the Senate at the time, Moseley Braun became burdened with a level of constituent demands rarely seen before. Despite such pressures, the senator was determined to influence legislation, including lifting a ban on gays in the military and promoting health care issues. Consistently, she provided a strong voice for civil rights legislation and promoted preservation of historic sites along the route of the Underground Railroad. Among her legislative achievements was the Improving America's School Act of 1994. Although Moseley Braun did not gain a coveted seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, she became one of the first women to serve on the Senate Committees on Judiciary and Finance.

Moseley Braun also had some high-profile confrontations with North Carolina senator Jesse Helms. In May 1993 the Senate Judiciary Committee heeded Moseley Braun's plea to deny the United Daughters of the Confederacy renewal of its 95-year-old federal patent on an insignia that featured the Confederate flag. Two months later, when Moseley Braun learned that Helms had introduced an amendment to reinstate the patent, she rushed to the Senate Chamber and made an eloquent plea against the amendment. "Symbols are important," she told her colleagues. "Everyone knows what that insignia means." She won the argument and the Senate voted 75 to 25 to deny the patent.

Despite legislative successes and her high-profile confrontations with Helms, Moseley Braun faced a tough reelection campaign in 1998. Although she received support from President Bill Clinton's administration, she was unable to raise sufficient funds from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee and other party sources to ward off a challenge from wealthy Republican candidate Peter Fitzgerald. She lost the election by less than four percentage points.

Following her Senate career, Moseley Braun became a consultant for the Department of Education. On October 8, 1999, President Clinton nominated her as ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. During Senate confirmation hearings, Senator Helms threatened to stop the nomination and claimed that an "ethical cloud" hung over her Senate career. Ironically, Helms allowed Moseley Braun finally to clear up many lingering questions. The results of the FEC's five-year investigation into misuse of campaign funds were made public for the first time, showing a discrepancy of only \$311. The Senate confirmed her nomination on November 10, 1999, with a 96-2 vote.

Moseley Braun served as ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa until 2001. She later became a visiting professor at Morris Brown College and professor of business law at DePaul University. She returned to politics in 2003 by entering the presidential race as a "peace dove and budget hawk." If elected, she vowed to bring more women and minorities into the democratic system. Difficulty in fundraising caused her to drop out of the race in January 2004. Following her presidential bid, Moseley Braun has served as a business consultant and founded an organic foods company.

About the Interviewer: Betty K. Koed received her Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She joined the U.S. Senate Historical Office as Assistant Historian in 1998, and became the Associate Historian and Deputy Director in 2009. In addition to many other Senate responsibilities, Koed is senior editor of the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* and serves as the Senate's History Webmaster.

INTERVIEW #1
The Road to the United States Senate
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BETTY K. KOED: How did you get interested in politics, in Illinois State politics as well as national politics?

SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: I come out of a civil rights background, in terms of my family. My father was always an activist in the pre-civil rights movement. That is to say before Dr. King, when—I guess coming out of World War II—there was a burgeoning group of African Americans who had served in the military, and were a part of what was then the newer generation that was just not content to go along with the old ways. They really provided the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement that we came to know under the leadership of Dr. King and others. In the 1950s my dad was really quite an activist. He introduced me to political figures in life—

[phone call; interview interrupted]

And yet, interestingly, there had never been a convergence, or coming together of civil rights activism and electoral politics. They were two separate and distinct tracks—parallel even. And so, I never had an interest in electoral politics. I just never thought of myself in elective office. I never thought of running for office. I really didn't pay much attention to it. In my early days, I worked with Republicans just as soon as Democrats. In fact, I worked in three Republican campaigns before I got started.

KOED: In Chicago?

MOSELEY BRAUN: In Chicago. Actually, they were successful. I worked for Chuck Percy. He had a campaign office not far from my house, and I was one of the people who worked on his campaign. You know, I was a kid. Apart from Percy's election, I worked for Jim Thompson when he ran for governor. Of course, by then I was a lawyer already, and I was an assistant U.S. attorney working for him in the office. Frankly, I didn't even think about the political implications of me out on the stump for Jim Thompson. [laughter] It was like, okay, he was my guy in the election, so there you are.

But I never thought of a career in politics for myself.

So then I left the U.S. attorney's office. Actually, I was just thinking about this a minute ago. I could just kick myself. I didn't really have a choice of leaving at the time, because I was pregnant. In those days, you stopped working when you were pregnant. They had something about breaks in service for federal employees, and if I had stayed at the U.S. attorney's office for six more months, I would have been in the CRS or CSR [Civil Service Retirement System], whatever, retirement system instead of the FERS [Federal Employees Retirement System]. [laughter] So I got ten years, but it's four and six, not five and five. So I've been thinking about those days. In any event, I left to have Matt, my son, and then I was home, being a homemaker.

I worked with some neighbors on a kind of environmental issue. The Chicago Park District was going to put a golf driving range in a part of Jackson Park and destroy the habitat of the bobolinks¹ in Chicago. This was a very major deal in my neighborhood. We were very concerned about the bobolinks. So I went out picketing with the other women, to save the bobolinks. When our state representative retired several months later, one of the women involved in that called, or saw me pushing Matt down the street in the baby carriage, and said, "Oh, our state representative just retired, and we were thinking of you being a good candidate. Would you be interested in running?" I pooh-poohed the idea. Oh no, not me. As a matter of fact, at the time I think I was more miffed than anything else that she hadn't invited me to the party. They had a party for him, and I wasn't invited. [laughter] So I said no.

Then, some interesting things happened. One group came to me and tried, basically, to threaten me, saying that if I ran for the office it would mess things up for the independent Democrats who had been fighting the machine for so long. That a black couldn't get elected to this seat, because I lived in an integrated neighborhood. Then another group came and said—The bottom line was that a black could not get elected to that spot. When one of the groups left the house, my then-husband turned to me and said, "Well, they said the wrong thing, didn't they?" I said, they sure did. That was when I made up my mind to do it.

¹A bobolink is a kind of bird.

I borrowed my first \$10,000 from him, and got a campaign started. It started in this lady's kitchen, Kay Clement's kitchen. Kay and I have subsequently had a parting of the ways, but at the time she was very instrumental in helping me. We called it the Kitchen Campaign. It was really calculated to bring in a new kind of politics, an interracial politics that wasn't so focused on race issues, one that brought people together. It's funny, because, even now, during this last campaign, somebody sent me a copy of my campaign literature from 1978. It talked about the same kinds of things—it was amazing—bringing people together and nonracial politics and coalitions. We called ourselves the Coalition Crusade for Good Government.

In fact, when I first started to run—This is a digression. I left this little part out, but now I'm mentioning the racial aspect of it. When I first began, and some other of her friends asked me about running, my first response was, oh I can't possibly do that. I've got a six-month old baby, a white husband, and I don't know anything about politics. [laughter] And they said, oh, that's all right, you can learn. So that was kind of how I got started.

I ran for state legislature. In those days, and this is an interesting historical point, as a matter of fact—well not historical but a current point—Illinois, since the 1909 constitution I believe it was, had a system of cumulative voting and multi-member districts. This was, in fact, the same thing that Lani Guinier got derailed over. Remember, she was talking about proportional representation. Our state had always had proportional representation, since the turn of the century. So, in that election, you ran and you could ask a voter—who had three votes—to divide those votes up anyway they wanted to in the primary and in the general. They could put them all together and give you all three, or they could divide them among several candidates. In any event, the district was always guaranteed to have two representatives of the most dominant party, and one representative of the least dominant party. So every district had two Democrats and one Republican, or two Republicans and one Democrat.

I ran at a time, this is another interesting historical footnote maybe, I ran at a time that because the state representative had retired, one of the two Democrats had retired, there were ten people in the field—a lot of people running. There were two women running. At the beginning, we had kind of a bitter rivalry between us—we have subsequently overcome that—but, in any event, we both ran and, in a curious twist, we

both won. This gets to be important in the old days in the district, because before there had been Bob Mann, the person I ran to succeed, and an older black guy by the name of Louis Caldwell, a state representative also. The Republican in the district was Bernard Epton. These names get relevant in a minute. Anyway, Bob Mann retired. Caldwell was running for re-election. Barbara Curry and I both got elected, which meant that Caldwell lost his seat. From his perspective, the black girl took his seat, and Barbara Curry, who was white, took Bob Mann's seat. Of course, it wasn't like that at all. [laughter]

KOED: That was his perception of it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was his perception, and he went to his grave thinking that I had beaten him and taken his seat in the state legislature.

So, we went to Springfield that year, in what was called the "year of the woman."

KOED: Another year of the woman? A previous year of the woman, I should say.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was my first "year of the woman." So, both times I ran for office, it became the "year of the woman."

KOED: That's interesting.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. So, my class in 1978, in the state legislature, represented more women elected in Illinois, in the state legislature, than ever before. In much the same way as in 1992, particularly after I won the primary because our primary was early, Patty Murray told me that her poll numbers jumped by 20 percent.

KOED: That seemed to be a trend that I picked up in my research. You were the forerunner in that race, and most of the women seemed to benefit from that primary win.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right, because our primary was so early. So, that was the first year of the woman, 1978. And Barbara Curry and I both went to the state legislature. That was really my first electoral spot. I had marched with Dr. King as a teenager. I had been involved in the politics of the '60s. I had always been involved in civic and community kinds of political activities, but not really in elective office, not really in

elective campaigns. Although, as I look back, it was really more than I thought, because, again, I had worked for Thompson as a volunteer, had volunteered in the Percy campaign. The person who probably really did inspire me to say yes, and who parenthetically did not support me in 1978—well, he did later. I mentioned that there were ten people running. When I was in law school I wrote speeches for state senator Dick Newhouse, who is probably one of the unsung heroes, frankly, of the Civil Rights Movement going into politics. He was one of a new breed of politicians. He was against the machine.

KOED: There was an important transition happening at this time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Very important transition. In fact, Dick Newhouse, but for the fact of his interracial marriage, might well have been the first black mayor of Chicago. He got bumped out by Harold Washington because of some race politics, frankly, within the black community. I was [Dick Newhouse's] speech writer for a while, while I was in law school. I did it as a volunteer. And then, when I got ready to run, his law partner and best friend was one of those other ten people running. Since he hadn't expected me to get in there, he kind of sat out the primary and really was supporting Eric—I've forgotten his last name. Dick supported him and didn't support me when I ran in 1978. Of course, he later came around, and really became a real mentor to me. It was a start in politics that really was unexpected.

KOED: It seems, too, that this reflects a national trend among African Americans, that of becoming more involved in politics at that time. Because politics had not served them well for so many years, I think there was a hesitancy to get into electoral politics.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think that's right.

KOED: But, little by little, in the early 1970s and especially into the late 1970s, you begin to see a lot more elective offices going to black Americans. I think your experience is very representative of that larger trend.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

KOED: Do you think that your interracial marriage helped you in that election, or hindered you, particularly since you came from a very diverse constituency.

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, it's funny, but I have never quite been able to analyze that appropriately. It's a tough one because feelings about interracial marriage have always been so mixed, in both regards, both whites and blacks have real antipathies in some instances and uncertainty in others. Particularly, when it's a black woman and a white man.

The area I lived in had a large Jewish population, for example, and Michael's last name was Braun. There were some people who thought he was Jewish, and he's not. But there were some people who may have been more disposed to support me because they thought I was married to someone who was Jewish, but then again, being Braun didn't help me at all in areas of the black community where they had trouble even pronouncing it. [laughter] I used to catch heat about it in some circles.

I can remember being really humiliated in public meetings. Yeah, it could get really ugly. In fact, mentioning Dick Newhouse, one of the ugliest humiliations I have ever seen occurred at a public, political occasion in which he had his wife with him. The people were so nasty to him. Yeah, I've gone through being humiliated because of it. But I suspect on another level altogether, some whites might have been more comfortable because of it, but I've never been able to decide if it helped or hurt.

KOED: That would be difficult to determine.

Well, let's move up to 1992. You had been in the Illinois state house of representatives, you had served as Recorder of Deeds, you had been, as you mentioned, active in state politics as well as in political activism outside of the electoral process. Why did you decide to run for state-wide office?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's a very good question. I think, in part, because of the challenge. The Senate had, and frankly once again has, no minority representation, no black representation certainly. At the time, there were two women. Between those two things, I just concluded that even if it just makes the statement that we can do better than this, that our democracy is not that closed, that the only people who can serve in our

highest legislative body are not just rich, white males, starting with the rich part.

KOED: I noticed that a lot of the press coverage of this time mentioned the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings. Did that play a role in your decision?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It did, but you know, this is where I am truly mystified, and I'm going to, one of these days, figure out exactly why this is so, but I've never had good press relations. Why that's so, I don't really understand. It's as though they made up their mind how they were going to characterize the race, and it really didn't matter what I had to say about anything.

In fact, my campaign really started before we knew anything about Anita Hill. You'll remember that there was a break in the hearings. I started off being annoyed that George Bush would suggest that Clarence Thomas was the most qualified person at the time for the Supreme Court. Now, I just really had a problem with that, because of Thomas' record over at the EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission]. My motivation in the beginning, in terms of opposing the Thomas nomination, was around his politics.

The challenge of these conservative right and right-wing, even right-wing blacks, to those of us who had been part of the Civil Rights Movement was a very, very serious one. It was something that, frankly, was very, very troubling. We have it now. To be honest, our side of the aisle, our side of the political spectrum, has done little if anything to develop voices and to develop talent in the African American community commensurate with the kind of effort being put in by the right wing. Why this is so, I don't understand.

KOED: You think it's more organized and much better funded on the right?

MOSELEY BRAUN: There's no question about it. Absolutely. I had a card yesterday—this is a digression—I had a card from a little girl that I met over at the Chamber of Commerce here in Washington. A bright, bright, bright young black woman. A college graduate. I guess she's working on her MBA or whatever. She's now styled herself as a Republican activist. We talked about it, about how she was recruited, actually recruited, when she was in college, to come and get involved in Republican politics.

KOED: Recruited by whom? A specific organization?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, the Young Republicans, you know. They brought her out here to Washington, and gave her a job at the Chamber of Commerce. That sort of thing. As an aside, on our side of the aisle, I couldn't get the DSCC [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee] to give me money towards the end of this last campaign. In fact, Russ Feingold was turning down money they were sending to him. Yeah, they tried to send money to Russ, soft money to Russ, which, of course, he wouldn't accept. The same week I was begging for \$300,000, Russ Feingold sent a million dollars back to the DSCC—the same week!

KOED: Do you think that's because they were looking at the polls, and thinking that they didn't want to put money into this campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'm sure that's right. But, again, if you've got one black person in the entire United States Senate, it seems to me you go the extra mile to try to help that person to not run short of money. They didn't. It was sink or swim on your own, and, of course, as it was, I sunk.

KOED: Going back to 1992 again. I found the press coverage of the 1992 campaign, the coverage of your campaign, to be, honestly, very sexist.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was. It was ridiculous. You see, seeing it in hindsight, I ran into the double-whammy of racism and sexism. When I was growing up, people would say, "Have you ever experienced racism?" And I'd say yes. "Have you ever experienced sexism?" Yes. Well, "How are they different?" Well, they kind of aren't, because someone's got their foot in your face, it almost doesn't matter why it's there. It's still a foot.

KOED: The reason behind it isn't as important as the block.

MOSELEY BRAUN: As the reality of it, exactly. And so, what I found was that, both with regard to negative racial as well as negative gender stereotypes, I was especially vulnerable. Without getting into the specifics of all the ugly controversies that associated themselves with my time in the public life of the Senate, if you go through

them and just made yourself a matrix of all the stereotypes you've ever heard about women on the one hand and about blacks on the other, every single one of those controversies fit one of them.

KOED: An interesting perspective.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Every single one of them. It's just stunning. One person said to me, well, you had to expect that you'd be held up to a special kind of scrutiny in all of this. I never objected to scrutiny. What I did object to was, on the one hand, having to accede to the notion that it was okay to be held up to a different set of standards because of my race or my gender, just accede to that, which a lot of people suggested that I should have done—just kow-tow, tuck-tail, and say that's just the way it is, and not get personally upset about it. That was one option. Alternatively, to try to resist it, in which case you find that you're just pissing them off and giving yourself more problems. So, there you are.

KOED: That plays into the idea, noted by some in the press coverage, that they thought you more a symbol than a viable Senate candidate. I also noticed, for instance, that the press frequently made comments along the lines of, "She is coming from an obscure county office," completely ignoring your experience in the Illinois house of representatives, your role as assistant majority leader.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Or that I was a lawyer. That is exactly right.

KOED: Or your legal training. I was very struck by that. I have in my notes here that there was a *Columbia Journalism Review* report that commented on a *New York Times* article, produced during the 1992 campaign, which took until the twenty-second paragraph of that article to mention your previous experience. The first twenty-one paragraphs dealt with your "cheerleader smile" and things like that. If it were a male candidate, they would never mention a "cheerleader smile."

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was the gender part.

KOED: So, the gender bias was very strong. Now, regarding racial bias, in some ways it was very obvious, but I think there were probably other ways, much more subtle,

that might have affected you as well. Those were harder for me to pick up from press coverage. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Again, talking about our matrix. You just mentioned cheerleader smile. [Drawing a matrix diagram] So we've got cheerleader smile [drawing] vs. qualifications—that's a gender one. Under race, you've got that I was late for everything, remember that? Not paying attention to the fact that I had all those appointments and engagements, and was being pulled in nineteen ways from Sunday. That I had a disorganized staff. Now, I'm not sure whether that's race or gender. It's both. There was this woman in Chicago, Carol Sexton, who was Jane Byrne's sister—Jane Byrne was the first woman mayor of Chicago—they coined the term "revolving door" referring to her staff turnover. You will find "revolving door" used in reference to my staff, when, in fact, I had no more or less turnover than many if not most of my colleagues.

KOED: Yes, they often noted high turnover of staff.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But there wasn't. In fact, if there was a problem, it was because I had people criticizing me because I kept so many of the Dixon staffers on. As much to the point, there were people who had worked in the campaign with me who stayed the whole six years. When you analyze that, you look at the percentage of staff turnover, and say where did the "revolving door" and "disorganized staff" come from. That was gender and race.

The whole thing with my mother—the Medicaid thing. That's called welfare cheat. [Drawing] That's a black stereotype. The fact is that this got more press when it broke than the Gulf War did, on television in Chicago. The thing about it that was so insane, even to this day, and I'm happy to share the actual documents with you, it was not a matter of hiding assets. This woman got a windfall while she was in a nursing home. It was like winning the lotto. Now, if somebody made a story out of your mother winning the lottery while she was in the nursing home, and you did not report it, how does that get to be a criminal violation. Yet, it cost me almost a million dollars, in legal fees, not to mention the bad press, negativism, and the poisoning of the well.

KOED: It seemed to have a real effect on the campaign.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In the campaign, it was what gave rise to the debt, because, from the time that thing broke, it cost us \$500,000 that we had to pour into different advertisements. I didn't track the money as closely as I probably should have, but my former campaign manager commented that we were dropping 2 points a day in the polls.

KOED: In the wake of that story?

MOSELEY BRAUN: In the wake of that story. To combat it, we had to beef up our efforts in terms of publicity as well as the workers. We hadn't budgeted for that, and it cost us a lot more money. But, welfare cheat is clearly a race thing. The state of Illinois did not even have a form with which my mother could have reported the money. And so here I was trying to protect my mother—I didn't want her to get hurt in all this, and as it turned out she really did. This was probably the singular event that hurt me both politically and personally the most, because it involved my family. My whole family got dragged through the mud. A law enforcement family—the last thing these people want is to have it said they are violating the law and stealing money. There we were, with welfare cheat. Everybody was horrified. What do you do? There was just no way that we could get our story out. And it continued into this election campaign. This guy ran commercials talking about stealing from Medicaid.

KOED: It was resurrected in the second campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Were you able to pin-point the source of it? Did it come from your opposition, or was it another organization?

MOSELEY BRAUN: We have not been able to do that. What really mystifies me, again, is how it got such legs. How did that get such legs? Or was it "welfare cheat" that was getting the legs?

KOED: It did get a lot of attention in the press.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And particularly when you consider that I had no

responsibility for reporting my mother's money in any event. It wasn't my money. I kept saying, wait a minute, it's not my money! It's not like my mother was a mental case, or anything like that. She was in a nursing home because of her leg and everything but, anyway, that was about welfare cheat.

Then you get into the whole thing with [campaign manager] Kgosie [Matthews] and all those stories. That was a gender thing. I'm convinced of it. That was the same thing that Gerry Ferrarro had to go through. You know, mysterious African running around in Armani suits. The guy was wearing Armani suits when I met him.

The FEC [Federal Election Commission] complaint—that cost a whole bunch more money, which gave rise to a whole bunch of other stories.

KOED: Also along the gender lines, there was a lot of press coverage along the lines of women having a tendency to choose "bad relationships," and some using it to support you and others to hurt you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's exactly right.

KOED: A lot of "we've all had bad relationships."

MOSELEY BRAUN: What did this guy do to anybody? Certainly nothing bad to me.

KOED: Did you ever start to have, say about the time of the Medicaid issue, second thoughts about running for state-wide office? Or were you committed to go all the way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I was committed. I was committed to go forward. In fact, it was only much later, after much of this kept coming at me, that I began to say, "Why in the world did I do this?" On a couple of occasions, I even got close to just throwing in the towel. A couple of times I thought, "I'm out of here." I was just telling someone that the Lord used to play a funny joke on me. This is the way I talk about the issue, but it's true. Whenever something hideous would happen, I'd go home and turn on the television, or sometimes I'd just pick up my Bible and start to read, but I'd turn on the television and

there would be something on television like *Rosewood*, or *Roots*, or the bombing of the kids in Birmingham—

KOED: Something to stoke the fires.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Stoke the fires. So, okay, I haven't really suffered, okay? That's suffering, and this is not suffering. I'm okay with this! [laughter] But, seriously, it was almost eery. Every time. I'd be dragging, I'd be so ready to throw in the towel, and I'd turn it on and there would be something there.

But Kgosie, I'm convinced, a lot of the stuff about him was a gender issue. The whole notion that stayed around of the personal use of campaign money, I think that was more race and lifestyle. Blacks often get hung up on lifestyle issues. I'm sure that's what it was. Particularly, they had no points of reference for him, in terms of his background, and not enough for me. So, when you find, not to brag or anything like that, someone from a middle class background—it wasn't a poor background, we didn't go through the "I was born in a dump, my mama died and my daddy got drunk" type of thing [laughter]—we had a quintessential (except my father was very violent, a whole other story) middle-class upbringing. From there, I haven't changed at all. Well, I've matured, I hope, and learned some things, but really haven't changed my lifestyle all that much. And yet, when I traded in my Lincoln and got a Jeep, the story was, "She bought a jeep, she must have used campaign money to do it with." I thought, I'm not on welfare fellas. Because it went against the welfare mother.

KOED: I think there's a definite racial component to that. Among both whites and blacks in America, I think that there seems to be an image that we have of what a black activist should be and look like. If people don't fit that image—usually a very poor background, rising from poverty, staying close to that community—a good deal of criticism has come to many blacks who have reached beyond that, or were never a part of it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Or who were never a part of it, that's right. Kweisi Mfume has a book out, I saw it sitting at a friend's house the other day, and I forget the name of the book, but the second line on the cover says, "From the Mean Streets to the

Mainstream."²

KOED: That's the expected image of black activism in America.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That is absolutely the image. While, frankly, I have experienced the mean streets, during a little side journey in my life, and I was always grateful, frankly, for that. As funny as it sounds, I was grateful for it.

KOED: You learned a lot about people through that experience.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. With Kgosie, his background was even more illustrious than mine. His grandfather—I know you don't need all of this—his grandfather was Zed K. Matthews, a professor in South Africa, one of the authors of the Freedom Charter. He was like their Thomas Jefferson, okay? His father and grandfather were arrested when [Nelson] Mandela was arrested, sent to Robben Island [Prison], and both got released. The South Africans tried to assassinate them, whereupon his father and grandfather both went into exile. His grandfather went to Botswana, became the ambassador to the United States from Botswana, when it became a nation. In fact, his grandfather died while he was still ambassador here in Washington. [President] Lyndon Johnson had his grandfather's body flown back to Botswana. His father, meanwhile, went off to the World Council of Churches to raise money for the anti-Apartheid struggle. Kgosie was raised in London. He didn't go to Africa until he was 14. When his father went back to South Africa, the ANC [African National Congress], which his grandfather helped to found, didn't want the father to come back. So, the father basically left the ANC and became Chief [Mangosuthu Gatsha] Buthelezi's counselor, because Buthelezi was his mother's brother. On his mother's side, Kgosie is Zulu, and his father is now the deputy minister in the government. His sister is the assistant whip in Parliament.

KOED: A very illustrious family.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But whenever you read something about him in the press, it's about his Armani clothes. I was always grateful to him because he kind of broadened my horizon in terms of national and international politics.

²Kweisi Mfume and Ron Stodghill, *No Free Ride* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1996).

But, anyway, getting back to the matrix, we've gone through personal use of funds, that's a race/lifestyle issue. We got past that. And the FEC, after an audit that went for four years, cost us all that money, not a single penny in a fine.³ In spite of all the bureaucratic language in the report—There was messy record keeping, no question about that. Earl Hopewell was a nutcase, but that was my fault. I take full responsibility for Hopewell. He was a nutcase who didn't do his job. But, the fact of the matter is that the money was accounted for. Sloppy record keeping notwithstanding, the money was accounted for. I think that's why they did not give us a fine after they went through all this stuff. They said, okay, it was really messy and it's taken us four years, but no money was personally used, which is the case that kept being made. So, anyway, the personal use issue is theft, that's kind of like welfare cheat if you really think about it. Because blacks are what—[again drawing on the matrix]—

Under women, women are air heads. [laughter]

KOED: Bad business managers.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, bad business managers, not managers. Influenced by the man—ran, controlled by the man.

Under blacks, they are lazy and shiftless [continuing to draw]. They are kind of criminal, they steal. And, of course, that went for him, too, so that becomes race and gender, because he was my partner in crime. We should make a point of these as we talk. I've done better matrices, this is just a scribble. If you go right down the list, there you go.

That's why I said to [Senate Historian] Dick [Baker], if anything, the good part of

³Moseley Braun drew criticism for alleged campaign finance violations, but such charges were later dismissed when a five-year investigation by the Federal Election Commission turned up only a minor discrepancy of \$311. The results of this investigation were discussed in Moseley Braun's 1999 confirmation hearings to be ambassador to New Zealand. See Jodie Wilgoren, "Leaping Past Triumphs and Debacles," *New York Times*, March 14, 2003; Helen Dewar, "Moseley-Braun Gets a Hearing," *Washington Post*, November 6, 1999; Hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations regarding Nomination of Carol Moseley Braun to be Ambassador to New Zealand, November 5, 1999.

being in the Senate *was* the Senate.

KOED: Explain what you mean by that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Because the institution is so traditional, and because the institution works in its own way. You get to be a legislator, and a legislator representing a state. And so things like race and gender become less relevant, because it is the position to which individuals respond. I think it's very much the same thing—I'm guessing now—but I think it's very much the same thing with the military. One of the reasons blacks do well in the military, and women are beginning to, is because the hierarchical structures mean that individuals respond to a captain, a lieutenant, a general, not the girl with the stars on her shoulders.

KOED: The rank stands in front of gender, or class, or race.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. I'm glad you mentioned class, because class has a lot to do with it, too. Class fits into that very much. In the institution, that gets in the way of those things that would otherwise detract. There was a movie with Denzel Washington and a woman who was a military, a sergeant, and she was fragged basically by her own troops.

KOED: Oh, yes, I know what movie you mean [*Courage Under Fire*]. The story was told from all the different perspectives of what happened and what this woman did in this particular situation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. But the reason I mention it is because she was fragged because of her gender. The reason they were covering it up was because they all knew they had violated the rule by failing to respond to her leadership because of gender, as opposed to responding to her leadership because of her rank.

KOED: In that case, gender got in the way, was put ahead of rank.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. It was a murder case. It's the same thing with the Senate, when gender or race gets in the way of you doing your job, it really is a big deal. It is something that violates the fundamental order of the Senate. So, I could be a

legislator, and I found that my colleagues treated me like a legislator. Some of them may have hated my guts. Some of them may have had hoods in their back closet somewhere. But it didn't matter, because—

KOED: You had an equal vote.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. I had an equal vote. I represented the people of Illinois. I think every member of that body respected that.

KOED: When you joined the Senate, in January of 1993, what was the reaction you got from the other senators? Was it a welcoming?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It really was. Strom Thurmond showed up at my ceremony. [laughter] He was too funny. One wonders whether he actually knew where he was, but, be that as it may, he showed up. Of course, the gasp from the room was audible when he walked in. [laughter]

KOED: I guess if any member of the Senate ended up being an antagonizing force, it was not Strom Thurmond but was Jesse Helms. For example, the Daughters of the Confederacy issue and the singing Dixie in the elevator incident. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Just that, the day that it happened, frankly I was unprepared for it. I didn't think we'd have an issue. You see, it had come up in committee—the flag business—and it was Strom Thurmond in the committee.⁴ I had gone around and lobbied my colleagues, as you do, and most of them had sided with me. Not all, which really kind of surprised me, because it was such a no-brainer to me. I didn't realize at the time that this was considered to be a big deal by Strom. Strom really wanted this to happen, and he was the ranking member on the Judiciary [Committee] at the time, because Joe Biden was still chairman. Again, you'll have to pull the vote on it, but I think in committee most if not all supported me. So we won it in committee. I thought that meant it was a dead deal.

⁴In 1993, Moseley Braun convinced the Senate Judiciary Committee not to renew a design patent for the United Daughters of the Confederacy, because it contained the Confederate flag. The patent had been routinely renewed for nearly a century.

Then, we were in the middle of the confirmation hearings of, I believe, Justice [Stephen] Breyer, when Orrin Hatch had gone into a thing—Orrin and I have always gotten along, even though our views are very different—he had gone into this whole thing about comparing abortion to slavery, something the Pope just did yesterday, which just sends me off the deep end. Anyway, I was getting ready to go into that issue. Some paper wrote something criticizing me over the words I used to describe the procedure, but I took personal objection to what he said, to that analogy, and was later criticized for making it a personal issue to me. Well, okay, I'm the only black person here, so who else is going to be offended by it. [laughter] So, I was in the process of doing that when a staffer came in with a note that said Jesse Helms has just taken to the floor with a motion to restore the Confederate flag patent. I thought, okay, Lord, what did I do this morning? What did I do to get this one? I get to argue substantive due process with Orrin Hatch over abortion over here, and then I have to run out here, because Strom was still sitting in the room. Strom had passed it on to Jesse Helms. It was Jesse Helms holding the fort.

So I literally ran from the committee over to the floor to take up the issue. Thinking that everybody would understand, I just kind of held forth and quietly thought I could defeat the motion. When it didn't go down, I was like Whoa! Wait a Minute. This cannot be. That's when we took up the issue further. I think Jesse Helms was being deliberately antagonistic, in a southern kind of way, when he got on the elevator.⁵ The action on the floor I think he was pretty much sticking to the idea that these are nice little old ladies who have a different point of view.

KOED: After the elevator incident, was there discussion among your colleagues in the Senate? Or was it just something that was quickly forgotten?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, more than one of them came up to me and talked to me or mentioned it. One of the things about having said how the Senate was much easier to deal with because race and gender get to be irrelevant, having said that, the contradiction to that statement is that it is still the "old boys club." I was never confused,

⁵In the summer of 1993 Senator Moseley Braun encountered Senator Jesse Helms in a Senate elevator and he promptly began singing a verse of "Dixie." Moseley Braun recalled the story: "When Helms stepped into the elevator, he saw me standing there, and he started to sing, 'I wish I was in the land of cotton ...' And he looked at Senator Hatch and said, 'I'm going to make her cry. I'm going to sing 'Dixie' until she cries.' And I looked at him and said, 'Senator Helms, your singing would make me cry if you sang 'Rock of Ages.'" The story was carried in many news accounts, including the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, August 6, 1993.

and I hope my now former female colleagues are not confused, that the boys still have their conversations, their relationships, their discussions, that you don't know about, but you'll get little outcroppings that will suggest—

KOED: Locker-room conversations, so to speak.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. So you'll get little outcroppings that will suggest that those conversations have taken place. What I got was that they thought the comeback on the whistling dixie was rapier-wit or whatever, very good, and they all took note of it. But in terms of being in a conversation with someone who had something to say about it, that did not happen.

KOED: Do you think that coming into office in 1993—Once again, you're in the year of the woman, I guess we should talk about that. What did it mean to be part of the "Year of the Woman"? The second time for you, probably the first for the others. Also, in many ways you were the vanguard in that year of the woman. You received a good deal of national press coverage. Did you feel special responsibilities, or burdens, because of that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You want to know something? I sometimes jokingly describe the period from the primary in March until the election in November as hyperspace, which is kind of like when you play video games and when you reach a certain point you go into hyperspace. I've kept some notes from that time, but unfortunately it is largely a blur, because I was so busy. I've always been mystified, for example, when people in the press would say to me that you were the darling of the press in the beginning. When? I never saw when I was the darling of the press. I missed that part. Maybe I didn't start paying attention to the publicity until it got ugly. I don't know.

KOED: That could be. There was one comment, I have it in my notes, that I found really interesting. Here it is. During the campaign, you became something of a celebrity in national politics. In 1992 the *Washington Post* noted that "the hottest senatorial prospect now is someone who resembles Carol Moseley-Braun." This was in the summer of 1992, after your upset victory in the primary, but before the negative campaigning had begun. Clearly, in this article, they were setting you apart as a model—this is the hot item for the Senate right now. What do you think about that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's just like anything else. They were taken by surprise. Their punditry had not worked. The punditry said the incumbent, Alan Dixon, was going to win.

KOED: A shoo-in.

MOSELEY BRAUN: For those who didn't think he was a shoo-in, it was going to be Al[fred] Hofeld, the millionaire. So, here I was—I wasn't a millionaire, I was a woman, and I was black on top of that. It's like, Whoa! What kind of duck-billed platypus is this? I think a lot of it really was the novelty value, and the curiosity of it. Really, I was kind of a talking dog at that point. Again, I missed out on a lot of the so-called good press, because I was very busy working sixteen to eighteen hour days, seven days a week.

KOED: This was a grueling time for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Particularly since I didn't have money, I had to raise money. One of the good things was that Kgosie had been involved in Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaigns, so he knew people around the country that I didn't know. I didn't have any national contacts at all. We went on what we called the long march, going from state to state to state doing fund raisers. We were raising, on average, about a million dollars a month. Bus rides, little tiny planes that looked like they'd fall out of the sky if someone sneezed on them. It was physically very, very demanding and very, very grueling.

KOED: Did that primary win come as a surprise to you, too?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, I thought I was going to win. I've always had a prescient, sixth sense about that. I thought I'd win the primary, and I thought I'd win the general. That was an election when there was never any doubt in my mind about whether I was going to win.

KOED: Despite the bad press you got at times, you won quite handily. Did you feel a sense of mandate going into office from that win? Did you feel that people had really spoken in your favor?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'll tell you something, it wasn't so much that. If anything, and this is one of the untold stories about all this, I was there to do a job. This is kind of a contradiction. They always want to make me out to be this celebrity, high-style. I had a job description. I had a job to do. I had to represent the people of Illinois. That means attending to their business. That means being a legislator. That means constituent service work. That means almost like a state legislator writ large. That's how I saw what I was supposed to do. In terms of a "mandate" to be a voice, if anything, I did not—I was really upset the other night. I was listening to a television program with this woman, a black female reporter, who really pissed me off because she had been a detractor from the beginning. She was saying, "You know, Carol Moseley Braun never really understood the symbolism of what it was that she represented. She never fully understood what we expected of her." It gets back to that symbol argument. I can go around and make speeches and kiss babies until the cows come home, and never get a single Illinois business taken care of, not pass a single bill, not help one person, you know, in getting their social security checks unloosed. Sure, I can do that.

KOED: In other words, it is a double-edged sword. Being a symbol helps you gain national publicity which can help a campaign in many ways, but it can also hurt it. It also places certain burdens on that person. You have to be a person who can please everyone all the time, and that's impossible.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. That's not possible. There's another side to it, too. Again, I was never comfortable with it. When you talk about being a symbol. So what does that mean? A symbol for what? What set of issues are you talking about? If I'm going to be a black symbol, that says I do one set of things. If I'm going to be a women's symbol, that's another set of things. If I'm going to be a symbol for the poor, oppressed, down-trodden, and overworked, that's another set. So, if I'm going to be a "first," another set.

KOED: You were a "first" in many ways.

MOSELEY BRAUN: This sounds old fashioned, but my attitude was, look, let's dispense with symbolism. I'm going to do my job and have a substantive something to point to. And I will rise and fall based on the substance. As it turned out, I fell based on the symbols. But that's another thing. Maybe that woman was right, maybe I never did

fully understand it. Again, I don't think—and this gets to the whole thing about whether or not it was my responsibility to go around and just be a national role model—I did not believe that was my responsibility. I did not believe that was my job. Not that I didn't comport myself as best I could to live up to people's expectations, but at the same time I had a job to do. My first commitment was to that job.

KOED: There are so many levels to deal with there. One level might be that most people who do not serve within the Senate, or within the House or other political office, have no idea of what a day is like in the Senate. And, therefore, they think you can spend a lot of time being a symbol to the American people, for whatever category we may choose for the day, and still have time left over to do all the legislative work, the committee work, and that sort of thing. Do you think there's a real misunderstanding?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, there is. But that applies to everybody. There's a special dynamic for me, and I'll get to that. As to everybody, there is the phenomenon—I call it the lobster dinner phenomenon—the average citizen out there thinks that senators are people who get driven around in chauffeured limousines, golf in the morning, and go to lobster dinners at night, and all they do is hang out and be important. They don't work hard. They have no idea that even the Strom Thurmonds of the world—for his age, Strom Thurmond probably works harder than any 90-whatever year old in the country. It's a very hard job.

So, you take that—that one set of misconceptions. Then you get to the special circumstances having to do with me. In the first instance, let's talk about the substantive level, we had more work to do. I don't know how you check this, but I remember one time comparing with Dianne [Feinstein] and some of my other colleagues. I was getting California-volume mail with an Illinois staff to handle it. I was getting more phone calls, with an Illinois staff to handle it. We were getting on average 1,400 invitations. The volume of everyone wanting me to come and speak, everyone wanting me to come to their thing, and particularly for those constituencies who felt they had a special investment in me, they were especially disappointed when I told them that I couldn't do it because I had to go to work. Remember, this is particularly true for the black community, but women also. You have never heard such screaming as when I told a NOW chapter that I couldn't come and speak to them. You would have thought that I had just assassinated somebody. But more to the point, the black community had never known

anybody in this position.

KOED: They had no frame of reference at all.

MOSELEY BRAUN: None. Zero. Zip. So they expected that I was going to respond just like the congressmen did, with local concerns only, and that I would be another Maxine [Waters]. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, because I was the one senator, that made it doubly important that I personally be there. I couldn't send representatives. Thirdly, because Jesse Jackson—the other point of reference in terms of national politics—all he does is go to meetings and give speeches. He doesn't have a day job. [laughter] Jesse does not have a job.

KOED: I was thinking, as you were saying that, that playing that symbol role would be a great job if you didn't have another job to do.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. You know, it's funny, because I got into trouble with Oprah [Winfrey]—I think to this day Oprah holds it against me—I got into trouble with her once because I made the statement that I'm not "Oprah Goes to Washington" or "Jesse Jackson in a Skirt." I'm a senator. I represent a state. Oprah took it wrong. I wrote her a note which said, look, I meant no disrespect to you. I just want to make sure that I get taken seriously as a senator, and not just someone who's entertaining people. That was a real point of conflict, because people were looking for me to entertain them, by giving speeches, whatever. It was really about entertaining. Particularly, as politics moves more into that.

KOED: The lines are getting blurred?

MOSELEY BRAUN: The lines are getting blurrier every day. Here I was, with this expectation that I was going to entertain, that I, in fact, was going to be Jesse in a skirt, I got into all kinds of trouble on substantive levels. Particularly, in my economic policies—they were so much more conservative than Jesse Jackson's. They were really pissed off. They were heartless mad at me for supporting the balanced budget amendment. Now, they didn't get that kind of mad at Paul Simon. They sure didn't get that kind of mad at Dianne Feinstein. But they got that kind of mad at me.

KOED: Your stand got a good deal more attention than theirs?

MOSELEY BRAUN: On balanced budget, on tort reform. The trial lawyers essentially hired Jesse, or whatever they did with Jesse, to do these blast faxes. I was furious with him. He did a blast fax talking about me on tort reform. It's like, wait a minute, there are no other Democrats that are supporting this? Why are you targeting me, Señor Jackson? I was really furious with him. So he was not real helpful. He was out there throwing banana peels, and essentially saying to the faithful, well we knew she had gone off the reservation. We knew there was something weird about her. So, I ran into that on the policy side, because, once again, I wasn't Jesse in a skirt. And because I was doing my job, and not just going around giving speeches, I couldn't do Oprah. I couldn't do "let me entertain you" and "be earth mother to the country." Even if I had the inclination to do it, I didn't have the resources to do it.

KOED: And you wouldn't have had the time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I wouldn't have had the time.

KOED: In many ways, your colleagues in the Senate, and I would imagine especially the freshman class of 1993, men and women, understood what your life was like much better than your constituency.

MOSELEY BRAUN: No question about that.

KOED: Did you feel a real camaraderie among that freshman class elected in 1992?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, I think there was.

KOED: Did it cross lines of gender?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It crossed lines of gender and it crossed lines of party. I struck up a friendship with Bob Bennett, which I'm sure will be a lifetime friendship. He's just a pal. Now Bob Bennett is as conservative as you get, but he's a friend. He's been a friend. We came in with Russ, Patty, me, Barbara [Boxer].

KOED: Yes, I have the list here: Bob Bennett, Barbara Boxer, Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Byron Dorgan, Lauch Faircloth, Russ Feingold, Dianne Feinstein, Judd Gregg, Dirk Kempthorne, Patty Murray and yourself.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, there was a real camaraderie in that class.

KOED: Do you think there was a special bond among the women? Or was there a lot of attention given to something that didn't really exist?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, I think there really was. I think the women had a tendency—we tried to form our own "old boys' network," really, now that's my shorthand for it. Barbara Mikulski, particularly, tried to set up meetings in which the women would get together. We eventually expanded it to a bipartisan thing, which was another set of meetings that brought the women together over dinner, all women—Republicans and Democrats. In some ways, we really tried to set up our own kinds of relationships that would help counter-balance our continued exclusion from the real track.

KOED: Did you talk about that, as a group?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Sure. We did. And we talked about the issues. That was the nice thing about it. We talked about issues in a bipartisan way. You knew who was going to be there on choice issues. You knew who was going to be there on research issues. You knew who was going to be there on pension issues. There was some rivalry inside. But that all got smoothed over, and we were kind of protective of each other. There was a bond among the women that was very important.

KOED: Can you point to any specific piece of legislation or a particular event where the camaraderie you shared with the eight other women had a real effect on the outcome?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Patty Murray and I worked together—Patty was kind of the lead dog—right after the Tailhook scandal, getting the rules of the military changed on sexual harassment. We legislated together on that. On pension issues, I took the lead on women's pension issues. Barbara Boxer was close behind, breathing down my neck, because she really wanted the issue. I got there first. [laughter] So, pensions, we worked

together on that. Olympia [Snowe] worked with Barbara Mikulski on women's health issues, more often than not. Kay Bailey [Hutchison] probably kind of isolated herself a little bit, only in that her politics were so much more conservative, even on women's issues. She was trying to be Phil Gramm in a skirt, literally. That meant that whether it was women's health, or sexual harassment, or freedom of choice in abortion, or women's pensions, Kay was kind of over here [gesturing to her right]. Although I worked with Kay on the spousal IRAs. That was one place where we worked together.

So, yes, I think there was legislative output that reflected the women working together on issues, particularly those that had a gender aspect.

KOED: When you came into that Senate in 1993, were there any members that emerged as mentors or role-model figures for you? You mentioned Paul Simon and the balanced budget amendment. What role did he play in the development of your office? Was he a mentor in any way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Paul was very helpful. He couldn't really help me with my office, although, quite frankly, he probably could have helped me more if I had gone to him more. He was open to me on all kinds of levels. I was grateful. In fact, I could not have done better in a senior senator. There was not the kind of antipathy, rivalry, or contentiousness that sometimes happens between senior and junior members in the same party. He was very, very helpful. We worked together on bills, like balanced budget and others. We did our town hall meetings every Thursday together.

KOED: A lot of cooperation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. On every level. Like I said, I just could not have done better in terms of senior senators. I would put him first among the people who mentored and were good to me.

After him, I think Joe Biden would probably come next. Joe was very helpful to me, both on the Judiciary Committee and even after I got off the Judiciary Committee. Joe has been a good friend.

After Joe—I'm going to the old bulls now—after Joe, I think Ted Kennedy would

be next. He reached out to help me.

Again, I try to be realistic in taking both the blame and the credit. Really, I was so busy playing defense, and so busy licking my own wounds and going owie, owie, why are they picking on me, that I failed to spend the kind of time, or give the kind of attention to creating the infrastructure around me that needed to be created. I didn't have the infrastructure coming in. I mean, literally, I used to use the analogy that it was like trying to build a boat while you're already in the water. So I didn't have it coming in, but I think that if I had said, okay, let's shut down the speeches, shut down the travel, shut down everything for this month, this week, whatever period, until I get this operation going smoothly, I would have saved myself a lot of trouble.

KOED: To a good extent, when you set up a Senate office, you become sort of small business owner.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: You have employees to deal with, staff to inform and educate. It seems like a huge task. How did you go about doing that?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It is a huge task. By the way, let's put down here one other set of canards [returns to the matrix drawing]—lazy, shiftless and disorganized, let's put down, too, she didn't show up for Senate orientation.

KOED: I missed that in my research. You were traveling for a while, and you missed orientation?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I didn't miss orientation.

KOED: Oh, you didn't miss orientation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In fact, there's a picture—one of my staff has it—on the front page of both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* of me and Dianne Feinstein at Senate orientation.

KOED: That's right. And I saw another picture from orientation, now that I think of it, that had the five women together.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Yet, time and time again, you will see, "She was out traveling and therefore didn't show up for orientation," out having a lark and not doing her job. So that's another one.

Actually, in hindsight, it was a mistake to go out of town at that time. I needed a break. I was really, really tired coming out of the election, and my mother had gotten sicker, and I felt all kinds of responsibilities. I'll probably go to my grave feeling responsible for what happened to her and that whole Medicaid thing. And I had fallen in love with Kgosie. We didn't really become an item until after—over that summer—and he had asked me to marry him. So we were going to take advantage of the opportunity to go to South Africa so I could meet his family, because African families are very traditional. They had to inspect my teeth, basically. [laughter] That was the primary focus of our activities in that break. I was going to come back in January and set up the office and get started. That's what I did. The problem was that, with all this stuff that had been left hanging over from the campaign, and all the expectations about symbolism and the like, it just meant that I was stretched too thin. I really failed to adequately organize and re-organize. I kept some people as hangers-on—I mentioned Hopewell, who I had to eventually pay off and it just killed me. I wanted, personally, to just sue him and go the whole nine yards, because he was just blackmailing me really for money. I should have fired him back then. That's all hindsight.

KOED: We've been at this for well over an hour now. We can pull it to a close at this point, or continue if you like.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Let's give it ten more minutes.

KOED: Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about when you were setting up your office, and hiring your staff. As you mentioned before, you kept some of [former Senator Alan] Dixon's staff, but you also brought in new staffers. What were you looking for? What kind of agenda did you have for your staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, I think that's one of the problems. I did not, at

the time, fully appreciate the fact that some people just don't have transferable skills. I almost laughed saying that, because this is a conversation I used to have with [Chicago mayor] Harold Washington. He would talk about people having transferable skills. I kind of intellectually understood, but didn't really appreciate what he meant by that. What I found was that somebody who does a good job at politics at home, you may find one of those people who can make the transition to do national politics on the same level, but more often than not you find somebody who just can't get there. Then you run into all kinds of problems. It is just a bad situation, to the extent that we really did get the revolving door comments. I think it reflected no small amount of that. There was one guy who I had really almost inherited, had been with me at the Recorder of Deeds office, very bright, very smart, but he just couldn't make the transition to Washington.

KOED: So, national and local politics are very different.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Very different. So the turnover I did have was really a function of personality, and wasn't more than anybody else, and the inability to make the transition. Or, alternatively, here's another aspect, they could not understand why Illinois was important. [Mike Frazier] knew the Hill very well. He knew all the rumor mills and the gossip centers—all that stuff! He had worked for Ted Kennedy. Kennedy was one who reached out to help me. It was getting real ugly at the beginning. One day, I was feeling so blue, and I was thinking that I was just going to throw in the towel, this is ridiculous. I can't do this. I know that it was Mike Frazier who contacted Ted Kennedy. I got a phone call from [Kennedy]. He said, "Carol, this is Ted Kennedy, let's go to lunch." How do you say, "No, I don't want to go to lunch" to Ted Kennedy? You don't, right? So, I drug myself out of bed. I was in such a blue mood. I wore all black. Black everything. Not even a scarf with color in it, just black, black, black. I got dressed and drug myself over to La Colline. I'll never forget it. He really did counsel me—you know, what to do in the glare of the press and all the rest of it. But anyway, Mike's problem was that he didn't understand why Illinois was important. I'd have some preacher that had been very involved in the campaign calling and not getting his calls returned, or the business community feeling like they didn't have a way to get in. It was that sort of thing.

KOED: Somehow, Senate staff have to bridge both worlds?

MOSELEY BRAUN: And that's transferable skills. You got to be able to do

both, and understand the role and relevance of it all. Not everybody can do that.

KOED: How long did it take you to settle in with a staff, and to get the office running the way you wanted it to run?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It never happened. Of course, part of that is just self-improvement. No, the office ran well, I think, but it never ran as well as I would have liked. Talk about being a small business person—mail, for instance. I mentioned the volume of mail. I actually had gone to the Rules Committee to get additional staff, because I thought it was kind of unfair that I was expected to perform with all these extra burdens on me. And Wendell Ford—Wendell actually didn't get it—the problem. Wendell said to me, "Well, you know, when John Glenn got here, he was a celebrity and we didn't give him extra staff. And Ted Kennedy is a celebrity, and he doesn't have extra staff." So, I was standing there going but, but, but, and didn't have a comeback to that. I never was happy about how long it took us to answer letters. I used to track how long it took us to answer letters. On the one hand, in the main, when I go home people say, "Oh, I was so pleased, I got an answer from you, I never expected an answer." From my way of thinking, as a small business person, if someone sends you a letter, you get it back to them in a week. You answer them, right away! I can remember, with my office report, just having fits about the fact that it would take thirty days, sixty days, sometimes even longer, to get an answer back to a constituent.

Now, I found out that a lot of my colleagues don't answer that kind of mail at all, which I didn't know. That was incomprehensible to me—people not answering their mail—just absolutely incomprehensible. That it would get answered but would take a long period of time was, for me, the problem. I was determined to answer every bit of mail.

In fact—and this goes beyond the volume issue and I haven't really thought this through—because of who I was and all the things that meant to so many different kinds of people, I think it really did empower and give people a sense of connection that they wouldn't otherwise have had. Let me tell you a little story. This is apocryphal, but I think it really does get to talking about the volume of work as well as the way people saw me. During this last campaign, I was in Champaign-Urbana, at a hotel called Jumers. Jumers is kind of an Illinois institution, the kind of thing they put on television to make us look

like hicks [laughter]. I'm in Jumers. I have my own little habits. Among my habits is that I have to drink water when I go to bed. I have to have a bottle of water by my bed. Jumers, of course, does not have anything like FEI [mineral water][laughter], so I said is it possible to get bottled water of any kind. The woman said, "Well, you know, the kitchen is shut down but I'll see what I can do." So, I started taking a shower and I heard a knock on the door. I ran to the door, wet with towels wrapped around me. I just cracked the door open a little bit and said just push it in through the door. The water bottle came in. The lady said, "Are you really Senator Moseley Braun?" I said yes. She said, "I just wanted to have an opportunity to meet you so I could thank you in person." Okay. Well, I'm really Carol Moseley Braun, I told her. She said, "Senator Moseley Braun, I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, because when my husband killed our daughter you were the only person who listened to me."

Needless to say, at this point, I opened the door a little bit and stuck my head out, thinking what is this story? She was a young woman who was a cleaning lady. Apparently, to the best I can reconstruct the story, her husband killed their daughter back in Illinois, and then he ran off to Arkansas or somewhere. Apparently, it was a matter of her trying to get information to the law enforcement people, or getting the police departments to coordinate—I don't even know. Clearly, I did not have anything, myself, to do with this case. But, whatever it was, my office responded to her, gave her whatever assistance she needed. So, she's standing there, this cleaning lady, in Jumers in Champaign-Urbana, with tears streaming down her face. I was the only person who listened to her, and the only person who helped her when her husband killed her baby.

KOED: That's an amazing story. In many ways, it reflects what we're talking about today. Being a woman, and therefore approachable, in a position of power. Was she black?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No.

KOED: And being in power and able to help, but also having an office able to deal with this important case that meant so much to this woman, despite the volume of work that every senator must deal with.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I get choked up talking about this story, because what do

you say to somebody like that? Something I learned from being a state legislator—and I would say this to the staff all the time—it's that kind of constituent service where the rubber meets the road. That's where government takes on meaning to the average person. That's where the connection is. I say you have four different types of constituents. First off, you have the fat cats who, as far as they are concerned, you are a cog in the wheel of whatever it is that they're doing. It's business for them. It's not ideology, it's just business. Either you're going to produce for their industry, or not. You got that crowd. They'll always be around. They hire lobbyists and the lobbyists are running around here—that's Gucci Gulch and all that. Then you've got the nut cases. [laughter] These are people who talk about martians invading their homes. They'll hang around. You've got those. Then you have the interested citizens who are just interested in government. That's not a large group of people, but they're out there. People who just care about government working and the issues. And then you have people who need stuff. Those are people, who in many instances, are the least powerful, or the least able—

KOED: And need the most help.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And need the most help. We do everything we can to make sure the fat cats and lobbyists are happy. We do everything we can to make sure the League of Women Voters like us. We try even to be polite to the nut cases. So I would say that you have an absolute responsibility to those people who come in here looking for help, you know the farmer whose property has been declared a wetland and he couldn't plant, those that really need help.

KOED: I can think of no better place to end this interview.

END OF INTERVIEW #1

INTERVIEW #2
A Day in the Life of Senator Moseley Braun
JANUARY 29, 1999

SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: Last time, you asked a question about whether or not my marriage had been a problem back in 1978.

BETTY K. KOED: Right. Was your interracial marriage an issue in that campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I remembered something. To the extent that it was a problem, I just kind of ignored it. But as soon as I got elected, the first article of the *Hyde Park Herald*— which is a little neighborhood newspaper that I later wrote for—describing my candidacy, referred to my husband as "she lives in Hyde Park with her white husband, attorney Michael Braun."

[phone call; interview interrupted]

So, Michael thereafter referred to himself as a WHAMB, W-H-A-M-B, so we made a joke out of it. [laughter]

KOED: So, it certainly was an issue at times, for some people.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, white husband attorney Michael Braun [laughter].

KOED: People like to put labels on all of us, in any way they can.

MOSELEY BRAUN: They do.

KOED: Somehow, that makes them more comfortable, I guess.

Today, I thought we'd talk a little more about working in the Senate, and what kind of experience that is. Let's start by your giving us an idea of what a day would be like for you in the Senate. We talked a little bit last time about how public perceptions are

very different from the reality of working in the Senate, but give us an idea of what a typical day would be like.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, a typical day was frenetic—that's the only word. I imagine that there are other professions in which the high level of activity is sustained over as long a period of time such as one finds as a member of the Senate, but, off hand, I can't think of what they might be. I'm sure there are. Maybe, someone running a multikazillion dollar business with world-wide branches works those kinds of hours. It was not only the long hours, but that there were a lot of plates in the air at the same time, a lot of balls being tossed simultaneously. So, the challenge was to stay focused, not to lose track, and to make sure that the details didn't get past you. So, in terms of just time, it would depend. I generally started at 8:30 in the morning, but what happened at 8:30 would vary from day to day. I tried to schedule things so that I could do meetings, office time, and the like in the mornings, if I could. Except, for example, every Thursday morning was our Town Hall meeting. I knew that I would have to be ready for showtime on Thursday mornings.

KOED: How long did the Town Hall meetings last?

MOSELEY BRAUN: An hour. And they were really wonderful. What we did was take questions from 8:30 until about 9:15 or 9:20, and then we'd take pictures for the next, however long it took. The smallest crowd I think we ever had was when five people showed up. The largest crowd was about five hundred. It was amazing. And we almost didn't know from time to time how large the crowd there was going to be.

KOED: Where would you hold these meetings?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, that was actually a point of some contention, because I thought that the secretary of the Senate, or the sergeant at arms rather, could have given us a set location in which to have these meetings, but, as it turned out, we wound up having to move from place to place, week to week. So, we could never tell people well in advance where the meeting would be. They'd have to call into the office beforehand. In fact, I didn't always know, so we wound up on more than a couple of occasions, I wound up going—like a homing pigeon—to where I thought it would be and it wound up being someplace else. Generally, it would be in the Senate office buildings,

either in Hart, or in Russell a couple of times. It was in Dirksen a lot. Most often in Dirksen, occasionally in Hart, and occasionally in Russell.

KOED: You had a "live" audience then, but were these also televised?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, it's funny you mentioned that, because that was something else that kind of annoyed me about the whole thing. [laughter] I wanted to have them televised from the beginning, but for some reason it just never got together to televise. We were able to televise some of the ones I did with Paul [Simon], we video recorded and televised some of those, but it was real spotty and there was no real consistency to it. We were able to televise some of the ones that I did with [Richard] Durbin, but not across the board consistent. There was no regularity to that.

KOED: For the most part, you met with constituents who were here in town, that came to town knowing ahead of time that these meetings would occur on Thursday mornings?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. In fact, I would put it on some of the letters, what we call the "robos," when I responded to people's concerns. We would put, "If you are here in Washington, come to this town hall meeting." I think Paul used a little card. It wasn't a big marketing effort, but a minimal marketing effort to get the word out that we were doing this. It also provided an opportunity for constituents who had specific issues and who had demanded or insisted upon meeting with "the senator" over something that, in the scheme of things, was not a huge big deal, to meet us. In most instances, you were able to get away with having staff meeting with people for those kinds of things. Often, if it was just your lay person from back home, who didn't want to hear that they can't meet with the senator—the person I voted for, or the person I elected. So the town hall meetings really served as a convenient way to have those constituents raise their issue, publicly with others or privately with you. You could shake hands with them and you could say, "You know that sounds like a very interesting issue. I'll have Sam over here deal with it, and if you don't mind speaking to Sam, I have to rush off. But I'm very concerned and you can talk to this person." So you could hand off constituents to staff on specific issues—

KOED: In a way that they felt comfortable—

MOSELEY BRAUN: In a way they felt comfortable with, in a way in which they felt like they had gotten the attention they needed and hadn't just been shunted off to an underling without getting your attention. So it really humanized the office in an important way.

KOED: And it gave them a chance to see both of their senators at the same time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Did Senator Durbin do them weekly along with you, as Paul Simon had done.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. In fact, there were two traditions that came out of the relationship with Paul that were very important—two aspects of collaboration that I don't believe Paul had enjoyed with [former Senator] Alan Dixon, but that I continued with Dick Durbin. One was the town hall meetings. Again, Paul had started the town hall meetings kind of on his own. I don't know if he did them regularly. I think he may have started them right before I came. When I started, I joined him, and it became a regular operation that we did together. Then, the second thing that we shared was judicial nominations. The tradition in the Senate had been that the senior senator from the president's party would have the power to select the district court judges. Paul did two things. He initiated a merit selection commission within the state, of citizens, and he shared that with me. I revised and I like to say improved the commission afterwards, but I kept the merit selection commission in place and continued to share the selection authority with my junior senator after I became senior senator.

KOED: To a good extent, then, the model that Paul Simon had established in these ways was followed and expanded by you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Well, then, I was going to ask another question, but let's stay with the "day in the Senate" theme first before moving on.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'd start out in the morning with 8:30 to 10:00 basically

given to constituent meetings, breakfasts with people, phone work, mail work, whatever. That was kind of flexible time, but it was work time. Then, at 10:00 the committees started. So, you always had a committee hearing going on from 10:00 forward. The Senate itself generally came in at about 10:00, sometimes later. In any event, you knew there was a committee or some set of activities at 10:00 that were connected to your official responsibilities. Once the committees got going, the Senate would generally be in session at some level of activity, sometimes in quorum call and sometimes it would be somebody droning on the floor, and at other times there would actually be votes being called while the committees were going on, but that middle part of the day was generally devoted to committee work. Then, you had down time, well not down time but in-office time, from 1:00 or 2:00 until the early evening, until about 5:00. That time was in-office. Often, that would be when you would take meetings. If you hadn't had a lunch meeting, which was usual, you would take meetings in the office or meetings outside the office—off the Hill—or you would be doing staff work and paperwork. By 5:00 or so, generally you'd be voting at that time of the evening. I don't know what it is about legislatures—and I say this having served in a state legislature—it's like "Dracula Session." For some reason or other, it's not until the sun goes down that you start voting on stuff. It's like—

KOED: Most of the votes seem to come around 5:00 or 6:00.

MOSELEY BRAUN: What's this cover of darkness business? I don't understand. [laughter] So you start with that, but that's when people start having their events, too. On some occasions, you'd be going to events at that time of evening, since they generally start about 7:00. To categorize broadly, voting and events would be the evening—

KOED: Those were the evening obligations.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Generally, I would get home about 10:00, 9:30 to 10:00. I'd try to be in bed by 11:00. Almost always, I'd try to be in bed by 11:00. In fact, I have a kind of a habit. I try to get in the house by 10:00 because there was a television program on. I would turn that on while I got ready for bed. By the time it was over—

KOED: It gave you a chance to wind down.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. By the time it was over at 11:00, I'd like to be able to turn the light out. I wasn't always successful, but that was generally— And then you'd start the next day.

KOED: Did you often get calls at home, during the night, on any particular issue, or were you pretty much left alone to rest?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Pretty much, but I didn't get that much time at home. The only time I had at home was when I was finished with it all.

KOED: Sleeping time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Bedtime. For me, I tried not to—my staff tried not to call me at home with a lot of stuff, frankly. I tried to deal with the at-home time for private needs and family. Remember, particularly when I first got here, I was faxing homework. Matt was still in high school. So, I had a junior in high school to deal with. [laughter] When I look back, I don't know how I did it. I'll be honest with you. I don't know how I did it at all. I had a junior in high school!

KOED: Did you know of other senators in that position, any that you talked with?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Patty came the closest—Patty Murray. But her husband moved up here, so she had her husband and two children. She had her whole family here. It was difficult and stressful for her, but the difference was that I didn't have a husband, because Michael and I were divorced by then, but also, well, a couple of things had happened.

First, Matt had declined to move here. When I first came here, in fact, the apartments that I rented were large enough for us, because I had expected him to move here and go to school here. We had interviewed at the schools here. But he finally decided that he didn't want to leave his friends. Now, this is somebody who had complained about how much he hated his school. It had been one complaint after another about school until it came time to leave it, then he said "Oh, no, I don't want to go anywhere, my friends are here." So he decided not to move. That was the first thing.

The second thing was that, in truth, Michael has always been wonderful as a caregiver. We had originally agreed that Matt would stay with Michael during the week, then I'd come home on weekends and we'd kind of trade off, with Matt moving between our two respective homes. Michael had remarried and has a family. So that was going to be the deal. As it turned out, Matt decided that he did not want to live up with his daddy and his daddy's wife. His home was where we lived.

There's a funny story about this. For a while, I did not have a residence in Chicago, for about four months. I finally bought a place, but I hadn't moved into it, so Matt moved into it first. [laughter]

KOED: He established residency for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: He established residency for us, yes. I discovered him and six of his pals and their pizza, while all of their mothers thought they were at a sleepover at each other's houses. [laughter] It was like, I don't think so! I called, thinking that Matt was at Michael's, but Mike said, "No, he's at your place." What my place, I haven't moved into my place. And he said, "Well, he said he was going to go back to Hyde Park and spend the night with Andy Zibbits, but he could be reached at your place." I said, oh no, and I called Andy Zibbits' mother. Pam said, "Oh, no, they're over at Sean's house." So I called over at Sean's house. "Oh, no, they're over at Andy Zibbits." So I got a plane and left here, flew back to Chicago, went to the new house, and—true enough—there were all these boys there with their sleeping bags and their pizzas.

That's when I moved into 5000. We just moved on in. I had people come and clean it and get my furniture moved out of storage. That's when I actually established a home, because it was clear that he was determined that this was how it would be—he would stay in Chicago and live with his Mom.

KOED: Even though his Mom couldn't be there all the time. These issues are going to become more and more important to the Senate—

MOSELEY BRAUN: We hope.

KOED: —as we have more and more women coming into Senate offices, as well

as professional women who are Senate spouses that have to deal with these kinds of family issues. We are no longer in a time when the family can just trail along wherever the husband decides to work.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. I think so. Frankly, the Senate does not do a very good job in handling those kinds of things. Take, for example, the issue of the codels [congressional delegations]. One of the reasons I never went on a codel was because, while you could take your spouse with you, you couldn't take a child. That was just the answer. Particularly given that I was gone so much and away so much, and he was so long-suffering. Maybe that's not the right word, since he was just terrific. Matthew could not have been better in his flexibility and coming to grips with the fact that his mother was gone and the western world was leaning on me for stuff. I did everything I could to try to stay involved, engaged, and attentive, but also to make sure that he knew that he came first. This meant stretching myself out. I mentioned faxing homework. We'd be on the phone for hours with homework. I would want to see it, so he'd fax it to me. So here I am in my apartment or in my office in Washington getting homework, going over it on the phone, and then sending it back. For that reason, it just didn't make any sense—I just couldn't go on any codels.

KOED: Many of the everyday experiences of family life, those that we take for granted, become very difficult in a situation like this—maintaining two households, for instance.

[phone call; interview interrupted]

You mentioned Richard Durbin a little earlier. When you became a senator, you were the junior senator, serving with Paul Simon, but during your term Paul Simon retired and you became the senior senator from Illinois. What's the difference between those two roles? Can you compare those for me?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's interesting. It kind of made a difference. There was kind of a difference on judicial selections, in that it's rather like being the senior partner. Even though you try to reach consensus, everyone in the room knows that you're the person who's going to make the call. That was about the only place, frankly, where being a senior senator made a difference. I think that my political troubles had an impact on

that. Back home, when Dick became senior senator, it was a big deal. When I became senior senator, it was like "Oh, well, yeah."

KOED: That's interesting.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yeah, they downplayed it.

KOED: By "they" you mean the press coverage?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Press coverage, yeah.

KOED: Does the senior role increase your responsibilities in any way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it does. I think that you really have a greater responsibility. It was funny, too, because in a way—I don't know if this is a function of our natural styles or of the roles, to be honest, but on issues having to do with the nuts and bolts of business for Illinois—taking care of the road funding, taking care of the appropriations, I took the lead. Well, Dick had experience in appropriations, so he was very much attuned to that. When it came down to the nuts and bolts of Illinois businesses or Illinois in the context of the Senate as a whole, I think I took the lead position on those things, even in terms of responsibility. In fact, I almost got a little annoyed—well, I'm being candid here—I got a little annoyed because when the six-year reauthorization of transportation funding came down, my staff was running around like crazy, doing the work, the negotiations. I was having meetings, sucking up to people who were making the decisions, you know, doing all the work to see to it that we got really on point and that I was able to achieve a transit funding package. I was able to do a lot of things legislatively, in connection with transportation. This afternoon, Rodney Slater was announcing the disadvantaged business enterprise [DBE] rules. You can imagine, when it came to DBE stuff, that stuff always worked my staff to death, because of all the women's businesses wanting to save the DBE, all the black businesses who were interested, and the Hispanic businesses and the Asian businesses. I had all these constituency groups coming to save the DBE stuff, not to mention the "road builders"—the good ol' boys back home—to deal with on transportation. There was a whole constituency for transit. We did a lot of work on that stuff. The new transit pass that people are able to use, well I was a sponsor of that at the Senate level. So, I did

transit pass. I was angling to get underground railroad funded there, even though that was technically not a transportation issue. There were a whole lot of things going on around transportation. I got kind of annoyed because I looked up and there was Dick [Durbin] taking credit for some roads being built in the state. I'm like, wait a minute! Actually, my staff was really furious about it, because he was claiming to have done all the work! But it was okay, because it was shared and I didn't have a problem with that. I've never had a problem with sharing credit on something like that. Everybody can look good, because there's enough to go around.

KOED: What sort of rapport did you have with Senator Durbin? How did it compare to your rapport with Senator Simon?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was like the difference between having an uncle and having a cousin. We were all very close. I'm still close to Dick. To begin with, when Paul announced that he was going to retire, there was a battle back in Illinois, a behind-the-scenes battle, over who was going to be the candidate to succeed Paul. There's a fellow who was very close to Bill Clinton, actually a former chair of the Democratic National Committee, David Wilhelm, who was very interested in running for the vacant seat. I can't think of who all ran, Pat Quinn, and I forget who else there was, but Dave Wilhelm would have been the biggest problem. As it was, Dick had a primary contest to win. Whoever Paul gave his blessings to obviously would have a significant advantage. And, so, I weighed in in favor of Dick Durbin, because he had been a House member, he had the experience, and he was from southern Illinois, which I felt no small amount of concern about.

This is an interesting phenomenon. When Dixon was there, in truth both of our state's senators came from southern Illinois. Paul Simon came from further south than Dixon. Dixon was Belleville, and Paul was from outside of Carbondale. And, so, both were from the southern part of the state. For some reason, southern Illinois felt closer to Dixon. He was more the hometown kid than Paul was. It may be because Paul was more liberal on social issues, or whatever, so when they lost Dixon it was like, "Oh, my God, now we got this black woman from Chicago who's not going to pay us any attention."

KOED: You were a northern voice.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Actually, this is one of the things that helped to defeat me in '98. What [Peter G.] Fitzgerald played on was that I've never been around, they haven't seen me, which wasn't true. But, again, the perception becomes the reality in that situation. You start off with the notion that I'm not going to be around, and then you take it one step further, particularly with the kinds of demands that I had—I couldn't be in anybody's place enough. I had people on the south side saying that I wasn't spending enough time in the black community. It was stunning. And yet I was working seven days a week. I thought what am I doing wrong with time management that everybody has the perception that I haven't been there, wherever it is?

This is a real digression, but I'll tell you what I call my "True Vine Church Story." I was down in Springfield, Illinois, which is in the center of the state. I was in a hotel, going to a meeting or coming from a meeting, and there was this black preacher in the lobby. He said, "Oh, Senator Braun, it's great to see you. How ya been?" I said, "I'm doing fine, Reverend, how are you doing? It's good to see you." He said, "Well, we don't see you around these parts much." Now, I was very sensitive to that, and I said, "Now, Reverend, I was just here two weeks ago for the state convention. I was here two weeks before that for—" and I named what the speech was I gave at the university. "I was here a month and a half before for that—" So, I gave him three examples in the last couple of months when I had been in Springfield. He looked at me and said, "Well, yeah, that may be so, and I'm sorry that I missed you those times, but, you know, you haven't been to True Vine Church." [laughter] So, I used to tell the True Vine Church story, because that was the sense of it. It didn't really matter.

So, one of the reasons for my backing Durbin over the other contenders was that he was from southern Illinois, or central Illinois really, Springfield, but still.

KOED: You thought it would give it a balance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: More balance for the state. I thought he would help to provide that balance. Again, it didn't help, because no one really felt that that was of any consequence.

KOED: You also experienced during your term, not only the shift from junior to senior senator, but also the shift from being a majority party member to a minority party

member. What was that like? Did it have an impact on the way the Senate operated—in committees, in the chamber, in relationships between people and among groups?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, sure. Absolutely. When you are in the majority, you are in the cat-bird seat and you can pass legislation. You can *do* something. When you are in the minority, all you do is make noise and hope the leadership includes you when they cut their deals. [laughter] That really is what it is.

KOED: A succinct description.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. But it's thus in any legislative body. In Illinois, I had the exact same shift. Here's another parallel I hadn't thought about—in the Illinois general assembly. When I got there in 1978 the Democrats were in the majority. In 1980, the Democrats lost the majority. Frankly, the fellow who is now the governor of Illinois [George Ryan] became the speaker of the house.

That was a fortuitous thing for me because it turned out that I wound up in my second term seated next to, seat mates, with a guy who had been the Democratic speaker [William Redmond]. He was an older man who kind of mentored me at that point. It was wonderful. I think I learned a lot just sitting next to Bill Redmond, because I was absolutely green politically. You know, I had gone from protecting the bobolinks in Jackson Park, so I just didn't know— Having Bill Redmond on the one hand, and Ethel Alexander, who became a dear close personal friend. Ethel and I met when I got to Springfield. She had come out of the Chicago machine. She understood machine politics, which I did not. As a matter of fact, even to this day, people introduce me—she came to Washington having been a part of the Chicago machine. Nope, I was not a part of the Chicago machine.

KOED: You were never a part of the Chicago machine.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Never a part of the Chicago machine. So, between Bill Redmond on the one hand and Ethel on the other, I was able to get grounded in the politics of my state.

KOED: It proved to be a good training ground for you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: But, again, that second year I was in the minority and that taught some important lessons.

This really gets to a point that I want to make about the Senate. As a member of the minority in the state legislature—this gets real relevant now that I think about it—I was able to still pass bills and do what I needed to do, by working in a bipartisan fashion, particularly as an independent Democrat. I wasn't tied to the machine. That meant that for whatever it is you want to do, you try to develop coalitions that would get you enough votes. You put the votes together and you won, right? I was able to work across the aisle with a number of my colleagues in the [state] house. In fact, the woman who was my state director when I was senator, Jill Zwick, was a Republican state representative when I was in the legislature. We worked together in a bipartisan way in the state legislature.

Having said that, when we went into the minority here in the Senate, I took a page from the book that the way things worked was that you tried to make certain that the other side had a sense of what you were about and what your interests were, and that you worked through issues and tried to establish bipartisan support for a generic issue. I made the mistake—I've had occasion to tell Tom Daschle that this was a huge mistake—of going to Trent Lott to talk about what my legislative interests were. The result was that every single one of them he put right on his hit list of things *not* to pass. Absolutely. This "crumbling school" thing that I'm doing now, on education— I said to Tom Daschle later that I made the hugest mistake talking about crumbling schools with Trent Lott. For somebody who's come through the southern experience the way he did, for me with my black face to talk about public education with Trent Lott put the absolute wrong face on the crumbling schools initiative. The worst person to talk about fixing up public schools to a Trent Lott was someone like me, given that he comes out of the experience of people who took their kids out of the public schools in response to integration.

KOED: In other words, you needed someone who looked like—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Like him.

KOED: Like Trent Lott.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Did the power shift have an effect on personal relationships, too, among your colleagues in the Senate?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't think the people who were now newly in the majority saw themselves as being more— No, on a personal level, no.

KOED: It was on a policy level, a legislating level, that it had the greatest impact.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Again, what for me was the saddest aspect of it was discovering that, unlike Illinois, there was no bipartisanship—at least from my perspective. Maybe there was later. With regard to this leader, bipartisanship just was not on the program.

KOED: Interesting.

You played many roles in the Senate, and one of them, from time to time, was sitting in the president's chair. What was that like? Does that give you a different perspective?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was phenomenal. That was phenomenal.

KOED: When was the first time you presided?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I don't know the day. I'd love to find the date. I'll tell you something. I actually sent a letter, which I don't think I have a copy of, to Lady Bird Johnson that I wrote sitting there, that first day, because—

First off, presiding was kind of a freshman duty. [Senator] Robert Byrd was not mean about it, but he was insistent that freshmen put in their hours at presiding. My staff—this shows just how green my staff was—instead of saying we're going to schedule the senator to preside based on her schedule, they would take whatever the cloakroom told them I had to do. And I said, now just wait one damn minute, you just canceled something that was important to me so I could preside. Have you lost your mind? Again, the guy who was making those decisions had been around for twenty years, so he was

responding to the institutional demands of the cloakroom instead of protecting—

KOED: Not to your demands.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. So presiding could be a pain, frankly. Be that as it may, the first time that I presided, I was so overwhelmed with the notion. Here I was, directing the activities of the Senate of the United States, coming off the south side of Chicago. This is why I wrote Mrs. Johnson the letter. It was the availability of quality public education at the elementary and secondary level, and all the scholarships and things that were available, and the opening up of what became the controversy of affirmative action—all of those things that went into the climate in the country when I came along made it possible to be there. When I was in grammar school, we were still able to point to the public schools as providing quality education, public education. You hadn't gotten into the whole dumbing down of America syndrome at that point. You hadn't gotten to the situation where children in public schools were likely to get less in terms of educational quality than children in the parochial or private schools. It was the same. So, I came out of public education literate, able to—as my grandmother used to say—read, write and cipher, in the first instance. When I got to college, unlike when my parents had tried to go to college—both my parents had gone to college but my mother had not graduated and I'm not sure if my father did, and they were very, very keen on getting your college degree—it was financial issues in their time. You had to be able to afford a college education. By the time I came along, you could go to college. I don't think my parents contributed a dime to my college education.

KOED: You had other forms of support available.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Student loans, scholarships, part-time jobs. Johnson even had this program, one of the Great Society programs, that let college students work part-time in the post office and places like that. I worked at the post office. It actually turned out to be a good thing later—this is really funny.

I took a job at the post office, a hideous job, working in third class mail. You got dust in your nose and ears, and wore a cap on your head. It was horrible. The old timers, of course, would just throw out an occasional piece of mail while the students were working real hard. Finally, I quit the job at the post office. I hated it. At first, I was really

upset. I earned just enough money to go into another income tax bracket, so it cost me more in income taxes. But it finally worked out in the long run, because we were just calculating my pension and those few months at the post office put me over the ten year mark on the pension, so it helped with my pension. [laughter]

KOED: Makes up for the increased income tax.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. You could work in jobs that were made available under the Great Society and get scholarships. That was before the time of the Pell Grant.

KOED: Work study programs.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Work study programs began. Because of all of that, I was able to get a college education. Then, when it came time for law school, I got into the University of Chicago. I had no idea that it was one of the hardest schools to get into. I just walked down to the closest law school, close to where I lived, and said I'd like to go to school here. They looked at me and said okay. [laughter] I'm sure that was a function of the climate of the times, because the University of Chicago had always had somebody who was black and had always had women. Menchikov, who was a professor there, used to talk about how the University of Chicago had never discriminated, had always had blacks and always had women. Yeah, one black person and one woman. From the 1920s—So, it wasn't until my class, really, that they opened up. I think we had six or seven blacks and ten or twelve women in my class. Those numbers would have to be verified, I could be off, but it was the largest class of women and the largest class of blacks that the law school had ever had.

KOED: What year was this?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I started in 1969.

KOED: Right in the wake of the Great Society.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. And so I wrote a letter to Lady Byrd Johnson from the podium of the Senate saying that this was a belated thank you to her late husband for what he did, because he had opened up the doors of opportunity for people

like me.

KOED: That's a fabulous story. Sitting there, in that chair, really gave you a chance to put these things into perspective.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Did it change your perspective on what you were looking at in the Senate Chamber?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, not really. [laughter] I've got a funny story in that regard. When I was in the state legislature, I used to preside, and was part of the leadership there. In the state legislature, the prerequisite for presiding was leadership status. One day, when Matt was a little guy, all of seven or eight years old, I was presiding. He was running around the chair, you know how they run around. The parliamentarian said to him, "Matt, aren't you proud of your Mom? Look, she's presiding over the legislature. Wouldn't you like to be a legislator when you grow up?" And Matt's response was, "Nah, that's for girls. I want to be a lawyer like my Dad." [laughter]

KOED: The perceptions are changing.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah, that's for girls!

KOED: Was it a busy day, that first day you presided?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it was. Remember, we couldn't read up there either. That was the other Robert Byrd rule. I would read the Bible up there, when we were in quorum calls.

KOED: And you were able to write letters.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Wrote letters, yes. It was really a singular experience.

KOED: That's a terrific story.

Let's switch from inside the chamber to outside the chamber. People are always interested in the relationship between senators, or any elected official, and interest groups, lobbies, and that type of thing. What sort of experiences did you have with pressure group politics while you were in office? Were there any individual groups that you dealt with a lot, or had more difficulty with, or more cooperation with?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Let me say this. If anything, that's one of the places where I don't think I did the best job. Getting back to the story I told earlier about the Lord was testing me and I failed, among the failures that I think I can ascribe to—again, I try to be clear about these things—I think I failed to appreciate, personally—My staff, for the large part, did because Bill Mattea who was leg[islative] director and later became chief of staff had been around for a real long time and understood interest group politics. But I never sufficiently cultivated interest groups as I could have or should have. I didn't cultivate them for fund raising, for money on the one hand, which you need to stay in office, nor did I cultivate them in terms of relationships. I don't know if that was a function of the time, or failure to appreciate the importance of cultivating, or, frankly, the fact that my politics—I think one of the more troubling parts of my politics, and my tenure in the Senate, I tended to be independent and nonconventional. The result was that I kind of became nobody's priority. The liberals and the civil rights groups, for example, were horrified that I supported the balanced budget constitutional amendment.

KOED: You took a great deal of criticism for that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Almost more than anybody else. I thought it was the right thing to do. It made economic sense to me. My thinking on the balanced budget amendment was that I agree with my friends the economists who said that having a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution is an irrelevancy. I agree with that. However, it was my sense, having been a legislator, that the institutional pressures were such that every legislator is called on to do the best he or she can to "bring home the bacon." In the absence of checks and balances, there was no check on spending, particularly at the national level, that would keep people from going into the red, that would provide limitations on deficit spending. Even though our country's deficit as a percentage of GDP was less than some of the European countries, there was no question in my mind but that the deficit position we were in was really bogging down opportunities for economic recovery and for job creation. So, if I was going to be

consistent with my commitment in the campaign and say I'm going to help create jobs for people, just to go in lock-step against the balanced budget amendment because it was going to "cause cuts in social programs" (which, as you know, was the argument) didn't seem to me to be consistent with principle. That is where I drew a line. I said, no, this is what I think is the right thing to do.

That really does get to the whole, historic debate about a legislator. Are you a representative of the views—

KOED: A voice of the people or a voice of conscience?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. I've always believed that you are a voice of conscience, even if you have to take a hit for it. Your duty is to do what you think is the right thing. In fact, I just gave a speech this Monday when that core question came up in the context of the whole freedom of choice for abortion as well as the death penalty issue.

So, the liberals were not happy with me because of the balanced budget amendment. They weren't happy with me because of the Lani Guinier [confirmation hearings] thing. I subsequently learned later that senators do this all the time, but at that time I didn't know the process—this is a function of the naivety about the process—I didn't think it was appropriate for someone who was going to sit in judgment of a nomination to hold press conferences before a single thing had happened. It was like a judge making a pronouncement for the defendant or the plaintiff before the case had been called. That was the analogy I drew on, not recognizing at the time that those kinds of nominations are more a political process than a judicial process. The committee process is a political one, as opposed to a trier of fact. If anything, the Lani Guinier thing was a mistake on my part based upon—

But, getting back, the groups just came at me, instead of trying to discuss it with me, instead of trying to reason with me about it, instead of having a debate about it. What they did was try to hold me up for embarrassment and say nasty things about me in the press—you know, the gossip, the whispers, you know how they work.

It was a negative, contentious kind of relationship with the traditional liberal groups from the outset in regards to some very important issues. Labor was furious that I

supported the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement]. Remember, all these things came right off the bat. Again, I didn't believe that we could be competitive with the European community and other trading blocs in the world unless we engaged in a trading arrangement in the region. Now, the terms of the trading arrangement obviously were something that had to be hammered out, which is why, by the way, I did not support fast-track. I thought that the Congress ought to have something to say about trade, and the constituent parts of our trading arrangements with our partners, but I thought it was appropriate for us to expand in the region.

KOED: You didn't support fast-track because you thought all the issues needed consideration along the way.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. And, you see, NAFTA was a fast-track procedure coming out of the previous Congress, so the question was are you for or against expansion of the trading arrangement? I just thought it made sense to do it, even though I had concerns about child labor and the like. In brief, what happened in that regard was that my politics tend to be unabashedly liberal on social issues, but more conservative on economic issues. If anything, this is almost the converse of the what the "new Democrats" are, because they are conservative on social issues—

KOED: And liberal on economic issues.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

It's funny, too. I have to think about this, and I'm searching for words to describe how my politics can be categorized, and I'm at a loss except to say that it comes closest to what in Europe they call the "third way." If anything, my politics tend to be "third way" politics, but there hadn't been a name created for it yet. There's still no name for it here. There's no way to really pigeonhole it. The result was I ran into stereotypes from the right, where they expected me to be Jesse [Jackson] in a skirt, or they expected me to be a bomb-thrower on economic issues. I ran into brickbats from the left because I wound up being more conservative. It was like, "How dare you *not* be Jesse in a skirt."

I was not uncomfortable with that. Quite frankly, if that was the basis upon which I lost re-election, I would be very, very comfortable with it. That would not bother me at

all. I have always maintained that it is a legislator's responsibility to take a position based on principle. If you go down with it, so be it. It wasn't your seat to begin with. It belonged to the voters. I'm really kind of a Jeffersonian Democrat in that regard, because I really believe, as a core value, that legislators are public servants who serve at the pleasure of the voters. Had that been the point on which I lost reelection, it wouldn't have bothered me.

KOED: Upon a point of principle.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Rather than on the point of symbol.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Or more to the point, money. That really pissed me off. [laughter] That's the real pisser, when you can't be competitive on the money front.

KOED: It sounds as though, regarding a relationship with interest groups, say labor for example, it's not as if they're trying to influence your opinion, or inform your opinion, on a particular issue, but rather being more of a hammer—identify the ones who agree and those who don't agree, support those who do—

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. That's exactly right. Remember, this is where gender and race come in again. Unlike a white male, I had a lot less perceived latitude to make an independent judgments about these things.

KOED: In other words, they are allowed to take any stance within the definition of their public role.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Exactly. Whereas, for me, you stand out. Paul Simon was the sponsor of the balanced budget constitutional amendment. He didn't get half the grief that I did, even though I had campaigned saying that I would support it. Nobody paid attention! Literally, it was part of my campaign literature. The labor community back home—I had correspondence back and forth—they were so irate, saying "you tricked us." I said, I'm going to send you a piece of my campaign literature. It's right there.

KOED: They were paying attention to the symbol rather than the substance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah. Yeah.

KOED: You mentioned a little while ago the Lani Guinier hearings. That takes me into another range of issues that I'd like to talk about—committee work. You spent a good deal of time doing committee work. You were on four major committees—Judiciary, Banking, Small Business, and Finance, as well as some subcommittees. At the time of the Lani Guinier hearings, Joseph Biden was chair of the Judiciary Committee. Senator [Orrin] Hatch was the ranking minority member. What was it like in the Judiciary Committee? What kind of working relationship did you have?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I had a very good working relationship with both Joe Biden and Orrin Hatch, even though Orrin is much more conservative. He was really—how can I put it—he was supportive of me on a lot of levels, including a personal level, more than I think anybody would have expected. If it was *pro forma* or not, I'll never know, but I can tell you that in the entire time that I was in the Senate, both Joe Biden and Orrin Hatch became friends, good friends, who would take up for me even when the media was trying to get background and deep cover kinds of comments about me. I had not wanted to go on the Judiciary Committee.

KOED: Why not?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I had been on the Judiciary Committee in the state legislature. As a matter of fact, I was vice-chairman. I had gotten off of it before I could be chairman, because I just didn't want it. The reason I had gotten off of it is that I had come to the conclusion that judiciary committees, by definition, are everybody's hot button issues, or "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin," or controversial nominations. That's the work. On everybody's hot button issues, for somebody whose politics are all about creating coalitions and consensus and finding practical solutions to issues, hot button doesn't get you there. Hot button is exactly those things over which people will always disagree. You'll have a debate about it—death penalty, abortion, crack cocaine vs. powder—

KOED: Prisons, juvenile delinquency—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Affirmative action. All of those things. Then, you go to the other extreme. The whistle-blower, bankruptcy, patents—

[Knock at the door; interview interrupted]

And the controversial nominations get to be pretty apparent. And that's what's on that committee. So, anyway, I had expressed my disinterest in the committee. Joe Biden came to Chicago, just showed up. I was in the process of unpacking.

Well, this is a long story. I mentioned about Matt moving in. I had sold my house before I knew I was going to be a candidate, or about the time that I started running for the Senate, certainly before I thought I was going to get elected to the Senate. The closing took forever. I had the choice of closing on my residence on the 11th of November. No, I closed in September, but I was supposed to move out of my house on the 11th of November. The election was the 7th of November. I tried to get the people who had bought my house—and I was anxious to get out of that house, because the building was falling down and the neighbors were not cooperative—but the people who bought my house were not cooperative. They wanted me to pay their mortgage and their rent, both, and a penalty if I stayed, so I had to move out. I took all my stuff and sent it into storage. I called a friend who managed a building downtown and asked if there was anyplace I could rent for a couple of months. He said there was. I moved in there. It caused a huge political fury back home. "She's lost touch with her roots." Rush Limbaugh was playing "Movin' on up" in connection with my name. It was also one of those things, as it turned out later, that gave rise to the perception that we must have been stealing money from the campaign. It never dawned on me that people would interpret things like that, but the fact that I had sold my car, went from a Lincoln to a Jeep, moved from 67th and Oglesby into Lake Point Tower—

KOED: The press portrayed that as moving to the penthouse suite.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. In truth, 6740 was as luxurious as Lake Point Tower ever was, but it didn't have the same perception because 6740 was on the South Side.

KOED: Your old neighborhood.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly, and this was downtown. When I say it was dumb, it didn't occur to me, again not appreciating the symbolism, and not having people around me telling me, whatever you have to pay to stay at 6740, do it and not create any waves right now. I didn't fully appreciate how people were perceiving me. That gets to another whole thing. It wasn't until much later that it dawned on me—this is going to sound really stupid, but it's true—that a lot of people thought I was some kind of welfare mother who had just made it to the Senate.

KOED: Part of that is probably due to the fact that in the press coverage of your campaign they gave very little attention to your governmental experience. You were an unknown nationally, except through the way that the press chose to portray you.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And I hadn't thought of that part. Yeah. Yeah. So, people thought here is a welfare mother who is now driving a new Jeep and living in Lake Point Tower. Small wonder they thought I was stealing money from the campaign.

KOED: And this was where you were living when Senator Biden came to visit?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, that's why I mentioned it. Joe Biden called. I was unpacking things. I put all of my furniture in storage, but you have your personal effects and your kitchen stuff. It was almost Thanksgiving and I wanted to have dinner for Matt, you know. I was into stabilizing this nest.

KOED: Establish a home.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right, even though it was just going to be temporary. Joe called and said he was at O'Hare Airport and could he come by and see me. I don't know what else he had going on that day, but he just showed up. I said, well I'm in jeans and I'm unpacking boxes and I'm not dressed. But he said "That's okay, I'll come by." So I put a pot of coffee on. He literally talked me into serving on the Judiciary Committee.

KOED: What reason did he give? Did the Anita Hill issue have a role in this?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I joked with him. He never thought it was funny. But my joke to Joe was, "You just want Anita Hill sitting on the other side of the table."

KOED: And Dianne Feinstein also joined the Judiciary Committee at that time. In the public perception this seemed to be a great coup for the two of you. Two junior members joining what is perceived to be a very powerful committee—the Judiciary Committee. But, in reality, it was quite different, then?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Absolutely. I didn't want it. Dianne liked it, but Dianne's not a lawyer. Like I said, it just wasn't—Other than Finance and Appropriations, there wasn't anything else that I would have rather done than Judiciary, but if I had had my druthers I would have taken Appropriations. Byrd didn't want me on Appropriations.

KOED: Why not?

MOSELEY BRAUN: He later admitted why not. Based on what he saw in the press, and based on—He didn't think I was going to make it as a senator, and he didn't think that I had the substance to serve on his committee.

KOED: In other words, it's pretty much up to the chairman as to who gets on the committee?

MOSELEY BRAUN: As to the big committees, yes.

KOED: In those early days of 1993, was there a good deal of lobbying on the part of the freshman senators to get onto certain committees?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Which committees did you lobby for?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Appropriations.

KOED: What about Small Business? Was that something you just got put onto?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I got put on Small Business, and I got put on Banking.

KOED: You really did not seek any committee assignments, other than

Appropriations? The others just fell to you?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. The exchanges back in Chicago wanted me to be on the Banking Committee. In fact, they made the point that Alan Dixon, who had kind of been their go-to guy, had been on Banking, then got off of it and went to Ag[riculture]. Ag was okay by them, but not as important as Banking. But they had an interest in that committee.

That interest coincided with the fact that none of the fellows wanted Banking, because of the Keating Five. Because of the Keating Five scandal, nobody wanted to be on the Banking Committee. Don Riegle, who had been part of that, was still chairman when I got there. Basically, he was a chairman with no committee left. You had Don Riegle, Paul Sarbanes was still on it and had been unscathed, I think Kerry. In any event, Banking wound up being packed with three women—me, Patty Murray, and Barbara Boxer. We used to joke that the three of us got put on the committee because nobody else wanted it, so they just stuck the girls on there. [laughter]

KOED: Three freshman women senators.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Do you think that had any impact on the operations of the committee, having it be woman dominated.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it really did. Having the women there really gave—What was the issue that the three of us kind of held our—It wasn't affirmative action. Oh, it was CRA. The fact that it was the three of us, weighing in strongly saying you can't touch CRA, I think made a difference, even among the fellows on the committee. That whip-sawed some of the guys on the Democratic side back in line. We never had much support on the Republican side to begin with, on the CRA issue, always just enough to get the votes. There is a real possibility that, had it not been for the three of us, that CRA would be dead.

KOED: Interesting. There's a case where the women had a definite impact on committee process.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: What do you think were some of the most important issues you dealt with, in committee, during your term? On Judiciary as well as the others?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, the Confederate flag stands out for symbolic reasons. Other than that, on Judiciary there was the choice debate, which is never ending. The confirmations were important—Supreme Court confirmations—I did two of them.

KOED: Which two?

MOSELEY BRAUN: [Stephen] Breyer and [Ruth Bader] Ginsberg.

KOED: Did you support both of those nominations?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. I'm trying to think what else there was.

KOED: Throughout your career here and in Illinois, you seemed to have a strong interest in educational issues, the Education Infrastructure Act for instance. Did you deal much with that issue in committee?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No. Interestingly, Infrastructure didn't go through either one of my committees—Judiciary or Finance. Well, it got to Finance eventually, but only after we changed it. The original Ed Infrastructure bill was a straight grant appropriation, which meant it went through the Kennedy [Labor and Human Resources] committee.

In addition to the education work, the most important work came in the area of the entitlement spending. I did a lot of stuff on pensions. I did a lot of stuff in regards to Medicare/Medicaid. Health care reform—I was very much a part of that debate although it went down the tubes. And the tax reform debate. Now, if anything—I give Bill Roth credit, although maybe he was just pumping me up or it was just a function of the circumstances in the bill—but I really had a sense of participating in the development of the IRS reform bill.

KOED: Did a lot of that come in committee work, in Finance?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: And in Small Business, you seemed to have a strong interest in women's businesses.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But most of that didn't go through the Small Business Committee.

KOED: Really?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, it's interesting. Well, it went through it, technically. Maybe it's just the way that committee operated, because Dale Bumpers was chairman and then ranking. That was a committee that didn't meet a whole lot. The actual work didn't happen in committee. It was more behind-the-scenes, working with staff. All the work on affirmative action, DBE stuff, women's business enterprises. I had very much wanted to do more in regards to micro-lending and that sort of thing. Also, on small business, I was very interested in SBA [Small Business Administration] reform, cutting the red tape.

Again, part of being in the "new way" or whatever you want to call it, is being the antipathy to bureaucracy. This is very different. It's a real divide among the more traditional Democrats and people like myself, because they see the response to be creating an agency, creating a program, creating a bureaucracy to respond to an issue as the way to deal with it. People like me say, if you can do it without having any of that, then you should. You should find the most efficient way to get to—

KOED: To get to the basic level, as quickly and as easily as possible.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Without all this program stuff. I used to make it a point with my staff. They'd send me speeches, saying program this and that. I'd say, write me a speech in which you don't use the word "program." Even internally, it was a mind-set thing.

KOED: And that was difficult to do on the Hill?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: It sounds as though there is a lot of difference between committees, in terms of who's guiding them in the chairmanship role, but also in how often they meet, how much they rely upon staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

KOED: Does Judiciary meet on a regular basis?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: Does it have a larger staff than, probably, Small Business?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yeah.

KOED: How closely did you, as a senator, work with the staff assigned to those committees?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Actually, I think I worked with committee staff a fair amount. You work with your own staff first. In fact, there's almost a protocol that you don't work with the committee staff directly, and you don't work with other people's staffers directly, you go through your staffer.

KOED: And your staffer would work with the committee staff?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Are there any individual staff members from the committees that stand out in your memory as people your office worked with particularly closely?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Kennedy's staffer [Michael Myers] on Judiciary was a real, not just an expert, but he just knew everything. Kennedy had a real strong staff person there, who had a staff of his own. On Finance, you had Regan Burke, and her successor. You had some strong women staffers on the Finance Committee. On Banking,

Bill Mattea—my staffer—was as much an expert on banking as anybody, so I just dealt with him, and then Kellie [Larkin] worked under Bill. Those come to mind.

KOED: That's helpful, since we don't get as much information about staffers as we'd like. We try to get as much information about the interchange between senators and staff as we can.

[phone call; interview interrupted and then ended].

END OF INTERVIEW #2

INTERVIEW #3
The 1998 Reelection Campaign
APRIL 15, 1999

BETTY K. KOED: I thought we'd start today with the re-election campaign in 1998, then move on to place your personal and political experiences into a broader context. Anytime you want to add more to the question or the answer, or add another dimension to what we're talking about, feel free to do so.

SENATOR CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: One of the things I did want to discuss, that I think I just splashed over in our previous conversation, is the whole Medicare thing with my mother. It occurred to me that we should talk about that.

KOED: We did talk a little bit about how it became a campaign issue, but we didn't cover all the details of it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. Why don't we go ahead with your stuff, and we'll come back to Medicare at anytime. Let's do your questions first.

KOED: Okay. That might just fit in as we go along anyway.

Let's start with the 1998 campaign. We covered quite a bit, during our first two interviews, of your Senate career. It's been almost two and a half months now since our first two interviews, so you've had some time to reflect on the experience, and to get a little more distance from it, which can be helpful.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: In my research in the news coverage, I noticed that around March of 1998 most news services were saying that your re-election chances were good, and in the bag more or less.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Really?

KOED: Yes. I was surprised by that, too, because I thought worries about the campaign had surfaced earlier. Around March of 1998, however, most were saying that re-election looked good. By May, there was a definite shift. By May, I noticed that the tide was turning, and people were beginning to say that re-election will be a problem for Senator Moseley Braun. What happened during the Spring and Summer of 1998?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I have no idea! It was my impression that they had written off my re-election from the beginning—the media. I had no idea that they had ever said that. Frankly, had they continued to say that it looked possible, I think that would have helped my polling and that would have helped my money. It was the fact that they were so negative about my re-election prospects that made fund raising so difficult.

KOED: Clearly, by May the tide had definitely turned, and then I found the doomsayers in the press. As we mentioned before, that probably had an effect on your fund raising and on the amount of money you were getting from the DSCC [Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee] and so forth.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right.

KOED: That's interesting that it comes as a surprise to you, too.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I can't think of anything appreciable between March and May that might have occurred.

KOED: To the best of my ability to put things together, it seemed that it wasn't until around May that the press began to take the [Peter] Fitzgerald campaign seriously. He put a lot of money into the campaign around that time, and maybe by that point the press began looking at the impact of the dollar. That's what I came up with.

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, you're right. Now that I think about it, what really made the difference was the primary in Illinois that happened in March. When he beat Loleta Didrickson—a woman candidate also without tremendous amounts of money—when that happened, I think you're right, then the press started saying, "Oh, wait a minute, we've got all these millions of dollars."

KOED: During that campaign, what issues were you hoping to focus on? We'll get to what issues became the focus of media attention, but what issues were you hoping to focus on?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That was difficult. There are two different levels of issues. On the one hand, as a matter of my own personal ego, I wanted to focus on the fact that I had been a senator for Illinois. It's funny, because subsequently I have been criticized by a black reporter who said that I never understood fully the importance of the symbolism of my job. I thought that was funny—not funny ha ha— but I thought it was kind of ironic because, if anything, because I think I really did appreciate "the symbolism" of it, I felt compelled to focus in on the substance. The symbol without substance would be a fraud. That's the way I deal with the world. And so I worked hard to develop a legislative record and to be seen as a senator from a state like Illinois— Ethanol Queen, and all those things. I worked hard to deliver as a senator, not just on the big picture issues of our day but on the nuts and bolts details of service. I had hoped to get some bang from that, but it didn't happen. I hoped also that, on a symbolic level, my service in the Senate would have been a point of reference and pride for not just Illinois but for the American people, that people would say, "We've finally integrated the United States Senate, again, in this century. That's a good thing for America, and something that we can be proud of." Instead, I wound up being on the defensive about silliness like Nigeria and that sort of thing.

KOED: In preparing for this interview, I collected a few quotes from press coverage of this campaign that I think will be interesting for you to hear, and interesting for us to hear your comments on. The first is from October of 1998, not quite a month before the election, and appeared in *The Washington Post*. It quotes you:

"I know I've made some mistakes and disappointed some people, but I want you to know that I've always tried to do what's best for Illinois . . . I'm aware that it has not all been hunky-dorry and it's not all been perfect, and I'm sorry to the extent that I failed to communicate or failed to meet expectations."

Another quote, from the same time period, comes from a Chicago paper:

"The latest poll, published last week in the *Chicago Tribune*, suggests that Ms. Moseley Braun, elected in 1992 as a rising star, is in serious trouble. She lagged behind Mr. Fitzgerald by ten percentage points with more voters saying they

believed Mr. Fitzgerald was the most honest and trustworthy candidate. The poll, which had a margin of error of 3 percentage points, also suggested that she had lost considerable support among suburban women, one of the main groups that swept her into office six years ago in what became known as the ‘Year of the Woman.’”

And, shortly after the election, another paraphrased you, saying that

" . . . after six years on Capitol Hill she was weary of being treated like some kind of political symbol, as she put it, rather than like just another first-term senator."

What do you think about these?

MOSELEY BRAUN: You just said a lot of stuff. As to the first one, which was the famous "mistake ad," I didn't like having to do that, personally. But I finally reached the conclusion that my advisors were correct in saying that I was better off doing a *mea culpa* with the public around errors, both real and perceived, leaving it general in hopes that would stop the conversation about what the specific errors might have been. Did it make a difference? I'll never know, without doing focus groups and getting an accurate polling. It's hard to know what kind of impact the "apology ad" had. My advisors thought it was important to do. That was after the explosion or gaff around George Will.

KOED: Right. For the purposes of our recording here, explain the George Will incident.

MOSELEY BRAUN: George Will had written nothing but nasty articles about me during the entire time I was in the Senate. This one was obviously calculated to affect the election, right at the time of the election. What I should have said—I shouldn't have said anything. I should have risen above it and not responded, not taken the bait. My joke, among my friends at the time, was that George Will was just mad that he was born too late to heckle Jackie Robinson. He's a big baseball fan—

KOED: A big baseball fan.

MOSELEY BRAUN: But everybody said, well George Will is not a racist, blah blah, and you can't say that sort of thing. It really wasn't even a statement, I just kind of

blurted out "Oh, he can just take his hood off" or "put it back on," or whatever.

KOED: It was some reference to the Klan.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. It was a blubbering kind of knee-jerk reaction. It was one of the situations when you open your mouth, and you know when you open it that you've just made a mistake. [laughter] But I was just mad, I was just furious. I felt like I had been picked on, and it was unfair. So, all of my anger around that time, and during the campaign you get tired. If anything, that's the point the pundits like to see candidates get to, the point when they're so tired—

KOED: You're vulnerable at that stage.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Uh huh. That was one. I discovered on the campaign trail that there were people—it was amazing—there were people who were mad at me for having gone on vacation after I got elected in 1992.

KOED: That got a lot of press coverage, too.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's like, this is extraordinary! Who doesn't go on vacation after an election. One woman said to me, which again gets to perceptions and expectations—it'll take an analyst to look at this one—a woman said to me, "Well, we felt like we had been locked in the car by our mother while she went off into the store." Like, excuse me? It was a sense of abandonment.

KOED: And very personalized harm.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Personal harm, exactly! It also related to what became one of the themes that Fitzgerald used in the campaign, which was, "She's been to Nigeria more than she's been in fill-in-the-blank county"—Bond County, St. Clair County, whatever the county. That wasn't true, but the perception that I had not been in the state and paid enough attention to the state was one that, frankly, over six years' time I could not overcome.

KOED: You mentioned in an earlier interview that that was a constant complaint,

even when you provided evidence to the contrary.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It didn't matter.

KOED: You know, we haven't mentioned in any of these interviews the Nigerian episode. Perhaps we should mention that here. Why did you choose to go to Nigeria [in August 1996]?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Actually, it was a vacation. I didn't really know the president of Nigeria [Sani Abacha] that well. I did know his son very well. His son had been killed. They were having an on the ground—

KOED: Warfare.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It wasn't warfare, but it was close. The daddy was a hideous dictator, but they always had hideous dictators there, so that wasn't anything new. The son was a really good guy. He was blown up in an airplane. It was shortly after that happened, and I had friends who were with him right before he died, so I decided since I was getting away from here that I would go there and pay my respects, hang out, and just kind of luxuriate. It was summertime there. I've always had a good time in Africa. Genuinely, it was no more than a vacation and a chance to pay respects to my late friend's parents.

KOED: But it became a political football, with people saying you went to meet, as if you were a personal envoy, the president of Nigeria. So the public perception was completely wrong?

MOSELEY BRAUN: But you can see that from the news reports. There was no nexus. Anytime you can say Carol Moseley Braun and African dictator in the same breath, it's just too juicy to pass up. [laughter]

KOED: Did you try to rectify that in some way, or just let it go?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It didn't matter. It was done.

With regard to the first thing—where were we?

KOED: The first quote dealt with your *mea culpa*.

MOSELEY BRAUN: So everything from Nigeria to George Will to really just having been the subject of such lightening bolts. At some point you have to take some personal responsibility for that. My view was, okay fine, if I have given rise to this because I have not handled the politics properly, or handled the press properly, or whatever, I wanted to say that's not what I intended to do and I've tried to do the best job I can for my state. Look at my record. That was the point of that.

In terms of the polling, that was another place where I got really whammed. I don't know which poll that was, but there's a game with polls and elections. The *Tribune* never said I was going to win any of the previous elections. It's always been negative to me. What happened was that a poll would get out there, then it would have a life of its own, and that affects your ability to fundraise and your campaign strategy. That was just one of many. It's also important to note, however, how far the polls were from the final result of the election.

KOED: The election ended up being very close, but the polls did not give any suggestion that that would be the case, even polls taken just two or three days before the election.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's correct. And you ask yourself, why is this polling so inaccurate in this case? I tried to explain this to my own party. I said, "Look, I've always polled funny." That may be due to being both black and female. Blacks may be afraid to say they're not going to vote for me, and some whites—women particularly—may be afraid to say they are going to vote for me. Poor people don't get polled, and to the extent that they come to the polls in greater numbers and influences, so you get all these different kinds of demographic synergies that normal polling has a difficult time putting a handle on. The result was that the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee would not give me the last \$300,000 that I was entitled to, at a time when Russ Feingold was sending them back money.

KOED: They had written off your campaign?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: What about the part of this polling that showed that you had lost ground among women?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Again, the voting results did not show that. But that was popular wisdom. Again—part of that quote "year of the woman"—all of this is invention. It was "year of the woman" when I got elected. This was supposed to be the denouement of the "year of the woman." They were looking to write that story, but there was no reality to it.

KOED: In the end, you actually did quite well with women voters.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: And the last quote, that you were wearying of being treated like a political symbol. That's something we've touched upon many times in these interviews, the fact that symbolism often became a hindrance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: More to the point, it was only symbolism when it was convenient to somebody else's agenda. I mean, here's the irony in the whole symbolic issue. If indeed I was symbolic of something, then there is no way in hell why the media should not have been saying what a great thing it was that I got out of bed this morning. In this United States of America, in the entire two-hundred-however many years of Senate history, we have one person of color who is a female. Come on! I'm not just saying this because I'm me, but just as a citizen, it's like, my God, we're talking human rights around the world, women's rights around the world, integration and civil rights around the world, and we have a lily-white United States Senate. I don't think so! What's wrong with this picture!

So, if I were really a symbol, then that should have been the reception. I think the ultimate indignity was when *Women's Wear Daily* had a picture of me on the cover of the newspaper, which got put on CNN, of my butt going up the Capitol steps because I had on a sweater set. You see, I'm a little on the chubby side, right? The sweater set was clinging to my backside, and this was "an example of what not to wear on Capitol Hill."

[laughter]

KOED: They couldn't have caught you in a better moment, to display what you should wear on Capitol Hill. [laughter]

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's my point.

KOED: So the symbol became a hammer, to beat you up with.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: Was there a way, in retrospect, for you to take this symbol strategy and turn it to your benefit? Did you miss opportunities to use it this way?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Uh huh. I missed opportunities. But you see the real bottom line is, and this goes to the "all politics is local" statement, the fact is that I did not have the support to turn it around and make it more positive. I started off as an independent Democrat, which meant the regular Democratic organization was not happy to see me coming. So I was getting pot shots even within my own party. Similarly—and again this is not by way of excuse because I did miss opportunities, and I'll talk about that in a minute—among the black leadership, I was the new kid on the block. So, I've got Jesse Jackson (not to personalize it), being "President of the black people of the United States of America," and all of a sudden there is a black United States senator. Where does this person fit? How does that affect his [Jackson's] hegemony, his authority, his platform?

KOED: Is this in the mind of Jackson and his group, or in the mind of the American people in general?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think this is within terms of the black community.

KOED: Okay.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In terms of the women's community—it's an interesting thing, and it goes to synergies, and actually goes to Abraham Lincoln saying that in this

country public opinion is all—because it really is. In this election, and the re-election that failed, there was an opportunity for synergy between me and our Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Glenn Poshard, congressman from far southern Illinois, a true "good ol' boy," but nouveau good ol' boy in the sense that Glenn was of the salt of the earth and we had a great ticket and could work together, even though he's a conservative Democrat, he's anti-choice and I'm pro-choice. Even though there were those differences, we were prepared to run together. Had the synergies worked, where people who supported me voted for him and people who supported him voted for me, both of us would have been elected. It didn't happen. The same thing is true on this symbolic side. Had it been that the women viewed the one black woman as a point of pride for women, and not just the last priority among "the women candidates," or had the blacks not looked at me like "well, where does she fit in this pantheon," or had the Democrats embraced me and not seen me as some interloper, had the liberals embraced my kind of third-way politics instead of saying I had to be lock-step with—Those are all big ifs, but, you see, the opportunities to be a positive, constructive symbol could have arisen had the politics been right with regard to those various groups. Instead, each one of those groups turned its back and it became the gossip among the blacks, gossip among the women, labor was not happy. You see what I mean? Labor was more unhappy with me over my vote on NAFTA than they were with just about any other Democrat.

KOED: They certainly criticized you for that vote.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly, but why? Why? Illinois' particular agricultural exports are second or third in the country, so why was the senator from a state like that held up to that kind of criticism?

KOED: Clearly, you did not meet their expectations in the way that they wanted you to meet them?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: And those expectations were defined out of past black leadership? How are such things defined, such as expectations of symbols?

MOSELEY BRAUN: If we're really clever here, Betty, we'll come out of this

with something really extraordinary with this work, because I don't have a handle on this. This is something to think about. I need to call this child. There is a woman by the name of Kimberle Crenshaw—I don't know if I've referenced her to you or not—Kimberle is a professor who talks about, an awful word, "intersectionalities." What this means is a special synergy that comes when you put race and gender together. When you add race, gender, and class together, you really have a set of boundary-breaking determinants at work that give rise to unusual kinds of results. I come back to this situation, because it could have well been that all of those groups were rah-rah'ing our symbol. You know—victory for working people! Here's a middle-class, working-class girl who works hard, plays by the rules, goes to law school, does all these wonderful things, and then she gets to the Senate. Labor could have done that, and they didn't. The civil rights types could have—you know, "She opens the doors to the Senate! We're integrating the United States Senate," and, rah rah, "Isn't this terrific? Looks at all this stuff—underground railroad, stamp for Jackie Robinson, all this stuff!"

KOED: And the fact that you had emerged from a middle-class background, did not come from a "disadvantaged" background, however we want to define that, should have been looked at as a triumph for—

MOSELEY BRAUN: For America.

KOED: Right.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. But it never was.

KOED: I admit, that baffles me.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It baffles me, too. I'll tell you, in terms of getting distance from the election, obviously there are still hard feelings and all, but I'm really getting to be more and more reconciled with the notion that this is just my path, this is just my destiny. Because this is so inexplicable on so many different levels, and says so many different things when you look at the hard facts of it, it raises all the contradictions in modern American society, in a funny way. So what did I do to deserve this? You know—why Lord?—and the answer is, why not? [laughter]

KOED: Don't ask me that!

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Why not you? But, looking at all those things, I don't know if there is a word for the opposite of synergy. Unfortunately, the polling was never accurate, but my own sense of things was that I went into the election season really in deep trouble. When people looked up and figured that they were about to have this seat bought by the right wing, they went, "Holy shit, let's get off the dime and get to work." By then, it was too late. The money hadn't been there. I didn't have the support. I didn't have the help. I had no operation in southern Illinois, which just killed me. I knew that we had been able to win in '92 in large part because we had a political operation in as many parts of the state as we could manage, across the board. We had nothing going in southern Illinois!

KOED: And so you became portrayed as the "northern Illinois candidate."

MOSELEY BRAUN: Even though he [Peter Fitzgerald] lives in the north, too.

KOED: And that was a result of funding difficulties, that you were unable to get that statewide constituency?

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. He out-spent me 3 to 1. It was \$18 million that we know about.

KOED: And, I believe, \$11 or \$12 million of his own money.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Of his own money, that's right. But that gets back to the symbol issue. I never did understand why it wasn't a positive symbol. Why nobody said, "Hurrah America!" It never happened. Even down to and including Kgosie [Matthews]. Now I'm not speaking to him personally because I'm mad at him for a whole bunch of reasons [laughter], but be that as it may, the fact remains that here is a guy whose grandfather founded the ANC. His grandmother, who just died this year, her memoirs talk about her time in the United States with his grandfather when he was ambassador, and her memoirs are as fascinating as anything his grandfather wrote. Anyway, she mentions Kgosie in her memoirs. Here was a guy from South Africa, after the breaking down of the walls and Nelson Mandela getting out of jail, and everybody is rah-rah about

that, and here comes this guy from South Africa who takes up a campaign in the United States, manages to take it from zero dollars and no chance in hell to opening up the United States Senate. Somewhere, you'd think someone would have said, "Bravo!" It never happened.

So, the symbol was only used in a negative way, when it came to me. It was a symbol in terms of expectations, that I was expected to behave in a certain way. As a symbolic working-class person, how dare I support business with NAFTA? As the symbolic black person, I don't know. I don't know to what extent my interracial marriage might have factored into it. Or—

KOED: Your middle-class status? There is a definite stereotype, for lack of a better word, that black politicians and black activists come from—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Poor backgrounds. Oh, listen, and that's why there were so many stories about wearing Chanel and living in luxury penthouses. My house wasn't any more luxurious than anybody else's, but the idea was that I was supposed to live in Robert Taylor Homes. Remember the scandal about buying the Jeep? I traded in a Lincoln Continental! It was, like, wait a minute! I went from a Lincoln to a Jeep, and this is a scandal? [laughter] I was mystified by it.

KOED: When did you personally become aware of the fact that the symbol was being used in a negative way? Was it immediately obvious to you?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Medicare. It's funny—I was just talking to somebody about the fact that my press secretary in the 1992 campaign said to me, "Well, you have to do X." I don't remember what X was, but he said you have to do X or the press will turn on you. I looked at him and said, "They already have." Intuitively, I knew. Maybe that's from having been a politician in an elective office. I just knew that something had happened and the corruption had come to the surface. Not corruption in the sense of anything I had done, but the corruption in terms of perceptions. All that Medicare was about was the welfare queen symbol. The Medicare issue was a way of saying that I was a welfare cheat. You couldn't find a handful of people today, in Illinois, who could tell you what was involved in that. The Medicare [scandal] broke in the middle of the Gulf War. I think it broke on the third day of Operation Desert whatever it was called.

KOED: Operation Desert Storm.

MOSELEY BRAUN: There was more TV time devoted to the Medicare "scandal" around me, in Chicago, than there was to Desert Storm on that day. Can you imagine? You've got a war going on, and the headline news is "Carol Moseley Braun's mother—"

KOED: Do you think there was a moment, after the election and as you moved through your Senate term, when you had an opportunity to dump that corruption and turn it around?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Possibly, yes. Talk about missed opportunities and where I made some mistakes. In hindsight—and I think I mentioned this to you—going on vacation when I did was a huge mistake.

KOED: Yes, you did say that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In part because of these reasons. Not that there was anything substantively wrong. There wasn't. I was exhausted. I needed to just get away. I was looking to get married. I wanted to go and meet my fiancé's family. I turned to the personal when I should have been more cognizant of the fact that this was a window of opportunity for me to put a political operation in place, put a press operation in place, get advisory committees set up, set up fund raising to raise a lot of money around the country, pay off the debt. You see, if I had taken advantage of that time and done all those things between November and January, who's to say that it wouldn't have been turned around. That's just me speculating and kind of wishful thinking, but I've given that part a lot of thought. If I had not indulged myself with going away, I could have raised money, I could have done some setting up. The press complained that I wasn't around to organize my office and I missed orientation—which you know wasn't true.

KOED: That's correct, that wasn't true.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I don't know to what extent—you probably can answer this better than I can—to what extent does the media resort to devices that they know are not true to express a thought. Those people who write the articles—at least the ones

honest enough to have done their work—knew or should have known—

KOED: Should have known that you were present at orientation. Your picture was on the cover of *The Washington Post* at orientation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And the *New York Times*. [laughter] That became a device, a shorthand, for "she locked us in the car and went shopping."

KOED: I noticed as I was reviewing articles from the 1998 campaign that many of these same issues were revisited in the 1998 campaign—the Medicare issue, the Nigeria issue—

MOSELEY BRAUN: They continued to revisit the same garbage. It was all foolishness. Betty, that was what was so stunning about it. That is why I've got to conclude—maybe with more time under my belt I will have reached the point where I have a better understanding about to what extent that foolishness was a device. What was really going on here? Because, something else—having to do not with me but with the collective national psyche—something on that level was going on. It was not about me. There was so much unreality and untruth about it. It couldn't have been about me.

It's funny. The president used the term—remember when they were burning black churches in the South—Bill Clinton, to his great and everlasting credit, responded immediately and there were people standing in the streets singing "Kumbaya" and that kind of thing. And we got over it. In the middle of it—while we were passing resolutions in the Senate and folks were concerned about having focus groups and whatever, talking about it with church groups, all this stuff was going on—the president used the term, he said it's like a "fever," the country's got a fever and we'll have to get over it. It'll break, and we just got to get through this.

KOED: And once we're through the fever, the burning will stop. The burnings were accelerating at that time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly.

KOED: That gives me a good opportunity—In a case like that, for instance, when

the church burnings are happening, you were in the Senate at the time. As a senator, how did you respond to that? Was there something you could do, in the Senate?

MOSELEY BRAUN: There's almost nothing you can do, except we tried to and were successful with the White House to get some money through HUD [Housing and Urban Development] to help rebuild some of the churches—you know, throw money at the problem. It was interesting because I had to literally fight with my colleague from Texas over sponsorship of the resolution condemning the burnings, and she got the sponsorship—

KOED: This is Kay Bailey Hutchison.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Kay Bailey. She got lead sponsorship because the Republicans were in the majority. I pointed out to her that as the only black person in the Senate that it was not fair that they did this to me—majority partisan issues notwithstanding—but she's just that kind of—whatever. So there was a scramble in the Senate over who was going to sponsor these [resolutions], who would be the first person to stand up and say what a terrible thing this was. The Senate did respond.

KOED: But the response became a partisan issue.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Actually, that's a good thing that there was that much competition over who was going to sponsor—

KOED: Because it showed that people cared enough.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. I think that's a good thing. And that Kay Bailey [Hutchison] of all people was rushing to be the one was a good thing. I didn't have that kind of problem with it. I think both the Senate and the [Clinton] administration responded appropriately to that. Again, taken as a whole, when you take all of the issues—My mother had been dead for five years and they were still raising the Medicare [scandal]. Let's use this moment to digress and talk about that.

KOED: Okay.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In the first instance, let's start with the fundamental issue, *it wasn't my money*. I didn't have control of it. Was it in a bank account with my name on it? Yes. But my mother was in no way mentally impaired. [laughter] How many people who have parents can tell their parents what to do with their money? That's the first question. I'll get to the legal arguments in a minute. That's the basic issue—can you tell your parent how to spend their money? You start with that. Then we go to the next issue which is—and this was characterized as "hiding assets from the state," but it wasn't that at all. She had no assets when we finally got her qualified for Medicare. We had taken care of her for a number of years before she got Medicaid because of her heart attacks and strokes and her leg amputation. It was the leg amputation that really did it, because she could not—even with help—get around to take care of herself. It was a wrenching decision for all of us, in any event. There were times when I thought [my mother] Edna—I thought the nursing home was ghastly—but I think she may have preferred it because really she didn't have any responsibility anymore. She just tooted around in her wheelchair and told people what to do. [laughter]

KOED: She didn't have to worry about cooking and cleaning and those types of things.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Cooking, cleaning, nothing else. She had an apartment. Michael and I took care of her from the time of her first set of heart attacks and first stroke. We sold her house and we took care of her. She had an apartment down the street from me in Hyde Park. When she had the leg amputation, she continued to live there and we had people come in and help her. Then the state came up with that—I forget what they call it—the homemaker services when someone comes into the home. She got that once a week in addition to the people we had come in to clean. It was really kind of a family kind of a thing. Then she got the one foot she had left worked on and the podiatrist was incompetent and she got gangrene in that foot. So, really, it was the amputation that gave rise to her having to be in a nursing home. Having said that, she had no assets at that point. There were no assets to hide. In fact, and I haven't been able to research this, maybe you will be able to, in retrospect I don't believe the state of Illinois—What she got was almost like winning the lottery while you're already in a nursing home. She was already in the nursing home and the state was helping to subsidize it, and she gets a windfall of money that nobody anticipated.

KOED: Where did the money come from?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'll get to that in a minute. A windfall of money that nobody anticipated. She said she reported it, but we have no documentation of it. This is a research point. I don't believe that the state even had forms to report it at that point. She always maintained that she had told the social worker in the nursing home that she had gotten this money. But the woman was gone, and we weren't able to track her down, and there was no documentation.

KOED: Documenting such things can become quite complicated.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In fact, I'll put this on the record with you right now, because I know they emptied my trash—unfortunately. This is an aside. Yesterday, I got some mail back from District Cablevision, sending me back a check for \$68.75, on the grounds that they could find no record of my having cable service. I have cable service in my apartment, but District Cablevision tells me that they can find no record of my existence. [laughter] They sent me back my \$68 check. Fine! I made the mistake of throwing the check away. I shouldn't have done that. I should have held onto that because when they come back and say you've been stealing cable from us. [laughter]

But, anyway, I don't think there was a form. Now, to talk about where the money came from. I must not have talked about the family aspect—

KOED: You talked a little bit about what led to her going to the nursing home and the fact that different family members had taken care of her from time to time, but not really about the source of the money issue.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Okay. My mother's family owned, and frankly still owns, about 350 or so acres of land in Alabama. In fact, one of the more interesting things about that property is that the matriarch of the family, my great grandmother—I have pictures of her, and her mother and her mother's mother, hanging on my wall—bought this land before the turn of the century. It's hard for me to figure exactly what happened or how this happened because she was back and forth to Chicago at the time. This is my great grandmother. When she died—There was also family confusion, because my mother always thought that she was entitled to simple interest in the property. As it turns out, she

wasn't, but was just left a life estate. The northern part of the family, the ones who lived in Chicago, got life estates in the property. The ones who stayed in Alabama got the simple title. So I still have an interest, as a life estate, as an heir under my great grandmother's will. Because of the way the will was drafted and the life estate, for them to do a timber sale off the land, everybody has to agree to it. The first step was when they asked my mother, some timber company wanted to buy all these hundreds of acres of timber. Marsha and I didn't think it was a good idea and we counseled my mother not to do it, but my aunt wanted her to do it because I think they waved a couple hundred thousand dollars in front of them. It had to be divided up a zillion ways, but they waved this money in front of them. Everybody else wanted the money, so my mother finally, under pressure from her cousins, gave in and signed the paper. So she got a check for \$27,000, something-something dollars. Because she had not been self-supporting—she didn't even have a banking account other than what they had at the nursing home....

KOED: A petty cash kind of thing.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Other than petty cash, she did not have a bank account. I had a money market account with a few thousand dollars in it, nothing really to write home about. She asked me if I would deposit the check for her. I took it and I did deposit it, because the account earned some interest. My mother spent six months deciding what she wanted to do with this money. One minute she was going to give it all to Joey, the next minute she was going to buy a house for Marsha, and then something else—you know. She's playing power games with her kids with the money. Finally, after six months she decided how to distribute it. I actually wrote down what the distribution was going to be, because I was, frankly, tired of getting my chain pulled. I wound up lending Joey some of my money because she told Joey she was going to give him some money and then she changed her mind. I had already given Joey the money. It was ridiculous. Anyway, it was family stuff, right. So I wrote it down and said, "This is what you said you want to do" and she said, "Yes, that's what I want to do." Fine. Done. Distributed the money to Joey, to Marsha, and to me, and didn't think twice about it.

So when this reporter called and said, "Well, we found out that so and so, and she's hiding assets from Medicare since your mother got this \$27,000 check and it should have been reported to the state, and what do you have to say about that?" My first reaction was to say, "Well, go talk to her. It doesn't have anything to do with me." Then it

dawned on me that they were trying to make the case that I was the responsible party, that it was my responsibility to turn this money in, my responsibility to take care of my mother's financial matters. You see, they couldn't find anything on my financial affairs. They tried.

KOED: And they saw something devious in the fact that you had put it into your account, not knowing the whole situation?

MOSELEY BRAUN: They didn't care. They knew. I told the reporter. They asked me, "Why was it put in your account?" Because she didn't have one. Duh? This is not rocket science!

KOED: It gave them an opportunity—

MOSELEY BRAUN: It gave them an opportunity to say "welfare queen." That's really what it was about. It was so sleazy.

There was one interview early on. The media came to the nursing home to see my mother. One kid tried to crash past the guards we had. One kid showed up with flowers and told the person at the desk that he was coming to see Mrs. Moseley. Since he had the flowers, the guy thought it was legit. When he got into my room, my mother screamed at him, threw the flowers at him, and told him to get out. Here's a woman in a wheelchair in a nursing home and they were hounding—It was unbelievable.

And I was bleeding because they were hurting my mother. What are you going to do? Are you going to stand by and watch it? She's already not well. They had cameras staked out in front of the Warren Barr pavilion. You would have thought that it had been the scene of some grizzly murder or something. It was that kind of over-reaction.

The facts had no bearing on it at all. During that time, I got a letter from a very prominent lawyer in Chicago who had written a letter to the editor stating that not only was I not responsible for reporting it to the state, but under the rules neither was she. So there was legal precedence to the notion that nobody violated any law. But that had nothing to do with anything in terms of how the story was being spun. There were five different investigative bodies—Department of Public Aid in Illinois looked at it and

found there was nothing actionable there. I wound up paying them \$15,000 of my own money just to try to make the issue go away so they would leave my mother alone. Frankly, in hindsight, I could have saved that money because I didn't owe them \$15,000. Then the state attorney general was accused of being racist because he was also black and had obviously let this welfare cheat go because he was another black person covering it up. They filed an action with the Federal Elections Commission (FEC). They filed an action with the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission (ARDC), trying to take my law license. That went away, but I had to pay for the cost of that.

KOED: When you say "they," who was pushing this?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, as for the ARDC, it was "private citizens." My guess is that it was some Republican operative. Same thing with the Federal Elections Commission, the attorney general and the Department of Public Aid, and there was one other law enforcement agency. The law enforcement agency had to respond because there was so much in the media. They didn't have a choice.

KOED: They couldn't allow the perception that they are letting you get away with it, so to speak?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. There I was, with all of these investigations going on, and spending money on lawyers and lawyers and lawyers and lawyers, dealing with it. Meantime, my mother was getting sicker and sicker and sicker. And every time there was another story on the television about it, she'd have another relapse or her condition worsened.

KOED: It was bound to have a huge impact on her life.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It killed her. I'll be honest with you. It absolutely killed her. A friend said, "Oh, come on, Carol, give it up, your mother died of cancer." Yes, that's true that she died of cancer, but at the same time there is absolutely no question in my mind that the whole episode—

KOED: It probably made it quicker.

[Telephone rings; interview interrupted]

MOSELEY BRAUN: When the news came that my mother had a heart attack—it turned out to be an anxiety attack—but that was the same day that they had revisited the whole Medicaid thing.

There was a woman who wrote for *The New Republic*, her name was Ruth Shalit. She wrote a scathing, searing, nasty hatchet job, focused mainly around the Medicare issue. It was a hideous article. When she wrote that article, that became almost as much news as the Medicaid thing to begin with. It was on the cover of *The New Republic*—you know, "A Star is Born," and they proceeded to rip me to shreds in the magazine. That made news all over. That was the day my mother had another one of these attacks and they rushed her off to the hospital. I had to leave the speech I was giving to go to the hospital to see to her.

So I'm walking around with all this guilt, having done this to my Mom. This Ruth Shalit actually fell on her own petard because she was found guilty of plagiarism on a couple of occasions. But journalists don't really run each other out of town. [laughter] She was on the "outs" for a little while, but I think she may be back at *The New Republic* now. The story was hideous, inaccurate, but it didn't matter. It didn't matter. At the time, in my own naïveté, I just presumed that they wrote the truth, that there was some resemblance between what they wrote and the facts.

KOED: Perhaps even more telling than that is the fact that when you're in public office, in the public eye, and you come forward with the facts, it doesn't fix the problem.

MOSELEY BRAUN: No.

KOED: That, I think, is an extremely important issue for all people in public life, and particularly those who are very high-profile.

MOSELEY BRAUN: We need to deal with that. This is the part that I can't get a handle on. It's difficult, because I have to separate me as a person from me as a theoretical "me." What interest was there in the American media to run the only black person in the Senate out of town on a rail.

KOED: An extremely important question.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Duh?

KOED: I certainly don't have an answer to that question. I was thinking, as you were talking about that, hopefully in the near future we will have another black woman in the Senate. Will that person face similar types of issues and problems that you have faced? What sort of advice would you give to a person in that position?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's interesting. Believe it or not, and this may be very interesting to you as a historian, I have never had a conversation with—I'm blanking out on the name of the only other black person to serve in the Senate in this century?

KOED: Edward Brooke.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Ed Brooke. I've seen him a couple of times, and actually I tried at one point to get in to meet with him, but he could never find the time to meet. Maybe this is just because he's put it behind him. I don't know! I do know that his politics were even less—Well, race was less of an issue for him than in my time. Gender was not an issue for him either, obviously. At the same time, I wonder to what extent there were similarities or lessons from his experience in the Senate and mine.

KOED: That would be very interesting to know.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And—I don't know—it may be telling that this conversation never happened. There may be something in that. I don't know why we never communicated about his experience. Clearly, going back to our question, for the life of me I can't figure it out. Even today, right now as we sit here, on the horizon there is not a black in position to run.

KOED: I am not aware of any rising star, so to speak. I'm an optimist, so I hope in the next few years someone will emerge. I have to admit, however, having had these conversations with you, I see that person emerging with a sense of reluctance.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Trepidation.

KOED: Reluctance and trepidation, because of what they might face. It's hard to understand why these things happen, and how we can prevent them from happening again.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Betty, I'll tell you something. I don't know how, in dealing with the project—I know you have a set of interests and you have a job to do for the Senate, but there is the possibility for me that I can actually do something and publish a book to make money. I'm really not looking to do that. Obviously, the potential is there, because I like to think that my story isn't written yet. It's funny. At 51, Edna was old. I am not old! [laughter]

KOED: Your story has begun to be written, but who knows what will come next.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, assuming I survive. But for me, and again it may be the armchair historian in me, there's got to be some lessons in this and some messages in this that ought to be spoken to in order to illuminate the debate. I don't know that I have the distance, or the intellect even—I am not trying to put myself down—and I wonder whether or not I can put my arms around those messages well enough to be able to communicate that. That, it seems to me, is the real challenge in all this. Nothing happens for no reason. My history, my track record from 1992 to today, can either be written off as the inexplicable perils of Pauline, or a story of this is what happened and it happened for these reasons. It's getting to that point, you see. There was a woman who started to write a book about the 1992 campaign. I thought it was an awful book. It was terrible. Well, not terrible, but it was boring. I think, in part, it was boring precisely because it was "on this day she spoke to the steel workers" and, whatever. It was a boring campaign kind of book, speaking to the mechanics of a campaign, as opposed to speaking to the "whys" of why these things happened.

KOED: That's an interesting comment because, in my own research, I was looking at this book that came out after the 1992 election, by Maria Braden, called *Women Politicians and the Media*.¹ It's an interesting book, and she talks a lot about this. She gave a chapter to Margaret Chase Smith and people who had long careers in Congress. It also has a chapter on the 1992 election. You were mentioned in the process

¹Maria Braden, *Women Politicians and the Media* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

of this chapter. It says: "Those whom the press built up also had a longer way to fall. Carol Moseley Braun is a good example." And then she goes on to say, mostly, that your downfall by the end of your term was due to self-inflicted wounds.

As I was reading that, I was thinking that no one has come to grips with your experience. Probably, we haven't had enough time to do that. No one quite understands what happened and why these various forces came into play. Probably, it will be a good many years before we understand that. As a historian, I tend to think we'll need twenty, thirty, or forty years. Hopefully, it won't take that long.

One of the things that we're doing here with the transcripts of these interviews, in addition to giving us an opportunity to talk about it and hash out the issues and try to bring some perspective to it ourselves, we're creating a primary source that you can use if you go on to other writing. Also, we're creating a record of ideas and thoughts that scholars for years and years will be able to refer to in order to understand the complete picture of this experience.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. You see, the whole self-inflicted wounds business is a cop-out. That's the easiest way to say, "Oh, she just really screwed up."

KOED: And I think they're saying that in this case because they don't know what was going on. They don't have enough information, they don't have enough time, to get the kind of perspective they need to understand. It's a very complicated situation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, it's more than that. It's more than that. I think it is absolute deliberate avoidance of having to come to grips with the notion that, because of who I am, I got treated differently on just about every front. Again, back to Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionalities. For Dianne Feinstein to have gone on vacation after an election would not have been—For Dianne Feinstein to have gone to Nigeria would not have been a big deal. Okay? When Dawn Clark Netsch, a woman politician who ran for governor in our state, when her husband neglected to file property taxes on some property they owned, it was a two-day story. My mother didn't report her windfall and—

KOED: It was a six-year story.

MOSELEY BRAUN: A six-year story, at least. So, you know, you can't just say that this is—Alternatively, if I were a black *male* politician—Kweisi Mfume has one date after another. One of the reasons my life is so screwed up now—not that it's "screwed up"—I don't have a man in my life in large part because they are scared to death of what happened when I did. So I wind up being too hot to handle because of my gender. Think about it. Just because a black politician gets engaged to somebody and the engagement doesn't work out—

KOED: Yes, it seems to be a combination of different forces at work.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's why I go back to Kimberle Crenshaw and intersectionalities. When you add class to it—Frankly, if I *had* been a welfare mother, I would have had an easier time of it on a lot of different fronts. People did not expect—.

I flew back from France on the Concorde. This was my present to Matt. He was such a trooper. He had gone through the campaign, had worked in the office. My son is wonderful, and a good kid, with his feet on the ground, honest, has his eye on the ball. You know, he's just a good person. You can see me glowing, talking about Matt. He wanted to ride the Concorde. So, my attitude, was "Hey, why not?"

KOED: It made the papers.

MOSELEY BRAUN: You would have thought that I had killed somebody! Why? Because welfare mothers can't afford tickets on the Concorde. Dianne Feinstein flies the Concorde. Bill Bradley flies the Concorde. Other senators fly it, but it's not a big deal for them.

KOED: Business people fly the Concorde regularly.

MOSELEY BRAUN: All the time. It's not a deal for them, but it was a deal for me, because it contradicted stereotypes.

KOED: It was linked with the penthouse story, and the Jeep story.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Extravagant lifestyle. People who know me will

tell you that they are likely to see me at Home Depot and Sam's Warehouse Club. [laughter] My lifestyle—other than being in the Senate—has remained pretty much the same since I left law school. I do the same kinds of things. If anything, I need to spiff up my act, if you will. I used to call this the "Sportin' Life" syndrome—living high on the hog, got two nickles and stealing from the campaign—

KOED: There's a definite illegal aspect to Sportin' Life.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. That's what a lot of that was. Medicare equals welfare cheat. Stealing money from the campaign, so she could live high style, drinking champagne on the Concorde, having elicited sex in the jungles of Africa. [laughter]

KOED: Gee, I didn't read that news article. [laughter]

Let's broaden this discussion out a bit. Let's talk about putting your personal and political experience into a broader perspective. Maybe by doing that we can help answer some of these other questions. It's worth a try.

I want to talk a little bit about your early life. We haven't done that yet. I was thinking the other day that, in many ways, you have grown up with the civil rights and women's movement. You've grown up with the movement of African Americans into political life. You grew up in Chicago. We've talked about your middle-class status, but we haven't talked about other aspects of your childhood. Tell me a little bit about your childhood.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It was a mix, actually. Frankly, I credit the mix with creating the unusual bringing together of experiences that I reflect. And, uh—This is tough, Betty. This is exactly the kind of exercise that I hoped this would give us.

I am convinced that part of the Civil Rights Movement and Women's Rights Movement—the places where they come together—is in the fact that in these times we have really been taking on antique notions of station in life and breaking them down. "Station" was what relegated women to a particular role, working in the home but not outside the home, being obedient to their husbands, and all of those things. That was a woman's station, that was her place.

KOED: And even in the work force, women had certain stations.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. There was a place for you. You did not move outside of that place, except at great peril to yourself. The Women's Rights Movement has been pushing at the edge of that envelope. At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement pushed at the edges of the envelope of the "place" of black people in our society. The whole issue of segregation, and *de jure* segregation—The first great leap of the hurdle of the Civil Rights Movement was *de jure*—get rid of Jim Crow and all those things. The world that my parents grew up in—It's funny, but I almost can't even envision what it was because it was absolutely two separate societies. What black people did happened in this little microcosm, this little caste almost, in American society that the larger white community had precious little understanding of. It was almost like a caste system in America.

KOED: Do you think it worked the other way, too, that black Americans had very little understanding—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Precious little understanding. They knew more—

KOED: They read the newspapers and—

MOSELEY BRAUN: And worked in the homes. They always had to live up to white expectations or they would get lynched or—You see what I'm saying? It's like when I say that women know more about men than men know about women, because we have to? It's the same thing with black people.

KOED: We've had to live in their world.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. But there was precious little interchange. The result was that at the time when I was born the Civil Rights Movement hadn't really gotten off the ground yet, but it had started. That's an interesting part of American history that is just now being written. Coming out of World War II, the veterans that came back home were not content, having fought against fascism in Europe, to come back and drink out of a colored water fountain.

KOED: Higher expectations.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. My father was active in the Civil Rights Movement. My aunt was part of the Beat generation. We had artists and musicians, an interracial crowd that they hung out with. One of the things that distinguished my background was, I think, the interracial nature of it, as opposed to what most blacks grew up with. Most blacks grew up not knowing any white people.

KOED: Complete segregation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Complete segregation. My aunt was married to a white man when it was still illegal to do so in this country.

KOED: Yes, in fact I have it written down in my notes that it wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia*—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Was it that late?

KOED: Shocking! It was 1967 when the Supreme Court declared all bans on interracial marriages illegal.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'll be darned. I didn't realize it was that late.

KOED: I was thinking about this in terms of your life. In what year were you married?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I was married in 1973.

KOED: So, it was within five or six years of your marriage that interracial marriages became legal across the country.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I didn't know that. Auntie Darrell was married in the '50s, to Norman Schmidt, Uncle Norman. Their marriage was illegal. It wasn't illegal in Illinois at that point, but it was illegal in many other states.

I've told you the colored water story?

KOED: No.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I never told you the colored water story?

KOED: No.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, I used this on the campaign trail. It always brought a big yuck. It's a true story.

We used to go south to Alabama, to the farm that gave rise to the great timber sale. We took the train down there one day in the summer. My mother would take us down there to spend the summers on the farm—the kids did. We got to the train station in Montgomery. We were thirsty, and they had the segregated water fountains. My mother wouldn't let us drink from the colored water fountains, and said, "Children, you must wait till we get to your grandmother's house, and we'll get some water there." My little brother, John—who's now dead—laid out in the middle of the train station, had a temper tantrum, a screaming yelling temper tantrum, because he wanted some colored water. He thought it was going to be green and pink and yellow and come out like a rainbow. "I want some colored water! I want some colored water! I want some colored water!"
[laughter]

KOED: How dare you deny me this unique experience, he thought.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Can you imagine it. She's standing there in the Montgomery train station with this kid having a fit because he wants colored water.

KOED: You know, in one way it's wonderful that he was unaware of the fact that you have a "white" and a "colored" drinking fountain. On the other hand, it's very sad, of course—

I love that story.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Colored water. Going from colored water, even down to

the issues of color within the black community, which were profound. My father was dark skinned and my mother was almost as fair as you are. The result was that, in those days, it was kind of normal that well-to-do and well-off black men would go and find the lightest skinned woman to marry. Edna was in that category. I used to tease her, saying she was a "trophy wife." She didn't like that at all.

But seriously, that racial dynamic was part of the world that I was born into, even down to and including a recent episode with the State Department. I had to get a copy of my birth certificate. My birth certificate has been amended. It's a funny story. When I was born, my mother spoke a spattering of French. The hospitals were segregated. My father wasn't there, so they put her—and I expect Edna led them on, too, with her first baby. She was probably thinking, "Oh, I'm not going over there with the colored women," because the colored section was the shabby section.

KOED: She was able to pass.

MOSELEY BRAUN: She was able to pass. They put her in the white section. So when I was born, my birth certificate said "white." And it stayed that way until I got to the Illinois General Assembly.

One time, I tried to get it changed when I was in the U.S. Attorney's office. I went to this clerk with my certificate and she said, "But this is a white woman's birth certificate." I said, "No, no, no, this is my birth certificate. That is my mother, my father, and my birth certificate, it's me." But she said "It says white." We got this circular argument going about how can you be the person whose birth certificate says white and you're obviously not white. I said "forget it."

When I got to the General Assembly, Jim Thompson nominated a fellow by the name of Bill Kempner to be the director of Public Health. We had a statute in Illinois that said that [that position] had to be filled by a doctor, and Bill was not a doctor. So, it came to a vote, and Bill's friends were going to support changing the law so he could become director of Public Health. I went to him and said, "Bill, I'll vote for you on one condition." He said, "What's that?" I said, "You've got to fix my birth certificate." I explained it to him. He laid out on the floor and died laughing. He thought this was the funniest thing he had ever heard. True enough, after he became director of Public Health,

they fixed my birth certificate and made me colored. [laughter] I don't remember what it says, black, Negro, but they changed it.

The point is, here I am born into a world with a fair-skinned mother, black father, both of whom were more educated than the average black person of the time. My father was an intellect, into philosophy and music, played seven different instruments, spoke languages, used to take me to different churches. As a child, I was raised Catholic, but I went to synagogues and mosques and temples. I got a chance to see a whole range of religions when I was growing up. That's the good side. The other side of it was that, when he drank, he would get hideously mean and he would beat the shit out of us. He was very, very violent. Our family went from this kind of idyllic suburban existence to absolute abject terror, being chased with guns, beaten with wet ropes, and things like that. The abuse in the household was profound.

KOED: Abuse of your mother as well, or just the children?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yes, primarily of her. That gave rise to their divorce when I was fifteen or sixteen. She just couldn't take it any more. She had a nervous breakdown. I'll never forget this. Our next-door neighbor was a psychiatrist in this suburban—It's still like that. If you go there now, that neighborhood still looks very much like it did when I was coming up. It was like living in the suburbs. We'd pitch tents in the back yard, climb the mulberry trees and pick berries, kids would sit out on the curb at nighttime. It was the suburbs, for all intents and purposes

Yet, there was this awful violence going on in the home. On one occasion, she just lost the ability to walk. She could not move. The shrink next door came over. His diagnosis was that it was stress from the abuse and so on.

So, they got divorced. And when they got divorced—this was interesting—it's funny, I think it had a positive and salutary effect, but really screwed over my brothers and sisters. When they got divorced, they were fighting over the house. He wouldn't move out. She wouldn't move in. So we moved with her down to my grandmother's house, which was in the heart of the ghetto. It was culture shock!

KOED: Especially for someone of fifteen or sixteen years old.

[interview interrupted]

Culture shock, when you moved in with your grandmother when you were fifteen or sixteen years old.

MOSELEY BRAUN: The neighborhood was called "bucket of blood" even then.

KOED: Oh, gosh. In one of our earlier interviews you mentioned that you had some years on "the mean streets." Is this the period you are talking about?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. It was a good thing for me, because I learned. I had never had any real exposure to a large part of the black community. I didn't know about poverty. I didn't know about fifteen people in a one bedroom apartment, with roaches crawling on the walls. I'll never forget—One of the most traumatic—I can close my eyes right now and see where I was and how it happened. I remember just being absolutely horrified when a baby was bitten by a rat. The mother came screaming out of the building, screaming that her baby had been bitten by a rat and she needed to get to the hospital. I went with this mother—I don't remember the woman's name—to Cook County Hospital, which was the only hospital she could get into. She sat in the hallway for hours before anyone would attend to this rat-bitten baby. I can remember the rage. This was a world—I get choked up today just thinking about it—this world was so hideous to me. How can this be? This is not right! It's not supposed to be like this!

So I credit that time for a large part of the motivation for me to go into public life at all. The things I saw that didn't have to be that way—the suffering. The human suffering that went with it. Down to and including—The neighborhood pimp took a liking to me. His name was T. Johnny. I don't know if this is how pimps recruit their stables, because he never asked me for anything, but he was nice to me.

KOED: That's probably how they work.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It probably is. But the good news—He came from a large family. The result was that all his brothers and friends looked out for me. The winos on the corner, or the junkies, or whatever—I never had a problem. I could walk the streets in the dead of night and it didn't matter. This guy, because of T. Johnny and his brother,

Major Brown—the last I heard of Major Brown was that he was in a penitentiary somewhere—they were very nice to me. That's the good news.

The bad news is that my younger brother, the one who is now dead, got involved with gangs and drugs and it was the beginning of his undoing. He wasn't strong enough to take it, and it just destroyed him and he died.

KOED: How old was he when he died?

MOSELEY BRAUN: A very good question. I think John might have been thirty. I think he made it to thirty. That's funny. As close as we were, I don't know—That was one of the great heartbreaks of my life. He was brilliant. He was the one who had not only the wit, but the personality. Everybody liked him. Unlike me! [laughter] I always had a problem in that area, but he had the people skills and everybody liked him. He was so smart that he could make things funny and light. He was just one of those people who just brought sunshine into the room. He's dead now. I really do trace it from those days.

In the meantime, my little brother and sister were sent off to my grandmother in Indiana, to protect them.

KOED: This was your father's mother?

MOSELEY BRAUN: My father's mother. They had their own scars from being separated. It was a devastating time for the family. It was awful.

KOED: What was your relationship with your mother?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's funny. I still haven't sorted that out. Edna and I—first of all, I could never call her Edna. I can only do that posthumously, as she absolutely demanded to be called Mother. I think there's no small amount of resentment in me—guilt and resentment for your mother—that's a recipe for being a nut case. I'm hoping it hasn't happened yet. [laughter] Because I was the oldest, you see, I wound up being the surrogate mother for the rest of the kids. I was "Miss Responsible." I was responsible for getting the kids off to school, for doing the grocery shopping, and this and that around the house. I grew up too fast. I lost having a teenagehood, because I just had

to be responsible.

[interview interrupted]

MOSELEY BRAUN: Where were we?

KOED: You were talking about your mother and your relationship with her.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Because I had always to be so responsible—Frankly, the medicare thing was ironic because here was one instance when I didn't have control. Yet, I was being held responsible.

KOED: Did your mother work?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yes. She was a medical technician. My father was in law enforcement, with the Chicago Police and then into corrections. In my early childhood, he was also a partner in a real estate business. He also was in insurance. Those were his professional engagements. She was always a medical technician, in the days when there were very few people in that, much less women. She was kind of ground-breaking in that way.

KOED: She was a good example to you in a working woman role.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, yeah. In fact, I always assumed that I would work on some level, outside the home. That's probably why I so enjoyed the little time when I was a homemaker. It's funny because when I look back, I didn't spend that much time as a homemaker, or as much time as I did in my mind. Do you know what I mean? Sometimes things will loom larger in your memory? I think that being a homemaker was important to me, just to fill in the blank of something that I really didn't have much experience with.

But we were very close, on the one hand, although it meant that I didn't have much of a teenagehood.

KOED: You grew up too fast.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes.

KOED: I think we'll hold there until our next opportunity to talk about your school and college years. If there is anything that you want to add about these childhood years—

MOSELEY BRAUN: No. But I do want to look up and see if the state of Illinois had a form for reporting windfall earnings, like lottery winnings and things like that. The best I recollect, I don't think there was even a form. I think that's important, since there was no way she could have done what they said she should have done. It wasn't like anybody did anything deliberately. And, frankly, I got to believe that they knew that it wasn't a deliberate thing. They knew it was a "gotcha" situation. And yet, it became an excuse to say, "Well, you may think she's done all those great things, but she's really a welfare cheat." Even in the '98 campaign, the *Tribune* editorial endorsing Senator Fitzgerald said, "She should have expected to be under greater scrutiny as the first black blah blah blah." One has to ask the question, if the reward for overcoming racism and sexism is more critical scrutiny, then how racist is that?

KOED: Again, the symbol.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: Well, thank you again for another good interview.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Oh, this is fun. I am enjoying it.

END OF INTERVIEW #3

INTERVIEW #4
Early Life and Career, and Building a Political Philosophy
JUNE 16, 1999

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN: I really like this project. I'm really excited about the work you're doing, and I'm happy that you're doing it. I'm very pleased.

BETTY KOED: Great. Well, we're delighted to be doing it. We'll keep it up as long as you have the time and opportunity.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, why don't we do your questions first, then we'll do mine.

KOED: Sounds good.

Building on the last interview, we talked a lot about your family life. Today, I thought we would start with a discussion of the environment you grew up in—Chicago in the 1950s and '60s—and talk about that in terms of the political and social environment of your childhood, building upon some of the issues we've talked about already. I'm going to head towards asking you some questions about the intersectionality of race and gender, building in that direction. Anytime along the way, if you want to segue into something else, just let me know.

So let's talk about Chicago in the '50s and '60s. What was that community like?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's very interesting. I'm delighted that this is the first question you're asking, because it says to me that we are on the same wave length in terms of thinking about this project. One of the pieces of research that it would be great to do has to do with actually getting the demographic numbers—the statistics—on how much of a minority—I point out to people, particularly black people, who have a tendency to see the world from the perspective of the black community, that African Americans are a minority within a minority, and African Americans—particularly middle-class African Americans, are another minority within that. If you really start doing the demographic analysis, I think it would be really interesting to figure out—A

friend of mine once said that it's one thing to have a Horatio Alger story, but to take someone who's black, female, and middle class, the odds have got to be a thousand to one that you would get to the United States Senate.

But we don't know what those odds are, do we? We haven't looked at the demographics. I think it would be important to look at the census numbers, or whatever those numbers are, and allow a mathematician to do the probabilities from those numbers. I think the probabilities are, on the one hand, one part of making sense out of this. I think it's also important to make the point—and I'm getting on the inspiration soap box, if you will—I think it's important to young people to know that those kind of probabilities notwithstanding, it happened!

KOED: Right. I think that's very important for people to know.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think therein is really the core value of this.

KOED: I think you're right.

MOSELEY BRAUN: All of the apocryphal stories notwithstanding, and all of the conversations about "I had this experience or that experience" notwithstanding, if you just start off with the facts, the hard numbers—There was an incident not too long ago—light bulbs going off, right?—somebody pointed out to me, after I made the point that there had been four African Americans in the history of the U.S. Senate, the point was made that "yes, but you're one of two in this century." Given that it's 1999—

KOED: The century is almost over.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's pretty certain that is going to be the reality, that's not going to change. You know, to be two out of, how many?

KOED: One thousand, eight hundred and fifty-one.

MOSELEY BRAUN: In this century?

KOED: No, that's total. In this century, probably about a thousand or so.

MOSELEY BRAUN: So, I think looking at the numbers would be important. To the extent that you can get the numbers and we can get them to a mathematician—I'm sure there are people available who can do this kind of stuff—regression analysis or whatever the hell they call it. That would be interesting.

Now, moving along with this question about growing up on the south side of Chicago. Chicago, even as recent as the 1970s, has been described as the most segregated city in the North. To be honest, I never had a sense of that as a child, because my birthplace, which was in the heart of the black community, the old black belt, as well as where we lived when I started grammar school, in both those instances there were white people in my family life. I didn't have a real sense of the kind of stark isolation—

KOED: You're family was an integrated environment.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. So, I did not have a sense of the kind of stark isolation that the rest of the black community experience. I know that had an impact. I think the impact was both a blessing and a curse. Remind me to get to you a little piece I did for Paul Simon a couple of weeks ago for high school students on "How I got to the Senate." It's about five hundred words or so.

KOED: We'd love to have that.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Remind me to get it to you. In it, I said that I have never thought about the fact that being African American, or being female, were limitations, and that is both a blessing and a curse. It was a blessing in that I never thought there were external limitations on what I could do or what I could be in this country. We were absolute buyers into the American dream in the sense that this is the land of opportunity and if you work hard, play by the rules, and you're good and lucky that you can be whatever you want to be. That was an article of faith. But in the South and in other places, and probably in more segregated black families, the notion that you were different than white people—Just last month, I had a lady say to me, "Honey"—she was old, one of these older women who writes letters all the time—"Honey, I kept trying to tell you and you wouldn't listen, I kept trying to tell you that you can't do what those white people do." Now, that represents real wisdom within—

KOED: Within that environment.

MOSELEY BRAUN: —within that environment, but it was something that never occurred to me. Is that a good thing? Yes. It's why I was able to even contemplate running for the United States Senate without thinking it would be closed to black people or to women, or whatever. On the other hand, had I been more cognizant of the perceptions and limitations surrounding race and gender, I know I would have handled my politics differently. Again, a blessing and a curse in not appreciating—

KOED: The perceptions of different communities is going to shape that issue.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. For me, that is really one of the more intriguing aspects of the whole thing. Although, I'll tell you Betty, we've been talking to each other now since I lost the re-election, and I'm doing so much better.

KOED: It takes time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It does take time. Frankly, without overcompensating, I really am beginning to have a sense that losing re-election was a good thing, on a personal level. It saved me. I don't think the press treatment would have stopped. I don't think they would have gotten any better.

KOED: It certainly showed no signs of letting up.

MOSELEY BRAUN: No. It wouldn't have stopped. The pressures wouldn't have stopped. The guy who used to drive for me, Gus, also worked in my Senate office. He's now working for Durbin on a short-time basis. He was nice enough to pick him up. Gus said to me, "Senator, you would not believe the difference. The phones don't ring. They don't get the mail. Nobody asks them to do anything." Now, I'm sure people do ask them to do stuff, but the volume is so different. And Troy [Ford] was at the desk answering phones, and he made the point the other day that we had three people at the front desk on the phones and it was still not enough. He said that Durbin's office has one person and they read the paper half the time.

KOED: That agrees with what you said in, I think, our first interview that when

you were seeking more help in your office, greater staff assistance because of the special demands placed upon you, but they didn't understand the pressures. This is good evidence that the pressure was real.

MOSELEY BRAUN: And from two people who were in the office. I had no way—I haven't been in Durbin's office to see, and I certainly haven't been in Fitzgerald's office to see, so this is from people who are on the ground and inside. That's kind of a segue, but I think it's important to make note of it.

KOED: I think it is, too. One of the interesting things we'll see, I think, as we review these interviews—it's been a month and a half or so since our last interview, and it's been about four or five months since the first interview—it'll be interesting to see how your own perception of this has developed over time.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes. And it has. Obviously, it's hard to lose an election. It's hard to lose an election so closely, and to be outspent like I was. People tell me that I couldn't have won because the money wasn't there. Frankly, I think there is a good news story in there for ordinary folks, because this guy outspent me 2 to 1, almost 3 to 1, and he still only won by two points. So, little people for whom the money was less relevant—I guess it says to me that the vote still counts more than money does.

KOED: And that's an extremely important point, because we have a common perception in our society that you can "buy an office." Unfortunately, to some extent that may be true, but this experience also shows that, despite the money, the outcome was very close. It could have gone the other way, with just a small amount of votes tipping it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: A small amount of money or a small amount of votes, either way. If I had been a little more competitive on the money side, it might have been different.

KOED: Could have meant a few more votes.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Right. Right. So I don't feel bad about it for that reason. That part of it has been no small amount of solace to me in all of this. The real trauma, of course, has been trying to figure out—as I jokingly say—what I'm going to do

when I grow up. It's the end of a career.

KOED: It's the end of one career and the beginning of another.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, we hope. Who knows? We don't know the future. But it means that I have to deal with the uncertainty and I have to deal with trying to regroup and get things together again. That's traumatic. I could have dispensed with the trauma. At the same time, I don't see it as the end of the world by any means, and it could be that in a mysterious way I've been saved for whatever other purposes. I think the stress and the pressure would have been so overwhelming.

I don't know how Ed Brooke handled it. I don't know if Ed Brooke got the same kind of demands. I don't know if people looked to him to be—This gets to intersectionality. One of the aspects of this is that people looked to me to be kind of "earth mother" to the country.

KOED: There were issues involved in your career that did not affect Ed Brooke. He did not have gender issues to deal with, for instance. It was also a very different time in the history of the black community in America. This hadn't occurred to me before, but I'd like to look to see if any oral histories have been done with Ed Brooke when he left the Senate to see what kind of comments he makes about these types of issues.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think that is very important. Unfortunately, I've never been able to meet with him. I've called him a couple of times. I've never spent any quality time with him. I would still like to do that. Hopefully, I'll have that opportunity. I just wonder to what extent—He was a Republican. He was from a different state, a different era. For example, he didn't belong to the Black Caucus. I understand a lot of reasons why he wouldn't belong to the Black Caucus, one being that he was Republican and the Black Caucus does tend to be heavily Democratic. Second, as a senator—Quite frankly, one of the issues that the Caucus never came to grips with was that technically I was entitled to 20 votes in the Black Caucus, because there are 20 congressional districts in my state, as opposed to one vote. Instead, in the Caucus—

KOED: You got just one vote.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, just one vote. But he deliberately chose not to be identified with the Black Caucus. I think it was important *for me* to be identified with the Caucus. Things like that—I don't know what the differences or the similarities would be between my tenure and Brooke's, but I think it would be interesting to look at.

KOED: It would be interesting to look at this. It might be interesting, too, in that he was not an easy person to categorize politically, in terms of the "Blacks in Politics" scheme of things. People like to pigeon-hole you, and he didn't necessarily fit into the expected hole.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I didn't either.

KOED: Right. Neither did you. In that way, we might see some interesting correlations as well.

MOSELEY BRAUN: But I think it's easier for a man to say, "Judge me based upon my own decision making." See, women still suffer from the notion that we haven't got two brain cells working. The minute that we are not part of the politically correct program—When you talk about authority issues, the question of gender gets more important. For example, among the voters in the state, I did very poorly among union households, particularly in southern Illinois.

KOED: You had been criticized by labor over NAFTA and that type of stuff.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right, but they didn't criticize the men in the same way. They didn't criticize Paul [Simon] over NAFTA, balanced budget, or any of that. So the question is, why was the criticism so much more pronounced as to me in those areas? I think that's where the gender issues come in, even more than the black issues.

KOED: Let's head in that direction. Let's back up a little bit to do our background work here. You mentioned in an earlier interview that your mother had rented out rooms in your house. I would assume that this exposed you to a broader variety of people. Is that true?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I'm sure it did—Well, no, not really. The people she rented

to were generally people who were in the same wave length. I found out later, getting back to the demographics (when you do the demographic research of this, it gets real fascinating), one of the things I discovered when I was Recorder of Deeds—where did I read it? There's a Chicago history book that is fascinating. It's got maps and pictures about the history of the city in it. I gave a copy of this, I think it was *Chicago: Birth of a Metropolis*.¹ I think, published almost twenty years ago. It showed the growth and development of the community, just like you look at a map of Europe and see how the borders of Poland have changed over time. This book does some of that. One of the things I found out when I was Recorder was that in the days of the pre-*Handsbury vs. Lee*, in the days of restricted covenants, the strategy was to put real pressure on real estate in the black belt. There were few places for blacks to live. The result was that people started carving up those big old houses into what they called "kitchenette apartments." So, you had the double phenomenon of overcrowding and high rents as a result of segregation. That's a phenomenon—looking at the minority within a minority—you wouldn't think of that until you look at the bigger context in which it happens, and the context of housing segregation in Chicago was one of the reasons why when we were on 41st and Indiana they rented out apartments in the house. The house wasn't that big.

KOED: Housing was so short—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. It also explains some of the experiences—I was in second grade, which would have meant I was about seven or eight, probably seven, when we moved to Park Manor. That was one of those communities in transition. There was a joke about integration at the time, between the arrival of the first black family and the departure of the last white family, that was when integration occurred. That was Park Manor. I think I told you the story about my next-door neighbor. Did I tell you that?

KOED: I don't think so.

MOSELEY BRAUN: The little girl who lived next door—I lived at 7628 Prairie, and there was a little girl who lived next door, which would have been 7626 or 7624—I don't remember her name, because I was so small. As children will do, we struck up a

¹Zukowsky, John. *Chicago Architecture, 1872-1922: Birth of a Metropolis* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2000.)

friendship. Her parents would whip her for playing with me. But, as children will do—

KOED: You got around it.

MOSELEY BRAUN: We did. What we would do is—because I didn't want to see her get whippings for playing with me—I would wait until she came out of her front door, heading for school, then I would come out and walk on the other side of the street. When we got to the corner, after we turned the corner, then we would join up and walk the rest of the way to school. We'd do that coming back home, and break up at the corner. So she'd go home on one side of the street and I'd go home on the other to keep her from getting a whipping for being friends with me.

KOED: Now, were you aware of the reason why she was getting the whippings?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, I found out, but I thought her parents just didn't like me—

KOED: Didn't like you. You didn't realize it was because you were black?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. So we just got past it. But that community underwent a pretty rapid integration. Interestingly, Mrs. Taylor—Dr. and Mrs. Euclid Taylor—still live there.

KOED: These were the little girl's parents?

MOSELEY BRAUN: No, these were people across the street. They still live in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is still very much "bungalow belt" with big back yards and things like that. It's almost a time warp, from what I can determine. That neighborhood was a wonderful place to grow up, because, as the change happened, except for that incident and a few bad boys—bad boys, you revert to the language of the time—some boys who would throw bricks and rocks at the schools, and some racial skirmishes in the school yard, but it was still a wonderful place to grow up. There were back yards, and you had neighbors and neighborhood block club parties. You could ride your bike and sit out on the porch at nighttime. All those things that happen in suburban neighborhoods.

KOED: It was a safe neighborhood.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Very safe. Safety was not an issue. For us, the worst violence was in the home, because my father was violent. Other than that, we used to put up a tent in the back yard and sleep there.

KOED: We used to do that, too. In the summertime, we'd be outside at 10:00 or 11:00 at night, playing in the street. We never had to worry about safety.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right. And that's what we did. As a matter of fact, the only rule was that we weren't supposed to cross the street because that was dangerous. My little sister, Marsha—We were joking about this in another context the other day. My father used to call Marsha "Princess." She's still a princess. [laughter] One time she crossed the street at night, and she got a rap on the butt. She went running in the house, "Mommy, Mommy, Daddy whipped the Princess' royal behind." [laughter]

KOED: How old was she?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Little, maybe seven. We still tease her about the "royal behind."

KOED: How dare he, eh?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. [laughter] It was idyllic, you know, kind of suburban living with neighbors and friends. Frankly, they were neighbors who I still see now. In fact, I ran into one of them at the art store last week. I'm going to go visit with her this weekend. She was a neighbor. It was that kind of environment growing up. If anything, I think that was part and parcel of not having the understanding of what that lady said to me, "You can't do what those white people do." It just wasn't part of my knowledge base.

KOED: Well, it strikes me that there are some very fundamental principles, here, in how you perceive the world. One is that you can perceive it as an obstacle to get past, and another is that you perceive it as an opportunity to embrace. It sounds as though, from an early age, your mind-set was shaped by your family, your environment, teaching

you to embrace—

MOSELEY BRAUN: Opportunities. Right. That is exactly right. In fact, later in life I was having a conversation with my father who was very much the philosopher and politician. He was very much into those kinds of community issues. I remember saying to him, when I was really kind of angry with him when I had my first run-ins with racism as it related to me as an individual, I was mad at him, thinking, "Why didn't you prepare me for this!" You know, "Why didn't you give me some more ammunition to deal with this stuff!" I just ran head-long into it, and just didn't know what to do. I thought, "Whoa, now what do I do?"

KOED: It came as a surprise.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yeah.

KOED: Did you run into this mind-set when you were in the Senate, when you would speak to groups. I'm sure you were asked many times to speak to groups of high school students, for example—African American, white, Asian, whatever—and did you find that this fundamental way of looking at life was a problem for people?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Do you mean with regard to me?

KOED: I mean with regard to their own opportunities. For instance, the little talk you gave for Senator Simon about "How I got to the Senate," would some of these students look at this as, "There's no way you'll get into the Senate, the odds against it are so huge," or turn that around and say "Look, here are the facts and data you need to know"—

MOSELEY BRAUN: You know, that's a hard question to answer. The reason I think it's hard to answer is because young people are all so enthusiastic. If anything, what saddens me sometimes is that they, themselves, limit their aspirations. I don't know if that's from a sense of "I can only do so much, therefore I'll do X," or if it's a generational thing. I ran into one kid one time who said he wanted to grow up and be a motivational speaker. I said, "Honey, why don't you learn how to do something first, then go talk about it." Well, I've subsequently found out that motivational speakers make a lot of money! So

this kid was not too much out of sync with what his generation provides, but it's very different from what my expectations—

KOED: If you walk into any bookstore, one of the largest sections will be the "self-help" section, which has a lot of wonderful things in it, but it's largely motivational speakers who have written their words down and published them. There is a lot of money there—

MOSELEY BRAUN: A lot of money to be made there. Frankly, an even better example is when my son got ready to go to college. He just graduated from Washington University. When Matt told me he wanted to go into computer science, I tried to encourage him to go into liberal arts. To me, liberal arts makes sense, while computer science was like, "Well, wait a minute, Sweetheart." As it turns out, computer science degrees are the hottest property—

KOED: Hottest thing around. Big bonuses are being given.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Huge. Huge. Some of his friends are talking about a guy, twenty years old, turned down a \$50,000 a year job because it didn't have a housing allowance and it didn't have the quality of life he was looking for. I was like, "What?"

KOED: Yes, as I was working away to get my Ph.D. in history, I had friends who were in engineering and computer science and on the job market at the same time as me, and they were getting huge bonuses to sign on to a job. That's where it is right now in terms of financial success.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, and in that regard, talking to some of these kids, I don't know if they were just being more realistic about what they wanted to do and what this present time holds for them, or if it really was a matter of them limiting their aspirations. One of the things I have been happy to find—Again, this is coming from a segregated—How can I put this? One way of looking at it is that you've got a black community that really has nothing to do with white people, and doesn't want anything to do with white people, and you have a white community that feels the same way, but then you've got everybody else in the middle—the integrated community. I think one of the challenges for our time is to build that group in the middle that is integrated. I'm

optimistic about it because, quite frankly, a lot of Matt's generation, Matt's friends, they almost think the whole racial conversation is boring. Which is good!

KOED: I think that is good. Partly it's because they've heard this conversation their whole lives. There's nothing new about it for them.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: This leads to my next question, so I'll go ahead and ask that. It seems to me that during this time both communities—white and black and those in between—were building a knowledge base from which they built their perceptions of the other, from which they related to the other group. Do you think this is true? How do you think perceptions were formed?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think it would be different if those two knowledge bases started from the same place, or even wound up in the same place. There, you almost run into the phenomenon that women experience with me. I'm not being sexist in saying this. It's always been said that women know more about men than men know about women, and that's because of our powerlessness. We learn about men, because you have to—

KOED: We have to live in their world so to speak.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. It's the same thing with race. This is a generalization, but what whites know about blacks is a lot less than what blacks know about whites, precisely because as a black person you have to live in that world. One of the things that I've run into in the Senate—a lot of these things came to a head when I got into the Senate—was a variety of perceptions that just proceeded from ignorance, people just not knowing what to expect from a black person. For example, I was joking with somebody about the lavish lifestyle stories. My lifestyle is as straight-forward and simple as anybody else you know. The difference is that people weren't accustomed to seeing black women who wear Chanel suits. I wore Chanel suits before I got to the Senate, this was not new. Many black women wear Chanel suits. Dianne Feinstein wears Chanel suits, but nobody would comment on Dianne Feinstein buying a Chanel suit. But it's a point of commentary about me, because the image that people know—other than Clare Huxtable and Oprah—is of people who are poor. Whites think of the black community as

being poor people.

KOED: And when the Cosby show came on TV, I remember that it received a good deal of criticism because Clare and Cliff Huxtable did not represent "the black community."

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. This also gets to class issues. The idea that I wouldn't be into a "lavish lifestyle," and that I might enjoy gardening and classical music—I was invited to the opening night of the Lyric Opera. First time I showed up there, I can't tell you how many people were surprised, stunned to see me at the opera. Why would you be stunned that I would go to the opera? Because that's just not part of the mind-set. So you've got all these stereotypes that relate to stereotypical images, and this goes back to the matrix I did early on, that come from a lack of information and understanding. Blacks understand more about the whites. But even in the black community there is confusion. Black people lump white people together as one big group—you know, there's "white people" and they're all the same. To make a distinction between Irish, Italian, Scots, English, upper class, middle class, lower class, even between Jewish and Gentile, just doesn't occur to them. Jocelyn Elders got into trouble for a lot of things, but one of the things she got into trouble for was a statement she made about the Catholic Church being a male-dominated hierarchy. When she said that, a number of my Irish Catholic colleagues in the Senate thought she was making a discriminatory comment about Catholics. I remember being in caucus and standing up and making this passionate plea for Jocelyn Elders, saying to these people that she is a church lady, and the black community does not make religious distinctions among whites in the same way. We don't have that point of reference. We don't have the luxury of saying "that's a Catholic white person" and "that's a Jewish white person" and "that's an Episcopalian vs. a Presbyterian." Within the white community, obviously those distinctions mean more to you than if they say—

KOED: It's almost a cultural, ethnic identity in itself. That leads me to a quote I have here. We've talked a few times about the work of Kimberle Crenshaw. I've looked at some of her work on intersectionality. One of the things she says in a recent article is, "The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite. It frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences."

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right.

KOED: We tend to think of the politics of identity as black American, white Americans, Hispanic American—One of the things that we're beginning to learn, and I think this comes through very clearly with these interviews, is that within each of these groups there is a complex array of identities. Let's talk about that a little. I think that has had an effect on your political career and certainly on your Senate career. What do you think?

MOSELEY BRAUN: Well, I think that not only has it had an effect, but if anything—and I'll need to think about this, Betty, to more clearly articulate it—I think it's almost a defining aspect of my politics. My politics have never been the old "identity politics" like coalitions of blacks plus so and so. I've never come at my politics in that way. It's always been, I say multiracial, but it's even more complex than that. It's multiracial, it's across the board in terms of gender and sexual identity issues, it's class-integrated, if you will. So my politics, I think, has always been to try to appeal to those commonalities, the things that bring people together, the things that people share in terms of aspirations, and to say to folks, "Look, this is where this person's interests meets your interests, and therefore it is in all of our interests to resolve this problem, and, hey, I've got an idea of how we might do that." The speech I make about public education, for example, talks about not just making sure those poor black kids in the inner city have a chance for an education, because that's not the point. The point is that our society needs to have an educated population. It is not going to help white kids in the suburbs to have black kids in the inner cities lack education. Why? Because the country's ability to compete and provide for all of them will depend upon the level of literacy of our work force.

KOED: We all have an interlinked fate in this nation.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes, and that's how I come at education. On the school construction project I'm doing here with the Department of Education, I've had people say, "Well, you talk about building the inner city schools and we've got to rebuild those schools so our kids can have a chance." It's not about that! It's about providing an environment for learning for an American workforce.

KOED: Black, white, or whatever.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Exactly. Because this country is not going to be able to compete globally in an international economic competition unless our entire workforce is educated. How does that relate? That's very different than the—One of my colleagues would say, "Well, we have to be sure to look out for the less fortunate." I'm not talking about looking out for the less fortunate. What I'm talking about is that if you let this group—the less fortunate—be excluded from opportunity, all you're doing is messing up your own situation. The less fortunate in the past in this country had a chance to not only look for opportunity but actually had a shot at it. How many stories are there about kids who Jane Addams scooped out of the alleys who wound up being titans of business and industry. Today, the thing that scares me is that you scoop the kids out of the alley—because they're still there—those kids haven't a snowball's chance in hell in our current environment to get there. That's what bothers me. I think that's where the policy imperative comes in. That was why I got into politics. I thought, okay, I can help to make the case to change this, to fix this. One of the harder parts of losing re-election—Where was I yesterday? I got upset, then I got over it. Oh, I'm a board member at Children's Hospital in Chicago, and they had a doctor talking at the board meeting about the incidences of asthma in children, pediatric asthma. Momentarily, I got upset, because my opportunity to help on a broad scale, to address the issue of children with asthma, is gone. I don't have it anymore.

KOED: You don't have that position of power anymore.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. For a moment, I got kind of upset, thinking "Well, here I am, just as concerned about pediatric asthma as I've ever been, but now I don't have the power to try to change it anymore." That was hurtful. But, again, I've done what I could do. I try. That's all you can say in any position.

KOED: Do you think that intragroup identities in politics—

MOSELEY BRAUN: I think that's one of the reasons that people are turned off of politics. I think it's one of the reasons why only half our people vote. I think it's one of the reasons why folks would love—Apparently, some guy started a campaign to put "none of the above" on the ballot. I think it's one of the things—in addition to the

pandering of the demagogues, and making politicians out to be crooks and thieves—you've got all of that ugliness and negativity towards politics—but what is even more scary and ought to be more scary than the folks who just love to hate politicians, I think are the people who have given up on politics as a way of improving the social condition. In a democracy, that ought to frighten people.

KOED: What do you say to people like that? How do you turn them around?

MOSELEY BRAUN: It is very difficult. It is very difficult. That is something that I hope I tried to deal with, and hoped that I could make a difference with. If one more person registered to vote because my name was on the ballot, then I'm happy. But it's a very difficult, very hard thing to do. They look at it and say, "What's the difference? It's going to be the same. It's not going to make a difference. It's the big money that runs the stuff anyway." That's a hard thing to argue with.

KOED: Unfortunately, they can find plenty of evidence that can be brought forward to support that view.

MOSELEY BRAUN: It's not a non-rational conclusion.

KOED: That's right.

MOSELEY BRAUN: But it's one that must be met and countered, I think, at every turn. I try to tell people, "If you just give up, then you are making it more likely than not that big money will make all the decisions. That's your failure, then, to take up your duty to be responsible." So I've always addressed it as a matter of individual and personal responsibility.

KOED: And stress the fact that *a vote* can make the difference.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Yes!

KOED: This is a little off the subject, but I was thinking about it this morning while I was watching the news. With the 2000 presidential election coming up—which we really shouldn't even have to think about yet—the media is already proclaiming

George W. Bush as "front-runner," etc. They do this every time. And every time it irritates me. There has not been a single vote cast in a primary anywhere, and yet the media is taking upon itself the authority and the power to say, "This person is most likely to be the next president." I think it undermines the fact that people have the power of the vote.

MOSELEY BRAUN: That's right! It's such a power institution. Frankly, one of the things about modern politics is that you have to be as prepared to deal with, manipulate, and otherwise master the media, just as you have to be prepared to get the money, or have the money, as you have to be prepared to actually go out and in the old fashioned way stump the votes.

KOED: Be prepared for a little bit of everything.

MOSELEY BRAUN: Right. Thinking in the terms of the evolution of modern day politics—Maybe this is part of what Michael MacKuen was talking about thirty years ago, when talking about the media and the message and how it was going to fundamentally change our democracy. It has! So, you went from the days of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, holding forth for three hours at seven different locations in the state of Illinois, to the point of Peter Fitzgerald having a one hour quasi-debate—Remember, I couldn't get him to debate. The guy was a stealth candidate who didn't make public appearances. All of those things. You go from the Lincoln-Douglas model to this model. It's very much a function of our time, in which media and money factor as much as political organization and actual touching voters and asking for their support.

KOED: To wrap this up, do you think that your relationship with the media has changed now? Obviously, you're not right smack in the middle of their focus now.

MOSELEY BRAUN: I hope so.

KOED: Do you think they are treating you more fairly?

MOSELEY BRAUN: I can't tell. I'm just praying that they don't start pissing all

over my New Zealand appointment [as U.S. ambassador].² I'm going to do everything I can—even if I have to go out and spend money with press types—it'll be worth it. I've got to try to at least recover from what those people did.

KOED: Good luck.

[end of interview #4]

²On October 8, 1999, President William J. Clinton nominated Moseley Braun to be U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. The Senate confirmed the nomination on November 10, 1999, with a 96-2 vote. She served until March 1, 2001.